

# College isn't for everyone

## *Work has value whether it is physical or mental*

By Ken Reynolds

As World War II drew to a close our nation provided financial assistance to help veterans attend college. The "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944" was a significant move for the country and for the individuals who benefited directly. The sociological implications of the increased availability of advanced education are still being researched.

Although not as widely known, the GI Bill also provided financial assistance to attend trade school or take correspondence courses in preparation for employment. As a nation we recognized college was not for everyone.

The GI Bill was not simple generosity or compensation for servicemen. Memories of The Bonus March of 1932, when 20,000 WWI veterans descended on Washington seeking early redemption of promised payment for their wartime service, were still fresh in America's memory. Congress feared the returning servicemen would be unable to find immediate employment and the country would lapse into another Great Depression.

At the same time we were falling for a ruse: Competition and failure diminish a child's self-image.

If you have tried to hire entry-level employees since around 1980 you how difficult it is to find recent high school graduates who can read well enough to follow basic instructions. If your company needs arithmetic skills you have a larger problem. The job seekers may not have the needed knowledge, but with self-image intact they see some work as beneath them.

Work has value whether it is physical or mental. One of my first employers posted a sign "Work Demeans No One." He meant floors have to be swept and garbage disposed of, sewers have to be installed, kept clear and the effluent treated. That work is necessary. Why then have we collectively allowed ourselves to regard such work as demeaning? Perhaps it is because



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we, who do not have to perform those tasks to survive, think of and treat those who do the work as beneath us. No rational person enjoys such treatment.

Between 1944 and today we somehow morphed into an "everyone should go to college" national mindset. I accept the risk of being labeled a curmudgeon, but not everyone should go to college. There is a major difference between advocating college for every student and encouraging individual students to

prepare themselves to make their way in the world. If college and knowledge work is what a student wants and is suited for, then we should encourage that student.

We all have known knowledge workers who long for a small farm, workshop or studio. They are people who want to escape the humdrum everyday rat race of office work they were

lured into to better themselves. Some people are happier working with their hands. We should not discourage them. We need them. Yet, college enrollment has proliferated as the number of trade schools and trade school enrollment has diminished.

Matthew B. Crawford, in his book *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, tells us secondary school shop classes are giving way to make room and provide funds for computer labs.

The increasing need for more people with computer knowledge is easy to see, but we are giving inadequate attention to the value of physical work. We need knowledge workers. We also need people who can build and repair our furniture, houses, automobiles, appliances and even our computers.

There is personal satisfaction to be gained in working with things, and we ignore the value of that kind of compensation at our own peril — individually and collectively.

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