



The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life

By William Damon

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Drawing on the revelatory results of a landmark study, William Damon -- one of the country's leading writers on the lives of young people, whose book *Greater Expectations* won the Parents' Choice Award -- brilliantly investigates the most pressing issue in the lives of youth today: why so many young people are "failing to launch" -- living at home longer, lacking career motivation, struggling to make a timely transition into adulthood, and not yet finding a life pursuit that inspires them.

His groundbreaking study shows that about one-fifth of youth today are thriving -- highly engaged in activities they love and developing a clear sense of what they want to do with their lives -- but approximately one-fourth are still rudderless, at serious risk of never fulfilling their potential. The largest portion are teetering on the brink, in need of guidance to help them move forward: some are "dabblers" who pursue strings of disconnected interests with no real commitment; others, "dreamers" who have no realistic plans or understanding of what success will require.

What makes the difference? Damon shows that the key ingredient for the highly engaged is that they have developed a clear sense of purpose in their lives that motivates them and gives them direction. Based on in-depth interviews, he takes readers inside the minds of the disengaged and drifting kids and exposes their confusion and anxiety about what they should do with their lives. He then offers compelling portraits of the young people who are thriving and identifies the nine key factors that have made the difference for them, presenting simple but powerful methods that parents and all adults can and must employ in order to cultivate that energized sense of purpose in young people that will launch them on the path to a deeply satisfying and productive life.

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Editorial Review

Review

The Path to Purpose is a beautiful and important book. William Damon takes on one of the most hidden and yet important elements of child development today and provides warm insight and clear advice." -- Michael Gurian, author of *The Wonder of Boys* and *The Wonder of Girls*

"If you are a parent, a teacher, or a policy maker, this is *the* book to read. Damon socks the crucial problem of our youth -- purposelessness -- right in the jaw and offers us a way out." -- Martin Seligman, author of *Authentic Happiness*

"As a leading authority on meaning and moral development, Damon writes a timely and important book on one of our most pressing social issues -- how to instill a sense of purpose in the lives of children. Damon gives us a fresh and useful way to look at both education and character development." -- Dr. Mary Pipher, author of *Reviving Ophelia* and *Writing to Change the Worlds*

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Young Lives Adrift

The life prospects of a young person in today's world are far from certain. Only a few decades ago, almost all young people knew by the end of adolescence where they would live, what their occupation would be, and whom they were going to marry. Today, most young people have no answers to these questions well into adulthood. The global economy has increased the opportunities, and pressures, for young people to move far from the communities that they grew up in. Even many of the best-educated will spend years in casual jobs without settling into a permanent line of work -- and, indeed, the whole notion of a permanent line of work has come into question, as many careers are evolving into a succession of relatively short-term, disconnected jobs. As for establishing their own families, young adults all over the world are deferring or declining marriage. If current trends continue, an increasing share of the youth population will never marry, or may wait until their childbearing years are almost past.¹

Some of today's young welcome these changes and the new opportunities they offer. These young people have formulated clear aspirations for their future. They are strongly motivated, full of energy, optimistic, and have created realistic plans to accomplish their ambitions. Confident in themselves, they enjoy exploring the world and testing the limits of their potential. Far from needing any protection or prodding, they almost can't be held back. In a word, they have found a strong sense of *purpose* to inspire them and provide them with direction.

At the same time, many of their peers are floundering. In the face of the serious choices ahead of them as they move toward adulthood, they feel as though they are drifting or stalled in their personal and social development. A large portion of today's young people are hesitating to make commitments to any of the roles that define adult life, such as parent, worker, spouse, or citizen.

This delayed commitment among the young is taking place today all over the industrial world, from the United States to Japan to Europe. In Italy, to cite one extreme case, it has been reported that the *majority* of thirty-year-olds still live at home with their parents and are neither married nor fully employed. In the United States, a study of youth in their late teens and early twenties concluded: "Marriage, home, and children are seen by most of them not as achievements to be pursued but as perils to be avoided."²

The British government was the first to officially recognize the growing phenomenon of unoccupied young adults when, in a national report five years ago, it coined the term "Young NEETs" ("Not in Education, Employment, or Training").³ Recently, the Japanese government has reported, with evident alarm, that almost a million of its own youthful population had become NEETs -- and this in a society long known for its strong intergenerational work ethic. None of these reports has cited any economic slowdown as the problem. The economy in Europe, Asia, the United States, and other parts of the industrial world has been growing rapidly enough to offer plentiful employment opportunities for the young. But many are holding back. Perhaps they are daunted by the uncertainties they face, perhaps they are fearful of perils they perceive in the choices they might make, or perhaps they consider the prospects available to them to be uninspiring and devoid of meaning. The reasons behind their hesitation often seem mysterious to parents and educators, many of whom are becoming concerned that these young people have yet to find the kinds of engagements and commitments that make life fulfilling.

Many parents are also voicing the concern -- often humorously at first, but less so over time -- that their progeny may become "boomerangers," returning to their home nests long after they were supposed to have flown away on their own wings. I've come to call this the "How can I get my wonderful daughter to move out of our basement?" question. Of course, not all parents are troubled by seeing their children take some extra time to strike out on their own, and there is a positive side to the story: it does indicate a closeness that has eluded many families in prior decades. These days, grown children feel comfortable staying in their family homes, and they do actually seem to enjoy hanging around their parents and communicating with them much more openly than did people of the boomer generation when they themselves were young.

A bit of light on this matter was shed by a May 2007 *Fortune* magazine piece on "baby boomers' kids," written delightfully by Nadira Hira, who identifies herself as one of those kids.⁴ Extolling (correctly) the extraordinary talent, energy, and creativity that mark her cohort of young people, the author makes the case that "all that questioning" that her peers are doing "will lead us to some important answers." In the meantime, the extended period of questioning and self-exploration is delaying that transition to permanent work and a home of their own far beyond that of any prior generation. Hira cites a survey of American college students from 2000 through 2006 showing that almost two thirds of the graduates moved home after college and over half of these stayed for more than a year. She quotes one twenty-eight-year-old (who himself wrote a book on the subject⁵) as saying: "If we don't like a job, we quit, because the worst thing that can happen is that we move back home. There's no stigma...our moms would love nothing more than to cook our favorite meatloaf." Another young adult, a twenty-four-year-old woman, echoes this sentiment: "I think parents want to feel needed, and it's like, because I'm so independent, they get excited when I ask for a favor."

Now, parental love for children is one of the world's great blessings; and it is true, fortunately, that most parents will gladly do anything to help their children get along. Also, it is unambiguously a good thing that most children feel secure in their expectations that parents will provide for their needs. But I am not convinced that most parents hope to spend their golden years providing basic needs for their children; nor do I believe that this truly would be in the best interests of the children themselves. What *is* in children's best interests is to find ways to make their own contributions to their families and eventually to the world beyond themselves.

The ultimate problem is not the parent's role in the child's life but rather the child's own personal fulfillment.

During the adolescent years, a certain amount of soul-searching and experimentation is healthy. Adolescence is a transitory period of development, a kind of way station on the road to a mature self-identity.⁶ This formative period of life is said to begin with the onset of puberty and end with a firm commitment to adult social roles, such as those cited earlier: parent, spouse, worker, and citizen.⁷ During this key time of transition to adulthood, it is sensible for young people to spend time examining themselves, considering their futures, and looking around for the opportunities that best suit their own ambitions and interests. For many young people, an extended period of exploration and reflection during adolescence may be necessary to establish a fulfilling self-identity and a positive direction in life. This is what the renowned psychologist Erik Erikson once described as a constructive "moratorium" from reality. And yes, this "identity formation" task in some cases can take years of postponing choices in order to resolve the task successfully.⁸

Yet the postponements of many young people today have taken on a troubling set of characteristics, and chief among them is that so many youth do not seem to be moving toward any resolution. Their delay is characterized more by indecision than by motivated reflection, more by confusion than by the pursuit of clear goals, more by ambivalence than by determination. Directionless drift is not a constructive moratorium in either a developmental or a societal sense. Without a sense of direction, opportunities are lost, and doubt and self-absorption can set in. Maladaptive habits are established and adaptive ones are not built. It is not that there is a critical period for the acquisition of a fruitful direction in life. But it is the case that excessive delay beyond the period of readiness creates the serious risk that the young person may give up altogether on the tasks of finding a positive direction, sustaining that direction, and acquiring the skills needed to achieve the directional goals.

Today's young people are well aware that they will need to make a transition from adolescence to adulthood at some point; but for too many of them, this awareness -- which can be a source of keen anticipation for those who look to their futures with hope -- triggers a sense of vague foreboding or worse, a debilitating anxiety that can lead to further developmental paralysis. Indeed, extended disengagement from adult social roles is a prescription for anxiety and depression. To remain uncommitted to career, family, and other serious community responsibilities is an untenable position for a young person to settle into. Such disengagement becomes increasingly uncomfortable over time. It cannot continue indefinitely without psychological costs.

I do not wish to suggest that most of today's young are in "deep trouble" or any kind of immediate peril. In fact, the most visible indicators of youth well-being look somewhat better today, or at least not worse, than they did ten or fifteen years ago. In the United States, today's young people are less likely than the young of ten years ago to become pregnant while still teenagers; they are less prone to violence and crime; they are somewhat less vulnerable to the lure of addictive drugs; and they are no more prone to major eating disorders (with the exception of obesity, which is still on the rise among youngsters and adults alike). Most students are staying in school for more years and are attending c...

Users Review

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The reason why? Because this *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life* is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will shock you with the secret that inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who also write the book in such incredible way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining technique but still convey the meaning fully. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking approach. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I had been you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

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