

Why Aren't Apprenticeships More Popular?

Last night I found myself walking down a hallway at a local private college. As I passed what was presumably the philosophy department, I noticed a couple of posted articles declaring the value of a philosophy degree and decrying the recent rush toward apprenticeships. Apparently the philosophy department was doing some thinking and came to the conclusion that apprenticeships could give them a run for their money.

While it's true that apprenticeships are growing in popularity, there's still something holding them back from becoming mainstream. And according to [*U.S. News and World Report*](#), the something holding them back is a stereotype:

"There's still this myth out there that this is shop class," former Democratic Gov. [Steve Beshear](#) of Kentucky said Tuesday during a panel discussion on apprenticeships at the left-leaning Center for American Progress in Washington. "Back in the day, shop class was where you sent the kids who really couldn't make it. Those kids then came out of high school and went to work as mechanics or as carpenters or in a factory someplace. And all those factories were thought to be dark, dirty places with grease all over everybody and sparks flying through the air."

"In the minds of many people, manufacturing was something you settled for when you really couldn't do anything else as a career," Beshear said.

But such is no longer the case. Instead of requiring intelligent young people to sit in a classroom for four years, apprenticeships give hands-on instruction in jobs requiring careful and advanced skills. The difference between apprenticeship and college students isn't a lack of smarts on

the part of the former; rather, it is a recognition that the minimal debt, marketable skills, and decent salaries that apprenticeship offers are an effective door into the middle class.

Indeed, as the U.S. Department of Labor frames it, “The average wage for an individual who has completed an apprenticeship is \$50,000, which over a lifetime can add up to approximately \$300,000 more in wages and benefits compared with their peers.”

Is it time we stop convincing our high school students that the only way to success in life comes through college?

Image Credit: Art of Manliness