

High School Apprenticeship at Home

by Maggie S. Hogan

There are a great number of ways to creatively gain high school credit at home besides using a curriculum bought from a publisher. At this age, volunteer work, as well as paid employment, can be counted as a work experience elective. For example, a student with an interest in nursing can volunteer at a local hospital, nursing home, crisis pregnancy center, or other health care facility. A student interested in wildlife management may want to volunteer at a state park, nature center, or wildlife preserve. Even just a “plain old job” has much value in teaching responsibility, time management, work ethics, accountability, and much more. It is perfectly reasonable to award a credit for a part-time job held throughout the school year.

What about apprenticeship? Apprenticeship by definition is “training in an art, trade, or craft, under a legal agreement defining the relationship between master and learner and the duration and conditions of their relationship.” This kind of mentoring goes a step further than just a job. It’s a well-thought-out plan of action. The key to successful apprenticeship is a blend of instruction and “hands-on” experience supervised by an expert in the field. This has gained much popularity among homeschoolers for several reasons:

- ▶ It’s practical. What better way to learn a business than under the tutelage of a “master” in the field?
- ▶ It’s do-able. Within our circle of family, church, and friends, it is quite likely we could find the right match for our student.
- ▶ It’s good preparation. Wouldn’t we all like our young people prepared for “real life”?

Two True Tales

“Is it my imagination, or is Flossie standing exactly where and how she was last night?” Janice asked her family aloud. Her 11-year-old daughter, Lauren, assured her that it was not her imagination and that she had been trying to tell her mom that Flossie looked sick! Their two acres out in the country filled with all description of animals was exactly to this middle child’s liking. She willingly worked hard on the property and had earned the title, “Farm Manager.”

They called the vet, who came out and examined the pregnant cow, Flossie. It was a good thing they called her when they had, because it turned out that Flossie was in pretty bad shape.

Thus began their relationship with a large animal vet. Being the child who always loved animals, Lauren was extremely interested in all the procedures that this doctor performed on her many visits. One visit prompted the inevitable “Why are your children home during the day?” question and the answer, question, answer, question, answer type

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conversation that inevitably follows that particular inquiry. (The doctor was intrigued enough by homeschooling that she attended our state conference that year.)

Lauren was so very interested in learning more about how people help sick animals that eventually the vet was asked if Lauren could possibly accompany her on her rounds one day. The answer was positive, and sure enough, the day came when Lauren was invited to go along. She loved it. Then, unexpectedly, she was invited to go again, and again, and again! Lauren treasured those experiences and longed for more.

A friend suggested that Janice should try to establish a relationship with the vet where Lauren could accompany her once each week in exchange for Lauren volunteering her labor once each week. The labor would be the “dirty work” that needs to be done but that no one relishes. The doctor instantly agreed to the arrangement, and the following year was a very happy one for the “Farm Manager.”

She learned all kinds of things and was functioning as a nurse-assistant. Her expertise grew to where she could anticipate what tool was needed during surgery and was invited to tag along whenever there was something particularly interesting happening. She even looked forward to doing the work on her volunteer evening. Sometimes she washed the trucks, sometimes she did paper work, sometimes she filled pill bottles, and sometimes she cleaned the office. She worked hard and enthusiastically. The arrangement worked out great for everyone involved and was continued into the next year. This shy, middle child grew into a self-confident, knowledgeable young lady.

The following year it became apparent to the veterinarian that the business had grown to the point where she needed to hire part-time help. To whom do you suppose she offered the position? Of course, Lauren was exceedingly pleased. It not only was her first paying job, it was a job at which she was skilled and one she dearly loved.

When it came time to figure out her high school science requirements, it was easy assigning her a credit for science after the many hours of labor and incredible knowledge she had gained during those years. Now, ten years later, we find Lauren has earned her nursing degree!

BJ was a quiet kid like his dad. He enjoyed playing the piano and messing around with his friends. There was one thing that really got him excited, though, and that was computers. As soon as he finished his studies each day, he would spend whatever time he could on the computer. His mom got him books on programming, and he pored over them. What he read, he put into action on their Mac. Over the years, his interest grew. He really wasn't sure he was interested in going to college; he really was sure he was interested in computers! His parents took the money they had saved up for his college education and bought him a state-of-the-art computer, printer, and many peripherals. He had learned so much about computers and programming over the years, they believed he

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would learn what he needed to know to be a valuable employee or entrepreneur if just given exposure to the right equipment.

At about this time, BJ began volunteering in the TV studio at their church. He started out sweeping the floors and emptying waste cans. Just by being there, he was learning much. Folks began to notice that he had an incredible amount of interest and aptitude in the use of computers in television and movie production and was even able to help them through various difficulties which arose. Soon a paying position opened up; BJ applied for and got the job. Then the homeschool graduate was making good money doing what he loved. Now, several years later, his reputation in his city for being the fellow who knows how to handle problems that arise in computer and film production is well established. BJ is in demand for this type of consulting and is happily doing his life's work.

Experience is the best teacher . . . so the saying goes. Many young people are taking advantage of the enormous opportunities available to them as home educated students. The flexible schedules they usually possess, as well as the ability to take the time to really focus on an area of interest, are very valuable and envied by many of their non-homeschooled peers.

However, these opportunities don't usually just jump into your lap. It takes an alert, caring, tuned-in adult to search out the possibilities, to turn occurrences into opportunities, and then to encourage the student to actively participate in them. There are many adults who would be pleased and honored to share their vocation with an interested young person. Pray, look, and be prepared for amazing opportunities!

Biographical Information

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Maggie Hogan lives with her husband Bob in Dover, Delaware, where they began homeschooling their two (now grown) sons in 1991. She is a regular contributor to homeschooling Internet sites, as well as print magazines like The Old Schoolhouse[®]. She's a nationally-known speaker and co-author of The Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide, Gifted Children at Home, Young Scholar's Guide to Classical Composers, and other resource books. They're also owners of Bright Ideas Press, publishers of the all-new Illuminations curriculum as well as award-winning The Mystery of History series, Christian Kids Explore series, and All American History series. When not reading or writing, Maggie can be found drooling over travel brochures.

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