

## What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

by: Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D. Q. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" A. "Something that hasn't been invented yet." Most of us were brought up to study hard, get good grades, choose a "practical" college major, and strive for a "good job." Talk to a stranded midlife career-changer and you realize the game has changed. Yesterday's rules prepared us to be passengers on a large ocean liner that promised a smooth voyage. Today we realize that ocean liner turned out to be the Titanic and we need to keep ourselves afloat on a small life raft if we want to survive. Here are some tips to help your child learn not only to survive, but to thrive and grow in a chaotic world.

1. From the first day of kindergarten, encourage your child to build on strengths rather than focus on limitations. Does she spend hours studying models of cars for the last twenty years? Maybe she'll become an auto mechanic -- or maybe she'll parlay her ability to classify detailed information into a career as a biologist or pharmacist.
2. Encourage your child to choose a field of study based on his or her natural abilities and passions, not "what will get me a job." Claudia Kennedy, the Army's first female three-star General, majored in philosophy. In her book *Generally Speaking*, she claims philosophy prepared her to become a top-level intelligence officer. Carly Fiorino, famed CEO of Hewlett-Packard, studied medieval history. And Michael Lewis, financial writer and best-selling author of *Liars Poker*, was an art history major.
3. Assure your children that few mistakes are fatal. Did your child fail a course? Face rejection from a first-choice college? Most of us can't avoid an occasional failure, but we can learn bounce-back attitudes as soon as we can talk. Yolanda Griffith, WNBA basketball star, dropped out of a premier program due to pregnancy. She returned to a lower-ranked college program, baby in tow, and now plays for the Sacramento Monarchs. I once taught a student who had flunked out of junior college following a close call with the legal system. After a four-year stint in the US Navy, she returned to college, maintained a dean's list grade point average, and went on to a top law school.
4. Encourage your child to experience success in any area of her life. Did she make the honor roll? Get selected for a play, a club, or athletic team? Win an election for competitive office? Survive a strenuous application process for a summer job? Once your child has tasted success, he will know how it feels and will act like a winner when he enters the job market. Cecilia, a shy twelve-year-old, blossomed when she won the lead in a school play. "We want you to improve your grades, not spend time in rehearsal!" fumed her worried mother. To everyone's surprise, Cecilia's grades improved and she made new friends with the "good kids" who were also achievers. Most important, no matter what happens, Cecilia can return to that feeling of success whenever she gets discouraged.
5. Getting into a top university -- or any university -- will not guarantee success. I've met Ivy Leaguers who have experienced unemployment, bankruptcy and even homelessness. I've met high school drop outs who flourished on their own initiative. In my own small town, a couple with degrees from excellent schools have dropped out to pursue artistic careers -- and they clean houses to pay the bills. Recently a minimum wage job was posted by a nonprofit -- and several unemployed lawyers applied. Career-changers who face the future with an attitude of "I can handle anything" are the ones who win today. Tossed into the ocean, they'll improvise a set of oars and keep up their spirits till they figure out what to do next. Those who feel betrayed ("I thought I was set for life") flounder around for weeks, months, even years. Entitlement is over. Those who have a positive outlook, who can seize the unexpected opportunity, can count on reaching the shore. And they realize that only they can transform a resting place into a safe harbor.

### About the Author

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