

## Career Training, Mentorship, and Parenthood

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As parents finish the high school years in their homeschool journey, they often find themselves facing the identical philosophical challenges that attracted them to family-oriented tutorial education in the first place. Resolving the dilemma of whether or not the traditional approach to career training is best for their child(ren) requires getting accurate information about their options, defining their goals, settling their insecurities, rejecting peer pressure (yes—it does affect adults, too), learning how to communicate their decisions in positive ways, and “building some tracks” to run on. Since most folks are pretty familiar with the “college degree” route to career preparation, let’s explore some basic requirements for the apprenticeship model. More than likely some of the items in this checklist will be helpful in any training context—college, apprenticeship, or both!

Traditionally, the concept of apprenticeship has a strong heritage in the European Renaissance. Because training then was focused on the arts, trades, and crafts, many people believe that apprenticeship is viable only for “blue-collar” employment, or for the “unacademic” person. But the principles by which this system worked throughout history are applicable even to modern professions and today’s business world. Apprenticeship encourages students to alternate between working and studying so that “hands on” experience and “head knowledge” are continually blended in training. Modern education describes this design as “learning based on the need to know” and hails it as a very effective motivational tool.

The secret to apprenticeship is the constant blend of experience and formal study under the direction of a master in the field. The term *apprenticeship* is not synonymous with a summer job, a mission extension opportunity, or part-time volunteer assignments to survey career possibilities—though all these experiences contribute significantly to a young person’s preparation for the “marketplace.” Apprenticeship requires a commitment between trainer and trainee for a specified period of time (anywhere from 2 to 10 years for most of the traditional apprenticeable jobs) to reach a predetermined goal. It is also quite possible that, in our twenty-first century world, some of the “head knowledge” portion of apprenticeship might be done in the group setting of college classes on campus or via distance learning.

The beauty of the apprenticeship model is that the young person is usually gainfully employed during the training time and thus able to pay most or all of the expenses related to the “head knowledge” facet of the work (tuition, books, equipment, etc.). In light of the fact that many new graduates finish their degree programs with \$30,000 or more of indebtedness, this is significant. Furthermore, graduating with some practical experience that can be written on a résumé is valuable as well.

So, how does the parent fit in—particularly when a young person desires training in a field that father or mother know little about?

By dictionary definition, a mentor is “a trusted counselor or guide; a tutor or coach.” Parents need to function as coaches during the career-training process. Help your teen identify the calling God has placed on his or her life. Research appropriate “field experience” opportunities for orientation and in-depth study. Pray diligently, and encourage your young person to wait on the Lord for direction.

Be available to negotiate the initial agreement with a prospective trainer of your son or daughter. Some thoughts that must be addressed at this stage include a detailed job description for the apprentice, a system for accountability and evaluation, a plan for housing needs, specified guidelines for remuneration, and the outline of a general schedule to balance work, study, and outside responsibilities. Begin with the following questions, and put all your final answers in writing to avoid any misunderstanding.

About the job description:

1. What are the work responsibilities on the job?
2. What are the study responsibilities for the job?
3. What safety practices must be observed?
4. What are the working hours?
5. Who will be providing direct supervision and instruction?
6. What is the anticipated timetable for increasing responsibilities?
7. What are the learning/ achievement goals?

About accountability and evaluation:

1. Specify the kind(s) of recordkeeping and evaluation tools you want the trainer to use.
2. Establish a journaling system for your son/daughter.
3. Decide how often you want to receive reports—verbal or written.
4. Follow up to ensure that you receive what you have specified. (Remember, you get what you inspect—not what you expect!)
5. Allow quality time for discussion of the reports when they are rendered. (There should be discussion between trainer and student as well as between trainer and parents.)

About termination of the relationship:

1. Assign a definite beginning and ending time to the apprenticeship assignment before it begins. While some people feel this is a pessimistic gesture, we encourage you to remember that ongoing training is your focus rather than simple full-time employment. Setting the deadlines up front helps to avoid the situation in which a young person becomes “indispensable” to an employer for routine assignments that do not lead to further training. Remember, you can always renew a contract for additional time and then specify new goals.
2. Begin with a short tenure away (e.g., one week at a time). A helpful guideline for balance of time away vs. time at home would be a maximum of three months out followed by six months at home. If you keep the time away shorter than the time at home, you will avoid the sense that your children function as “guests” whenever they return.

You will also magnify your ability to assess developing needs. Of course, personal maturity level will be the main determinant in whether or not a young person can be away from home for any length of time.

About remuneration (salary and benefits):

1. Establish price at outset of the job/training. List benefits and schedule for evaluating increases.
2. Is the trainer paying the apprentice?
3. Is the apprentice paying for the trainer's time? This is sometimes necessary especially at the outset of training when having an apprentice on board requires a significant investment of the trainer's time.
4. Is a barter situation appropriate (i.e., trading routine maintenance or custodial chores for the privilege of learning in the shop, office, or studio)?

If the young person needs training away from home, consider these housing questions:

1. Will there be suitable privacy (retreat for study)?
2. Are safety/protection concerns satisfied? Check out the reputation of the prospective host family or dormitory situation thoroughly—no matter what the affiliation of the organization offering the assignment. If either parent has any sense of hesitancy, honor those cautions and do not proceed. God is able to bring both parents in oneness of spirit to confirm His direction.
3. Evaluate if it would be better to live in an arrangement that does not mix training and “down time.” It's usually not a good idea to live in the same household with your employer/trainer!
4. How will meals be handled in a boarding situation? Will the young person cook for himself? Will he eat with the family? What is the household policy on snacks? How will storage of personal food items be handled? If eating with the family, is the young person expected to help with meal preparation and cleanup? Apart from meals, what kitchen privileges are allowed?
5. Who owes whom for what? What are the room and board charges? Are utilities included?
6. What chores must be fulfilled by the young person?

About the young person's schedule:

1. Work with your son/daughter to compose a schedule that will satisfy your training goals. Be specific with guidelines for study time, rest time, Bible study goals, etc.
2. If living away from home, assist the host in understanding the apprentice's needs. Obtain a written copy of the family's normal daily/weekly routine.
3. Clarify all expectations verbally and confirm in writing: schedule, communication methods/network, amount of participation in family events.
4. Decide where the young person will attend church.
5. Is the young person expected to help with the host's children? How much, in what context, remunerated separately or part of housing?

About the need for regular interaction between mentor and mentoree:

Plan to talk with your son/daughter on a frequent and regular basis. Be prepared to ask specific questions. The general “How are you doing?” or “What’s going on?” is insufficient to satisfy the role of “coach.”

Parental mentoring includes the responsibility to maintain accountability with your children in “standing alone” for their convictions. No matter where you work or live, you will find some variance in beliefs and practices. It is extremely rare that an organization or another family would match your family on all standards. This discovery can be deeply shocking to youthful idealism and thus produce great vulnerability to disillusionment. Preparation for “standing alone” is the responsibility of the parent—particularly the father—and should be thoroughly evaluated before any assignment away from home.

Finally, mentorship is enriched with diligent “journaling.” Design an “experience” report form that works for you. Include the following: date, location, people involved, a brief description of the situation with a report of how the student met the challenge, an assessment of what this experience made the student wish he or she had known, and recommendations for resolving this need.

Apprenticeship works! But remember, the process is highly individualized. Obviously, parents need to transfer more and more decision-making responsibility to their offspring as young adults mature. Good communication is crucial on every front. Parents are certainly not the only mentors their children will have—but parents can and should be the first and most important mentors in their children’s lives.

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### Biographical Information

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*Joined by her husband, Dr. Ronald Jay Cannon, in 1987, Inge has served the homeschool community in a variety of encouraging ways for almost 25 years. Her current focus is helping parents produce professional high school transcripts that will satisfy the need to communicate with education officials and yet honor the heart of a discipleship-oriented tutorial lifestyle of learning. You can learn more about her ministry, Education PLUS, by visiting [www.edplus.com](http://www.edplus.com) or [www.homeschooltranscripts.com](http://www.homeschooltranscripts.com).*