



## Finding Your Calling: A Graduation Message.

### Description

I spend a lot of time thinking, writing, and speaking on how working in healthcare is a calling. And around graduation time, I tend to think about the notion of “callings” in general. After the past couple of tough years, this subject resonates more than ever. I would love it if everyone started talking and thinking in terms of pursuing not a job or a career but a calling.

As young people everywhere are preparing to head off to college or pick a major or look for their first full-time job, it’s time to take a step back and think about how to get to a place where you realize what your calling might be. Once you find it, it’s a game changer.

Recently I heard a story about a teenager who was volunteering with a group of children who have developmental disabilities. After spending some time with these wonderful folks, she decided she wants to be a teacher for children with special needs.

As I was talking to the young lady’s mother, she told me she would normally have some misgivings. She knew this would be a career that required a lot of hard (often heart-wrenching) work without a lot of money.

This mother told me that in the past she might have discouraged this career path. But after going through the COVID years and learning more about happiness and mental wellness, she realized what we do for a living should be something that makes us feel helpful and useful—something connected to a cause larger than self. She had read *The Calling* and felt like she had a different understanding of what a career path might look like.

This young lady’s story actually reminds me of how I ended up as a teacher for children with special needs. Back when I was in high school, my soccer coach, Coach King, asked me to help with the students who had special needs. I would walk them to the library and sit with them to help prevent them from being teased by other students. This was the highlight of my day.

Later, when I was in college and it was time to declare a major, I thought back about people who had made an impact on my life, and Coach King came to mind. With the help of my academic advisor at the time, I realized that I wanted to be a teacher—in fact, I wanted to be a teacher for children with special

needs. And that's exactly what I did. It turned out to be a path that I really loved. It was a time in my life that I enjoyed very much. Of course, my work now is very different, but there are parts of my training that I still use today.

So, as graduation approaches and I think about callings, I have a message for three audiences: young people, parents, and employers.

**YOUNG PEOPLE:** Whether you're choosing a major or looking for a job, try lots of different things. Don't be surprised if your career path is a zig-zag. Not every journey is a straight line. My own has taken many sharp turns and detours. We can have more than one calling in a lifetime, though there is often a common thread connecting them. When something energizes you and makes you feel alive, it's a sign that it may be your calling.

Don't worry too much about the challenges or whether a path seems "practical," or tough, or even lower-paying than you'd like. I look at the radio people who cover baseball, and most of them knew they wanted to do this when they were very young. It's not an easy profession, but they love it. Recently there have been some new houses going up in my neighborhood. I watch the construction workers, and as they're building something, you can just see how much they love working with their hands and making a home a reality for a family.

It's so important that work is fulfilling right now, even if you end up changing careers or roles later. Go with your heart and you won't go wrong.

**PARENTS:** Give your child space to explore. Make it clear where they start out probably won't be where they end up. Don't ask them questions like "What's your passion?" (They probably don't know.) Talk to them about how different kinds of work feels to them. Teach them to notice what makes them fulfilled. Also, don't automatically try to steer them to a path with more financial security. I know this is done out of love. Making a living is important, but making a life you want to live matters even more.

Years ago, when I was about to leave my job with Baptist Hospital to start my own firm, I was a nervous wreck. I almost didn't do it. But Norm Adams, who was a spiritual advisor of mine, met with me. He talked to me about how sometimes our heart gets aroused, and when that happens, we should follow it. Making a change might not provide the security of where we are at the time, but we lose opportunities if we don't go where our hearts are aroused. As parents, we want our children to go with their heart, so what they do for a living is meaningful and rewarding.

**EMPLOYERS:** Have regular conversations with employees around their callings. What makes them feel good and feeds their spirit? It may not be obvious in every job. You might need to help build it in. Talk about how their role connects back to the company's mission.

If you suspect they're not in the right job, do all you can to help them get training, go back to school, etc. Even if they end up leaving, you'll build tremendous goodwill. They may refer others to you. People usually don't forget those who help them find their calling.

I've been fortunate to have more than one calling in my life. I've been even more fortunate that I somehow knew to listen when it came. Because I was open to answering the call, I've met fascinating people, met many goals, learned a lot, grown a lot, and had plenty of fun. Best of all, I've been able to do the kind of work that touches lives in a meaningful way.

That's what I wish for all new graduates—and anyone at any age or stage of life who is taking the next step in their career path. No job is easy. They all have their roadblocks and challenges. But when you're called to do the work, you will find a way to overcome them. One day you'll look back amazed at where you started, how far you've come, the experiences you've had, and the difference you've made along the way.

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**Author**

quint-studer