




• P A R E N T   G U I D E •

# Introduction



*The College to Career Road Map* and this *Companion Parent Guide* offer you and your college student a rare opportunity: The chance to engage in illuminating career dialogue throughout your student's four (or more) college years. Our goal in these innovative books is simple: to provide the detailed road map your student needs to find a satisfying career—one that aligns with his purpose and pays the bills!

The *Parent Guide* will help you guide your student through the ever-complex career development process by allowing you to take on the role of career coach. Like an athletic coach, you don't have all the answers, nor should you. Instead, your task is to help your student help himself using *The College to Career Road Map* as his handbook. The *Road Map* outlines the career-building activities that are most critical for your student to work on during the college years. Its focus is on both the *academic* and the *experiential* activities that will help your student discern his future direction and boost his chances of landing a fulfilling job after graduation.

Here's what's most unique about *The College to Career Road Map*: Each activity we've outlined tells students not only *what* they need to do, but also *why* the task is so important and *how* students can actually go about completing that task. (Most career resources focus solely on the what and foolishly overlook the why and the how—both of which are critical in the minds of today's savvy college students.) Additionally, each activity is explicitly tied to the three most important aspects of career decision making where college students and recent graduates are concerned:

- Finding one's *passions*.
- Uncovering one's *innate talents*.
- Determining *what matters most* (i.e., one's values) in work and in life.

The *Road Map* is grounded in the philosophy that, while the career activities we've outlined are important in their own right, much more valuable are the reflection and discussion that help students learn about themselves and then apply that critical knowledge to their future career decisions.

This *Parent Guide* is meant to be a *facilitative* guide, not an *instructional* one. We believe that every person is unique, and that every person has the potential to be successful and satisfied (in whatever form that takes for him/her). We begin with the belief that the process of *facilitating* is a fluid and flexible one that is designed to help your student step back and see who he is now and who he is becoming. It's a personalized development process that enables your student to experience the impact of his actions (and, in some cases, inactions). It's designed to help you discuss these discoveries with your student in an exploratory, safe manner in which you're focused on *facilitating*—not *telling* or *instructing* or *expecting*.

Your primary role as a parent coach is to help your student uncover the hidden blocks and issues facing him head-on as he ponders the wide world of careers. Think of it this way: You're helping your student remove barriers so he can see possibilities. If you can do that in a naturally comfortable way—one that feels caring and non-judgmental to your student—you'll form a new bond with him and create a new aspect to your relationship that will serve both of you well throughout the rest of your lives. (Note: Keep in mind that *The College to Career Road Map* and this *Parent Guide* outline a process your student can complete with you or with

another trusted adult. What matters is that your student has someone he can go to for support in the career decision-making process.)

The *Parent Guide* offers specific exercises aimed at each year of college: freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. Ideally, you and your student will complete these exercises together to get your conversations going, but in some cases you may need to adapt the main principle(s) behind a particular exercise and talk to your student your *own* way. Know that either approach is effective.

We've also embedded some helpful tips on facilitating each exercise with your student. We want you to get beyond the common "I don't know" type of response your student may put forth—the one that merely frustrates both of you. Ninety percent of the time, college students really don't know the answers to the difficult life questions they face as they attempt to find their direction. It is a challenging journey for them. You can help best, then, by *gently* probing, guiding, and—most importantly—listening.

Remember: This is truly a learning situation for both you and your student. In the process of choosing a career, your student needs to find the doorway to who he is—in all respects—and experience success while he's developing a new and unique relationship with you.

## *The Parent Coaching Model*

One of the primary challenges you face as the parent of a college student is that you've been a parent for at least eighteen years or so! The parental habits that have kept your child safe and happy for nearly two decades can now start to work against you in some ways as your emerging-adult student begins seriously exploring career options and "The Future."

That's why the *Parent Coaching* model focuses on helping you acknowledge this pending change and open yourself up to a new kind of parenting experience. Sometimes that experience will feel unnatural and out of your control. That's completely normal. And if you think about it, you already know deep down that your student needs to develop her own thoughts and feelings about the future. All college students must discover who they are and where they want to go in life. Indeed, that's essentially what college is all about.

With that in mind, we outline below five core principles for being an effective facilitator, or career *coach*, for your college student. Remember: You'll be going through at least a four-year process. Some of your conversations with your student will go fabulously; others will leave you feeling empty and confused, and possibly even frustrated with your student's motivations, decisions, and general direction. It's all par for the course. What matters is that you're taking an active role in opening up a line of career dialogue with your student. You'll thus be more apt to experience (or at least hear about!) her successes, her joys, her discoveries, and her passions—and ultimately, you'll get to know your student on a much more intimate and trusting level than ever before.

## *The Five Core Principles of the Parent Coaching Model*

### **Listen for Understanding**

*The College to Career Road Map* and this *Parent Guide* will compel your student to dive into a profound mode of introspection about his life and his life's purpose. The questions posed throughout both books will help your student start to reflect on what's meaningful to him and learn how to integrate those reflections into the choices he's making along his college and career journey.

In the meantime, you—as the parent coach—will be *listening* to your student process and struggle with these difficult questions. Deeper conversations will naturally emerge, and that's when your listening skills will play a vital role. Your student will be rolling around choices he's contemplating and looking for your reactions and sometimes even your “answers.” Be careful! Your student needs to find his *own* answers. So *listen* to your student grapple with the questions.

Your student has entered the gray zone of life, where he must dig much deeper to find the answers that will enrich his life with purpose. Up until this point, your student has probably viewed the world in black-and-white terms. Now, he's in the midst of a developmental process that challenges him to view the world through different lenses—gray ones—and shed the simplicity of seeing the world concretely.

The beauty of simply listening to your student—and avoiding the common temptation to offer “answers”—is that you’ll give your student the chance to live with all of these questions and think about them ... on the way to class, in the shower, in the car. At some point, your student will have an “aha” moment and an answer will begin to crystallize. It may happen when the two of you are sitting together talking, or it may happen during a phone conversation when suddenly the light goes on and your student realizes the answer is right in front of him—and then he shares it with you!

Throughout your student’s career exploration and decision-making activities, clear your mind and hold on to those well-meaning pieces of wisdom you so desperately want to share with your student when you’re chatting with him about careers. Just listen and ask questions that will help him go further into his discovery process. You’ll be amazed at what you hear.



• LESSONS ON LISTENING •

**Listening is not like breathing.** *Listening doesn’t come naturally to most people. But it is a skill you can learn through practice.*

**Your listening style has a history.** *How well (or poorly) you listen is directly connected to your family upbringing. Do you frequently interrupt others when they’re talking? Do you half-listen so you can think about what you’re going to say in response? Observe your family of origin the next time you have a chance and see how you were taught to listen. Do you have any work to do where your lis-*

*tening—and thus coaching—skills are concerned?*

**Listening is one of the cornerstones of effective coaching.** *Let your student know she can (and should) give you feedback as the two of you work together on career activities. (Note: Be prepared to feel a little awkward the first time your student gives you feedback on your listening skills. You may feel a bit defensive. But it’s critical for you to understand what works best for your student when it comes to discussing her career issues with you.)*

**Beware of the blocks to good listening.** *Common blocks like these will impair your ability to listen to your student effectively:*

- **Lack of time.** *Make sure you're not rushed during the conversations you have with your student. If at all possible, set aside specific time to chat with her, either in person or on the phone. Don't try to cover too much territory. Instead,*

*let your student bring to you what's most pressing to her at the time.*

- **A busy mind.** *We all wrestle with "inside chatter" in our minds. But if you're going to be fully present as a listener, you need to quiet your thoughts and focus on your student.*
- **Unruly emotions.** *Clear any emotions that may get in the way of your listening: fear, anger, worry, and the like.*

### Question to Uncover Ideas

By simply asking good questions, you'll help your student identify his innate talents—not to mention his attitudes, behaviors, and passions—which in turn will help him uncover his potential and explore ways to fulfill that potential via his career.

All great coaches are skilled questioners. You can become one too. If you're someone who has unquenchable curiosity to begin with, then you may already have this essential ability. Even if you're not a naturally inquisitive person, though, you can still ask questions that will give you an honest, inside view of all that's happening in the recesses of your student's mind, heart, and soul.

Here are a few types of questions you can ask, ranging from the most basic to the most complex:

- *Knowledge/comprehension questions.* Ask questions to determine if your student understands something. For example: "How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_?" or "How would you show \_\_\_\_\_?" Does your student have the knowledge he needs to make key decisions or support his assumptions?
- *Application questions.* Can your student see how one piece of knowledge or information relates to another? For example: "What approach would you use if \_\_\_\_\_?" or "What would happen if \_\_\_\_\_?" or "What would you do if \_\_\_\_\_?" Has your student digested his knowledge in a way that will help him make connections and expand his career possibilities?

- *Analytical/evaluative questions.* These are the types of questions that will help your student defend an opinion or break a complex concept down into smaller parts. Examples: “What could you do to improve \_\_\_\_\_?” or “What proof can you find of \_\_\_\_\_?”
- *Assumption-challenging questions.* “How do you know \_\_\_\_\_ is true?” “What data do you have to support your assumption that \_\_\_\_\_?” If your student, like many, is drawing conclusions based on poor or even nonexistent data, then he might well fail to explore a potentially enriching career. That would be a tragedy. So when your student tells you, for instance, that he loves writing but that he “could never make a living at it,” challenge that assumption. How does he know he could never make a living using his writing skills? Where did that conclusion come from?

### **Promote Action**

Ultimately, the career discussions you have with your student must lead to action on her part—even if she feels she doesn’t have every piece of information she needs to make a decision and move forward. It’s a daunting prospect to be sure, so don’t be shocked if your student seems stuck at times. Your job is to help her get unstuck.

Suppose, for example, that your student knows she needs to get some work experience but she’s been hesitant to take the steps necessary to find an internship, a part-time job, or even a volunteer opportunity. You can help her get moving by showing her how to break the task down into manageable pieces. You could encourage her to take these steps:

1. Search the school’s web site for the campus career center’s site.
2. Call the career center and set up an appointment with a career counselor there to learn about various ways to obtain relevant work experience.
3. Write down a few questions in preparation for the appointment, in order to review past experiences and skills gained.
4. Attend the appointment.
5. Follow up on whatever actions are necessary to take action based on the counseling session.



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• HELP YOUR STUDENT GET UNSTUCK •

*We all get stuck at certain points in our lives, especially where our careers are concerned. If your student is stuck during some part of the career journey, here's how you can help—and not harm:*

- **Be gentle and supportive.** *Don't criticize your student for his confusion or tell him you're disappointed in him.*
- **Let go of blame.** *You may feel responsible for your student's inaction. You might even feel it reflects badly on your parenting when all it really means is that your student is stuck at the moment. That's neither good nor bad; it just is what it is. There's no blame to be meted out to anyone.*

- **Seek to understand.** *Ask your student what he says he wants to do that he has (so far) failed to do. All it takes is a simple question.*

*For example:*

*Help me understand how important this is to you. Last time we talked you said you needed to look into getting experience, but nothing has happened yet. Do you need to change this goal or maybe go about it in a different way?*

- **Break things down.** *Your student might look at the task(s) ahead as being too “big” to even start, let alone accomplish. So help him break the task down into smaller, more manageable pieces that he can complete—one by one—to achieve his goal.*

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### Engage in Dialogue

Talk to your student about her ongoing discoveries and the career possibilities those discoveries present. Granted, technology has changed the way we communicate with our young-adult sons and daughters (and everyone else!). Indeed, most of today's emerging adults are used to developing and carrying on entire relationships via short text messages. But that doesn't mean your student isn't interested in discussing her future with you—in

depth. Yes, it may take some time for her quick sound bytes and surface-level responses to transform into deeper conversations with you. Then again, she may be hungry to be heard and taken seriously by an adult who cares deeply about her.

You'll find out soon enough where her comfort level is. Meet her there, and use the elements of solid communication to talk with her, not at her. Make sure she knows she's the center of your attention. Listen non-judgmentally and reflect back what she's saying so she knows you understand. And look for nonverbal signs—facial expressions, posture, etc.—that offer clues as to the real meaning behind her words.



• 8 WAYS TO BE A MINDFUL CAREER COACH •

**Mindfulness** is the ability to allow your mind to be open and uncluttered, clear of the barriers of stress, worry, and preconceived notions that will prevent you from helping your student fully explore her career possibilities. When you work with your student, start with an open mind—one that is mindful of keeping your internal voices at bay.

Your goal is to be completely present for your student. Here's how:

- Spend 90% of your time listening and 10% talking—with 90% of your talking time asking questions and 10% of it making statements.
- Ask questions to help your student clarify her thinking.
- Engage in dialogue that is transformational—the kind that helps your student discover something she really didn't know or consider before.
- Allow new ideas to emerge in your student's mind. (Don't poo-poo something you think is ridiculous at first glance.)
- Understand that the learning moment will occur when distractions fall away and your student's own innate knowing appears. Such personal insights will change your student's thoughts and beliefs—and, therefore, her future. The possibilities now begin to take shape!
- Focus on your student's potential from the inside out. Don't focus

*solely on what you can “see.” Examine what you don’t see or don’t really know with a renewed sense of curiosity so you can help your student find what she’s always had inside but perhaps never noticed. Help her see possibilities with a positive attitude.*

- Focus on dialogue, not feedback.

*Give your student the chance to examine her thoughts and actions and make decisions based on deeper understanding.*

- Suspend your own judgments, prejudices, and assumptions so you’ll be fully present with your student each time you get together to discuss career-related issues.
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### Encourage Reflection

Reflection deepens learning. So it’s critical for your student to spend time reflecting upon his thoughts and feelings after he makes key career decisions and takes action on them.

You can help by asking open-ended questions: “How did it feel to \_\_\_\_\_?” or “How does this experience impact your choices so far?” You might even want to encourage your student to keep a journal where he can examine such questions and write out his responses to them in depth.

## Preparing to Use the Parent Guide

As you go through the process of career coaching your college student using this *Parent Guide*, your goal will be to listen, question, and encourage in a way that will help your student develop a solid plan of action—and the confidence to then carry out that plan. You should seek not necessarily to reach *decisions* (those will come in time), but rather to get your student moving so she can “reality test” her career dreams.

Helping your student discover and uncover what she already knows in some conscious or unconscious way is precisely what career coaches do. You’re *assisting* your student; you’re not *deciding for* her. Only she can write her own unique career story. Your job is to empower her to feel comfortable with you throughout the career development process, and to go

beyond her comfort zone when necessary to realize her own internal dreams—with your full support. It's one of the most critical tasks you'll ever undertake. It's also one of the most rewarding.

Let's begin.

## *A Word About Gender Usage*

Throughout this *Parent Guide*, we alternate between using masculine and feminine pronouns—*he* and *she*, *him* and *her*, and so on—so that we can be inclusive in our wording but avoid awkward and sometimes confusing sentence constructions featuring *he/she*, *him/her*, and the like.