

College Shouldn't Be Considered the Only Option for Success

One of the first big education stories to hit headlines in 2017 was the announcement that New York state will be offering free college to its residents this fall. According to [*The Washington Post*](#), this offer of governor Andrew Cuomo's stems from the fact that college is now viewed as a necessity:

“‘College is a mandatory step if you really want to be a success,’ Cuomo said Tuesday at LaGuardia Community College in Queens. ‘And the way this society said we’re going to pay for high school because you need high school, this society should say we’re going to pay for college because you need college to be successful. And New York state is going to do something about it.’”

It struck me that Governor Cuomo might benefit greatly from a little fable from 1904 by American author George Ade. The fable, entitled [*The One or Two Points of Difference Between Learning and Learning How*](#), describes two schoolboys named Bradford and Otis.

Bored by lessons and eager to be working in the real world, Bradford scorns higher education and goes into business for himself, working his way up the ladder by his own common sense and elbow grease.

Otis, on the other hand, is convinced that education is the pathway to wealth:

“‘Bradford is making a great Mistake,’ said Otis, as he saw his Friend tear from the Institution of Learning. ‘In order to get a few worldly Chattels right at the jump, he

sacrifices his Diploma. I shall be more Foxy. I shall go right on through the High School and then I shall attend College and get a Degree. When I have taken my Degree then I will be the human It. My scholarly Attainments and polished Manner will get me past the Door and into the Inner Circle of the Hot Potatoes. As for Bradford, although it is possible that he shall have combed up a little Currency he will be a mere ordinary, sordid Business Man—not one-two-seven when he tries to stack up against one who has just been delivered of a Thesis on the Correlated Phenomena of Unconscious Cerebration.’”

Thus, Otis plugged away and earned first his B.A., then M.A., eventually working toward his doctorate degree. But while he studied and aimed for the revered status of doctorate, Bradford’s business was booming:

“It happened one Day that Brad ... dropped in at the College where his Boyhood Friend was now the Professor of Dipsicology and Plamazus.

‘This is a likely-looking Plant,’ said Brad, as he sized up the Campus. ‘I like to encourage these Joints because they help to keep a lot of Young Fellows away from Business Offices. I find that I have here in my Vest-Pocket a measly \$50,000 that I have overlooked in changing my Clothes. Give it to the Main Cheese and tell him to have a Laboratory on me.’

When the News got out all the sis-boom-ah Boys gave a Parade in their Nighties. The Faculty called a Special Meeting and made Brad a Doctor of Philosophy.

Next Year he put up for a Gym and they made him a Doctor of Divinity.

The Year Following he handed them a Telescope and became an LL.D.”

Although I chuckled at this fable, I couldn't help but notice how heavily weighted today's society has become toward Otis' way of thinking. Governor Cuomo's offer of free college affirms the fact that we believe the only path to success is found through ever greater levels of schooling.

But while schooling can certainly be beneficial, the hard truth is that not every person is the same. Some may find success through the ivy halls, but many will not. Pushing everyone toward college can only lead to disillusionment and lost opportunities for both the student and society at large.

If we really want to help students achieve success, perhaps we should provide a wider variety of education options and pathways for success, instead of simply throwing money at them to pay for college tuition.

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