

We need to give youth the steering wheel

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Just how do we adequately prepare our youth for the future?

This is a question that every parent, every generation of parents, asks themselves.

But just like Dorothy in Oz observed "people come and go so quickly here" so too with current skills, talents, habits and work ethics.

Unlike decades past, when we Baby Boomers had time to pause, reflect, adapt and grow, the current global economy is a complicated bit of machinery. It's relentless and often merciless.

In my three decades of employment, I've seen many technological advancements that have directly impacted my profession, and in fact, all professions.

I remember our first fax machine using thermal paper. I remember the first mobile and cell phones, I recall the creation of the Internet, email, desktop publishing. Today these are commonplace tools that most teens have a handle on.

People, perhaps more than ever before, are sometimes viewed as commodities "chattel in the huge modern economic contraption. While most of our young are tech-savvy, does that make them more intelligent and more resourceful?

In my household, my technologically capable children can download an app and play a game in minutes. But when I ask them to Google a topic to find the answers to a question, they hum and complain that it takes too long to search through various websites. Yes, it's been some time since kids were in a library.

Like any generation, it's not the tools, but what you accomplish with them, and how you use your inherent talent, that matters and makes a difference.

I spoke to a King resident last week about his involvement in helping to create the operating systems for the Canadarm used on the space shuttles and the International Space Station. He provided some interesting background of the times in the late '60s, '70s and '80s. Experts worked hard to overcome the challenges that our species never faced before. They put men on the moon and built the most impressive machines our planet has ever seen. And all this was done with rather antiquated computers and technology, compared to what we have in our hands today.

This person observed that they were focused, knew how important their job was and they worked day and night to solve the problems. Our accomplishments back then were more a matter of brain power and human passion than technology.

So we can all agree that we can rise to great heights, with or without the benefit of technology or assistive devices.

This gentleman stressed that what society needs, in his opinion, are more scientists and engineers, yet our young don't seem to be embracing those career paths.

My nephew is a case in point. A very bright high school graduate, he's entering university to study pre-med. His strengths are in math and science and I've discussed everything from time travel to quantum physics with him. He'd make a great addition to any aerospace firm, yet he hopes to one day get into cosmetic surgery. Hmmm, boob jobs over exploring the galaxy!

We talk about young people as being "agents of change" and yet how do we encourage this?

In order to be change agents they have to develop a keen sense of responsible citizenship, both locally and globally. That means

being aware of all social injustices, conflicts, inequities across the planet. They also require hands-on experience ??seeing is believing. They have to have a firm grasp on democratic concepts, politics and how things work. Similarly, they have to be engaged in local politics. They have to have compassion.

As good as our school system is, I'm not confident it provides all of these things. While there are opportunities for co-op placements and internships, we lack a comprehensive apprenticeship program in this province. If students want to travel for humanitarian work (as in my daughter's case)?they have to pay their own way (no subsidies). Students are required to put in 40 hours of community service through high school and yet I don't see hordes of them volunteering at the food bank or animal shelter.

Given the state of the economy, some of the ?summer jobs??typically available are taken by adults.

Hindering our young's exposure to the ?system,? is that it has become more guarded and removed than ever before.

As I?said, I've been doing this for 30 years and I?recall the days when I could enter the clerk's office at any township office, sit and chat and have a coffee. I?could waltz into any school, head to the gymnasium for sports photos, or drop by the principal's office to share the gossip. These are things of the past. Today, because of political correctness, perceived safety issues and strict policy guidelines, these venues are closed, shut tight. Even parent involvement in field trips requires paperwork and a police check.

So while we push for ?engagement? we are actually moving away, shutting ourselves off from enquiring young minds.

Our youth don't have a huge interest in politics because all they see on their Twitter or Facebook pages are viral videos of political indiscretions. How many field trips are there to municipal council meetings, school board sessions or Q?&?As with CAOs?

The bottom line is we all have a role to play in paving the way for the future. Our young minds are what will set the stage of what will be. They don't need a nudge or a push, they need guidance, advice and encouragement. We can no longer afford the ?sink or swim??mentality.

What are we doing about it?