



# Parents as Career Coaches Tip Sheets

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## Parents as Career Coaches – Tip Sheet

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### 5 Ways to Be a Great Career Coach to Your Son or Daughter

*By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt*

In 2002, Ferris State University surveyed more than 800 high school juniors and seniors across the United States to find out about their career-related concerns. One of the questions the survey posed was: "Who is primarily responsible for helping you plan for a career or job?"

Guess who high school students are turning to the most (by far) for career advice? You - that is, their parents. Indeed, a full 78 percent of the students in the survey said that "one or both parents" were their "primary" career advisors. (For the record, "school personnel" came in a distant second at 10 percent.)

So whether you're ready for it or not, chances are your high school son or daughter is going to come to you for career guidance. Remember the old saying, "You are your child's first teacher"? Well, you'll probably be your child's first career coach as well.

What is that all about? What does it mean for you to be a "career coach" to your child? Like any coach, as a career coach you'll help your child put his/her career-related ideas and passions into some sort of **action**. You won't "tell" your son/daughter what job to pursue or what career is right for them. (You can try, of course, but you won't truly succeed.) Instead, you'll serve as a "guide on the side" who understands and accepts these key principles:

- Your child has his/her **own** interests, motivations, passions, and abilities. You can't impose your (or anyone else's) interests, motivations, passions, and abilities on your son/daughter. But you most certainly can (and should!) help your child discover his/her own.
- There is a **vast** number of career choices that are possible in the world of work, with new occupations and even industries being created practically every day. It is both necessary and desirable to investigate possibilities - both those your child already knows something about as well as those he/she may not be aware of (yet!) - so that your son/daughter finds true satisfaction in his/her career life.
- Your job - indeed, your unique gift to your son/daughter - is to help remove barriers so that your child can hear his/her inner voice and begin moving toward actions that will help him/her respond to that inner voice's wants and needs.

How exactly can you do all of this and be a great career coach to your son/daughter? Here are five specific strategies you can employ:

- Encourage your child to assume responsibility for making his/her own career decisions. Let him/her know that you can't - and won't - "tell" him/her what to do or not do. At the same time, however, assure your child that you're willing and able to point out potential options to explore, and that you'll do your very best to be a helpful resource.

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- Help your child identify his/her innate talents or abilities (sometimes referred to as "gifts"). How? For starters, share your observations of things you've seen your son/daughter do well consistently. Ask your child about what he/she has felt good about doing in the past. And encourage your child to take advantage of any abilities and/or skills testing that might be available at the high school or (future) college career center.
- Help your child deal with the inevitable fears and anxieties that stand in the way of moving ahead with career exploration. Does your child have the "yes, but"s where some career options are concerned - in other words, is he/she prematurely ruling out a potentially rewarding career with statements like "yes, I enjoy art, but you can't make a living doing that"? If so, work with your child to develop a plan of action for questioning his/her assumptions and what he/she **believes** about a particular career path. Much more often than not, what any teenager "knows" about a particular career doesn't exactly match reality.
- Openly discuss your child's dreams and passions. Ask open-ended questions to help your son/daughter elaborate on what type of career might give him/her a sense of real purpose and meaning. Don't get hung up on job titles at this point! Focus instead on the essence of what your child would like to do - and then have him/her describe it in as much detail as possible, either verbally or in writing.
- Listen for understanding. Again, don't slip into the all-too-natural but ultimately unproductive mode of giving advice. Rather, try to pinpoint the feelings that accompany the words your child is speaking or writing. Read between the lines of what you're hearing - is your child consciously or unconsciously trying to tell you something beyond the obvious message embedded within his/her words? If so, work hard to uncover that message and put it on the table for open discussion.

Great coaches listen as much as they talk and take in as much as they give out. Your son or daughter will likely be coming to you for critical career guidance - if he/she hasn't already - hoping you'll be the open-minded, inquisitive career coach he/she needs instead of the biased, my-way-or-the-highway career nag he/she fears.

Will you be ready?

*-- Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt are career coaches with College to Career, a Minneapolis company that offers personal career coaching geared to the unique needs of high school and college students. To learn more about College to Career, visit the company's web site at [www.collegetocareer.net](http://www.collegetocareer.net). Or contact Terese Corey Blanck, President, at 763-494-4447 or [tblank@collegetocareer.net](mailto:tblank@collegetocareer.net).*

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## 7 Ways to Help Your Child Find the Path That Fits

*By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt*

In their bestselling book [Now, Discover Your Strengths](#) (Free Press, 2001), Gallup Organization researchers Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton cite 30 years' worth of Gallup research - involving almost two million participants - that points to a key conclusion about people and careers:

To excel in your chosen field and to find lasting satisfaction in doing so, you will need to understand your unique patterns. You will need to become an expert at finding and describing and applying and practicing and refining your strengths.

This task is difficult enough when you're considering yourself and your own life. It can be even tougher for you if you're the parent of a high school or college student and you're trying to help your son/daughter identify and apply his/her unique strengths in selecting a college major, for example, or determining a career path after graduation.

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to become a thought-provoking, inspiring resource for your young adult as he/she embarks on this critical journey:

### **Set the Stage for Authentic Dialogue**

Clear your thoughts about what you might want for your son/daughter in the way of a college major or career, and instead be fully present to listen to the path(s) he/she is contemplating. Give your son/daughter express permission to talk with you about his/her career-related thoughts and dreams. And let your child know his/her exploration and decision-making process will take some time.

### **Help Your Son/Daughter Pinpoint Natural Strengths and Abilities**

You've known your son/daughter for many years now. Share your observations of what his/her innate talents or gifts seem to be, and encourage him/her to ask close friends for their observations as well. You'd be amazed by the number of people - especially young adults - who feel they have no strengths because what they're good at comes so easily to them that (in their minds) none of it can possibly be "real" talents! Help your son/daughter see - and acknowledge - the strengths they may not recognize in themselves.

### **Teach Your Son/Daughter How to Identify Interests and Passions**

It's one thing to be good at something; it's another thing entirely to enjoy that something. Many a young person has been steered in a major or career direction that made sense with his/her abilities but not his/her interests. The result is often disappointment or worse. As a parent, you can do your son/daughter a great service by helping him/her identify what he/she really enjoys. What does your son seem to focus on almost naturally? What grabs your daughter's attention the most? Conversely, what activities does your son/daughter absolutely hate?!

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## **Encourage Your Son/Daughter to Test Ideas**

You've been in the world a lot longer than your son/daughter has, so you've developed relationships you can tap to help your son/daughter test academic and career ideas. If your neighbor, for example, sells insurance and your daughter has expressed interest in a finance-related career, encourage her to talk to your neighbor for initial ideas on the types of finance careers that exist in the world of insurance. If your second cousin - who lives hundreds of miles away - is a veterinarian and your son thinks he might want to major in zoology at college, suggest that your son email your cousin and ask her some questions about veterinarians and others who work with animals for a living.

## **Point Out Resources Your Son/Daughter Can Tap for Academic and Career Planning**

Many, if not most, high schools and colleges employ guidance counselors and career development professionals who are paid - through your tax dollars and perhaps even your private tuition dollars as well - to help students with academic and career planning issues. Encourage your son/daughter to explore the often overlooked resources available at his/her school's guidance office, career center, or counseling or advising center.

## **Help Your Son/Daughter Keep Academic and Career Decisions in Perspective**

Too often, young people treat choosing a major or selecting an initial career path as though it were a life-and-death decision. But of course it's not. Help your child keep that in mind. The path your son/daughter will take on the road to his/her educational and career goals will be winding, not straight.

## **Be Willing to Say, "I Don't Know"**

Every day, somewhere in this country, a high school or college student says to a career counselor, "I'd like to major in art, but I can't because I'll never get a job with that degree." What a tragedy - and it often unfolds because a well-meaning but less-than-knowledgeable parent has told his/her child, "You'll never get a job with an art degree."

Where does that kind of (mis)information come from? Often, it's something a parent has only vaguely "heard about" or "read somewhere" - and it isn't even remotely accurate.

So when your son/daughter comes to you with an idea for a college major or career, be very careful of sharing with him/her what you (think you) know about that possibility. Challenge your own assumptions and perceptions about various educational and career paths, and teach your son/daughter to do the same. True, there may not be as many jobs in the world of art as there are in, say, accounting; but there are some jobs out there - and one of them may have your child's name on it.

-- [Terese Corey Blanck](#) and [Peter Vogt](#) are career coaches with *College to Career*, a Minneapolis company that offers personal career coaching geared to the unique needs of high school and college students. To learn more about *College to Career*, visit the company's web site at [www.collegetocareer.net](http://www.collegetocareer.net) or contact Terese Corey Blanck, President, at 763-494-4447 or [tblank@collegetocareer.net](mailto:tblank@collegetocareer.net).

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## Address Your Biases to Become a Better Parent Career Coach

*By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt*

You come to any interaction with your own biases. We all do; it's normal. If you're going to be an effective career coach to your young-adult son or daughter, however, you need to understand and deal with your biases so that they don't get in the way.

That's not always easy! After all, it's your child we're talking about here - and your biases may pull on you (and thereby your son/daughter as well) even stronger than they might if you were trying to help someone else.

Fortunately, you can learn how to address your biases before you begin the career exploration process with your son/daughter. Here's how:

### Clear Your Mind

Before you sit down with your child to discuss his/her career aspirations and thoughts, take an honest assessment of your **own** aspirations and thoughts where your child's future is concerned. Begin by spending a few minutes clearing your brain, as if you were preparing for a relaxation retreat and you needed to get rid of all the stress of the day. This is called a mindful approach - one that allows your thoughts to become uncluttered so that you can focus on the good feelings you have for your child.

**Mindful:** "Attentive, open to the possible, regarding with care, humbly observant, conscious" - these are just a few of the dictionary definitions of what it means for you to be mindful. Try these exercises to get yourself into a mindful mood:

- Picture your child on his/her first day of school all those years ago or during some other positive event that occurred when he/she was little. Remember how you felt at just that moment? Let yourself smile and feel that joy again - right now.
- Take a short walk and focus your mind on all the joy you've experienced so far with your son/daughter.
- Find your family's photo album and curl up in a comfy chair or on the couch. Look through all the years you've had together with your child and remember all the good times with him/her.

### State Your Biases

When your mind is more clear, think carefully about how you can encourage your child and help him/her during the career journey in the most positive way. Then develop a list of the top three to five of your biases that you're aware of that could hinder your son/daughter (and you) in his/her career exploration process. For example:

- "An elite school is the best place for my child."
- "I should fill out my son's/daughter's application so that it gets done right."



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- "My child should go to college close to home so that he/she won't get homesick or lonely."
- "It's best to decide on a major as soon as possible."

### Question Your Biases Thoroughly

Now, look at each of the bias statements you've written down and ask yourself a simple question: "Why?" That is, why do you have this bias? Where did it come from? Is it accurate? Is it based on fact or is it something you've merely "heard" (possibly from a less-than-reliable source)?

Then ask yourself, "How will these biases help or hinder my son's/daughter's career exploration process?" Be honest about your responses to this critical question.

Once you've pinpointed your biases, analyzed them, and perhaps even changed or dismissed them, you can decide how you want to proceed with your child on this issue. Remember: You're dealing with your child's future, not your own. Every person is unique. So while your son/daughter may share some of your traits, he/she likely has some traits of his/her own as well. Honor them - because one way or another, your child must (and will) eventually find his/her own path.

Studies show that the most successful people are those who find careers matching their passions and their innate talents and abilities. If you, as a parent career coach, can assess your own biases and help your son/daughter uncover his/her own unique traits, qualities, abilities, and passions, you will have given your child an awesome gift - the greatest potential of finding lifelong career satisfaction.

-- [Terese Corey Blanck](#) and [Peter Vogt](#) are career coaches with College to Career, a Minneapolis company that offers personal career coaching geared to the unique needs of high school and college students. To learn more about College to Career, visit the company's web site at [www.collegetocareer.net](http://www.collegetocareer.net) or contact Terese Corey Blanck, President, at 763-494-4447 or [tblank@collegetocareer.net](mailto:tblank@collegetocareer.net).

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### Career Coaching Your Teen: Practice "Active Listening" by Listening Between the Lines

By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt

*"The way of being with another person which is termed empathic means temporarily living in their life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments ... . To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter the other's world without prejudice ... a complex, demanding, strong, yet subtle and gentle way of being."*

~ Carl Rogers

Listening appears to be well on its way to becoming "endangered" in our fast-paced world. But it's an essential skill you must use in the art of coaching your son/daughter on career issues (and other issues as well!).

So if you'd like to take an active role in being an objective parent-coach to your teen as he/she begins the process of selecting a college, a major(s), and a career, learn to listen **between** the lines.

Some words of caution: As a parent, you may find it difficult to master the skill of objectivity because there are so many emotions you bring to any encounter with your teen. These emotions can sometimes impede real progress. So if you're like most parents, becoming an effective coach for your teen will take some time. Learning to listen is a great first step.

#### Hazards to Avoid

- **Don't** steer your teen in a certain direction - **your** direction, the one you think is best for him/her. Remember: This process is not about you. It's about your teen, and it's critical that you learn to listen from your teen's perspective, not yours. The fastest way to shut down your teen (or anyone for that matter) is to inject your opinions without first walking in his/her shoes. It's not that your opinions don't count; they do. But it's confusing for your teen to discern what he/she truly thinks if your opinions aren't similar. For example, you may be able to actually sway your teen into a college, major, career, or field that isn't a fit - but you and he/she may not discover what's happened until much later. Your son/daughter must **own** his/her dreams.
- **Don't** think about what you're going to say next while your teen is talking. If you do, you're not truly engaged in active listening because you're lost in your own thoughts, rehearsing what you're going to say next. This is a common habit and one of the hardest ones to break. But there's a clear distinction between actively "listening to understand" the message being presented and just "hearing the words." It takes practice to become an intentional listener.

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*Coaching* is about helping others find the answers that already lie within them. The challenge is digging deep enough and long enough until those answers are finally revealed. Be patient!

Here are a few more *active listening* tips to consider as you begin the journey of becoming a truly inspiring and helpful parent-coach to your son/daughter:

- **Clear** your mind. If you're preoccupied when you sit down to ask questions and listen, then your focus will be on your thoughts and feelings and not on your teen's.
- **Listen fully** and you'll begin to hear what your son/daughter is communicating "between" the lines. You can then follow up by asking related questions.
- **Listen to the essence** of what's being said - the tone and vigor of the message. Don't just focus on the words and what you **think** they mean.
- **Ask** questions to clarify. Reflect the feeling of the emotional aspect of what your teen is saying. Repeat (in your own words) what your child has just said so that you clarify your understanding. Then paraphrase - restate the meaning of what you've just heard.
- **Suspend judgment.** Pay attention to the way you're processing the information. Are you evaluating and making judgments while your teen is talking? Be sure to check your biases at the door (or keep them quietly to yourself) when you begin the process to genuinely help your teen find his/her own answers.
- **Focus** on creating an experience of connection with your teen through the entire listening and questioning process. You will know when this occurs because you'll find out about your teen's true reality versus your idea of it. This will lead to deeper understanding of your teen and his/her dreams.
- **Be aware** of what makes you defensive and try to quell it when it arises. Don't respond right away. Try to discover what triggers this kind of response initially and then move on. We all have "hot buttons" from our own personal histories, which can trigger negative feelings that don't belong in the conversation.

### An Active Listening Exercise

Practice active listening through this simple exercise...

In your next conversation, become aware of your internal monologue, or inner voice. Most of us have one long conversation going on most of the time. This monologue impedes active listening.

When you become aware of this voice, ask yourself, "Why am I listening right now?" Is it because you're waiting for someone to stop talking so you can share your brilliant ideas or tell one of your stories or point out where the other person is wrong? If so, then you're not truly practicing active listening.

Now start over again and try to clear your monologue. Notice how different the experience is this time? Practice this technique whenever you can.

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We're all conditioned to be constantly evaluating the content of another person's dialogue with us. So it takes a while to rewire what seems to be hardwired within us. But we must try to change our patterns of listening if we want to be the best parent-coaches possible for our teens. When we hone our active listening skills, we build far stronger and more satisfying relationships with our children - or anyone we may happen to be speaking with. This is a wonderful gift you can give to another person ... and yourself.

*-- Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt are career coaches with College to Career, a Minneapolis company that offers personal career coaching geared to the unique needs of high school and college students. To learn more about College to Career, visit the company's web site at [www.collegetocareer.net](http://www.collegetocareer.net). Or contact Terese Corey Blanck, President, at 763-494-4447 or [tblank@collegetocareer.net](mailto:tblank@collegetocareer.net).*

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# Parents as Career Coaches – Tip Sheet

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## The Parent Career Coach's (Quick) Guide to Helpful Questioning

*By Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt*

If you're like most parents, you've probably felt like a career "dentist" at times - "pulling teeth" in an attempt to get your son/daughter to open up about his/her dreams and visions for the future!

At times like those, it's easy to simply tell your young-adult son or daughter what to do about career "issues" (or, more accurately, **try** to!). It's much more difficult - but, ultimately, much more productive and rewarding - to help your child figure out what to do himself/herself by asking thought-provoking questions and creating an environment where your son/daughter can respond to them honestly and in detail.

The better the questions you ask of your son/daughter, the more you'll help your child begin to clarify what he/she wants (and doesn't want) in a career and uncover his/her deep-seated fears and anxieties where the future is concerned. Asking questions is a little bit science and a lot art; there's no perfect or right way to do it. But you can use this "Questions Primer" to ensure that the career questions you ask of your son/daughter are relevant, challenging yet not overbearing, and - most important of all - helpful:

### **Avoid "Yes or No" Questions**

The moment you start asking questions that call for only a "yes or no" type of response, you start down the unfortunate path of turning what's supposed to be a helpful dialogue into an annoying interrogation:

"Do you want to go to the University of X?"

"Do you want to get into accounting?"

"Do you want to live in Wisconsin?"

And on and on and on ...

In the "Peanuts" cartoon specials on television, the voice of the children's teacher is always something akin to the sound of a broken trombone. Ask only yes/no types of questions and you'll start to sound the same way to your son/daughter.

### **Don't Ask Leading Questions**

In courts of law, attorneys are prohibited from asking questions that "lead the witness." You, too, should avoid asking questions that attempt to lead your child in a certain career direction. Examples:

"Nursing is a hot field right now. You could be a nurse. What sort of nurse would you like to be?"

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"You're good with computers. What can you see yourself doing in the IT field?"

### **Learn to "Listen Between the Lines"**

When your son or daughter replies to one of your questions, are you picking up on any underlying feelings accompanying his/her verbal response? For example:

You: "What careers have you thought about, if only in passing?"

Your son/daughter: "I wish I could do something in the arts, but ..." [voice trails off]

You: "It sounds like you have some doubts or fears about that. What are they?"

Pose probing questions to help your child uncover what it is that is holding him/her back.

### **Be Ready for the Unexpected Response**

Your child might very well surprise or even shock you with his/her reply to one of your questions. If that happens, do your best to remain neutral at that moment so that you can later process what your child said and come up with a supportive, useful response. For instance:

"I wish I could go to school in Japan and do some teaching there."

Poor response: "What??!! How can you even consider going so far away??!!"

Better response: "Interesting. I didn't know you were even thinking about studying abroad."

### **Keep Your Questions Simple - and Ask Them One at a Time**

Watch any live news conference on CNN or MSNBC and you can see great examples of how **not** to ask questions:

"Mr. President, I have a three-part question .. "

Ugh. Invariably, the president (or whomever) latches on only to the last part of the question (to the degree he/she can understand or even remember it) and never goes back to the other two.

So in your career conversations with your son/daughter, stick with one topic at a time. Better to cover too little in a discussion than to try to cover too much.

### **Give Your Child a Chance to Think**

Some people - particularly introverts - would much rather go off and think about questions before responding to them (instead of replying to them immediately). Does your son/daughter typically prefer to ponder things for a few hours, or even a few days, before making decisions about them? If so, be sure to encourage your child to take the time he/she needs to consider your questions.

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### **Know When to Say When**

Neither you nor your child is going to enjoy a six-hour questioning marathon. So unless the two of you feel you're truly in the middle of a productive dialogue and you don't want to stop, keep your conversations to about an hour or so. You can always talk again another day - when your minds and spirits will be more refreshed.

Asking insightful questions of your child and demonstrating that you'll listen closely to his/her responses is one of the best career tools you can offer as a parent. You'll learn more about what's on your child's mind where careers are concerned (and how you might be helpful in that regard) - and he/she will see that you're a sincere, non-judgmental ally in the career exploration and decision-making process.

*-- Terese Corey Blanck and Peter Vogt are career coaches with College to Career, a Minneapolis company that offers personal career coaching geared to the unique needs of high school and college students. To learn more about College to Career, visit the company's web site at [www.collegetocareer.net](http://www.collegetocareer.net). Or contact Terese Corey Blanck, President, at 763-494-4447 or [tblank@collegetocareer.net](mailto:tblank@collegetocareer.net).*

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