



Why are so many kids unhappy in school, dropping out, doing drugs?

Maybe we should ask what they have to look forward to. For most of them, drudgery-filled, underpaid, demeaning jobs – for the rest of their lives. They're not stupid. Let's admit it. Drugs do give them, in the moment, something better than our culture offers them for life. It should be apparent by now the failures this generates. So let's go back to the values we base our lives on.

We're taught that work is something to be minimized. For business, it's a necessary evil, to be reduced as far as possible. For workers, it's a sacrifice of free time, something to be suffered through, to get a paycheck to pay bills, watching the clock until we can have some fun outside of work. That creates adversarial and unproductive relationships and cuts the heart out of what work can give us.

Other cultures look at work differently. E.F. Schumacher, in his *"Buddhist Economics"*, explains the function of work in the Buddhist tradition. To them, it gives us a chance to utilize and develop our abilities; to enable us to overcome our self-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to create the goods and services needed for a becoming existence.

From that perspective, work set up so it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking is criminal. Equally, *avoiding* work forgets that work and leisure are complementary and can't be separated without losing the joy of work, the satisfaction of achievement, and the bliss of leisure.

Work, in conditions of human dignity and freedom, creates inner products as important as the outer ones. It nourishes our hearts, minds, and spirits as much as food does our physical bodies. It offers the satisfaction of doing the best we are capable of. It gives us a chance to live our values, develop our personality, grow our skills, and accomplish things we can be proud of at the end of the day. If we have no opportunity to work, we not only lack an income, but also this nourishment which nothing can replace.

African village traditions say the same thing. Malidoma Somé, in his *Of Water and the Spirit*, talks about village women making pottery. The women chant and sing most of the day, raising energy; then in a flurry, wonderful pots pour out at the end.

Most work in the Dagara village, he says, is done collectively. The primary purpose is not much to get the job done, but to raise enough energy for the people to feel nourished by what they do. The nourishment comes before and during the job, not after it. We are nourished first, he says, and then the work flows out of our fullness. The indigenous notion of abundance that underlies such work is very different from ours. Villagers are not interested in accumulation, but in a sense of fullness. The sense of abundance coming from that fullness has a power to release us from the worry characteristic of life in our culture.

Here, in our own villages, we can offer that kind of work to our children and ourselves. Work which respects and pays fairly, which doesn't exploit and degrade. Work where we learn and share real skills, and create real benefits for others. It costs too much to do otherwise.

*Every* job is 90% routine. We're *all* doing stuff for others. Everyone has different passions and skills, whether it's fixing engines, fixing dinners, or fixing broken hearts. The magic is doing it so it nourishes, so we wake up excited at what the day is going to offer.

And Somé is right. Some of the best memories I have are of working/giving with others – planting trees at Alder Creek Farm, barn-raising Fire Mountain School, putting a roof back on McLaughlin's house after Chuck broke his back.

Our kids want to make a difference, and learn and do concrete things. Look at the pride and sparkle in the eyes of the kids in NeahKahNie's new building trades program. Bringing in Starbucks or Wall-Mart, with their skill-less jobs isn't the answer. We're set up small and human here. Add in living wages, financial transparency, and a root of caring about others, and we're halfway there. There is no reason entities whose sole purpose is to maximize what they take from others should be allowed in our communities. Requiring the Code of Corporate Citizenship for a business license is an important first step.