

# Preface to the Second Edition

The preface to the first edition of *Getting Real* began with the following observation:

*In my youth, teens jarred their friends back to reality with the phrase “dream on”; now, they say “get real.” At least when it comes to postsecondary planning, many teens would benefit from taking such advice.*

Now, almost eight years later, there is little evidence of a diminishing need for teens to “get real.” On the contrary, evidence suggests the opposite. Among high school graduates, the majority head off to college, often by default, and if they graduate, they are, more often than not, as directionless as when they matriculated. Many move back home and join the ranks of the newly defined “gray collar” workers, taking jobs for which they are overeducated. Or they go back for even more education, hoping the next degree will lead to a job.

But this group amounts to only about half of all teens that enter the ninth grade. What about the rest? They are not doing well either. The national high school dropout rate is now 30 percent. Among those who do graduate from high school, a consistent 30 percent do not go to college—they go to work, mostly in low-skill/low-wage service sector jobs. These two groups of teens make up half the teens in virtually every state.

The purpose of this book is to improve the odds for postsecondary success for *all* teens: the college-bound, those who go to work,

those who become homemakers, those who enter the military after graduation, and also those who see no reason to stay in school and drop out. It is time to stop taking pride in how many teens go to college and start asking instead how many teens—all of them—are successful.

## WHAT IS NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION?

Perhaps the most significant change in the second edition is that it has been expanded to focus on helping *all* high school students and young adults with career planning, not just the college-bound who were the focus of the first edition. One could argue that the first edition largely ignored half of all teens, namely those who drop out of high school and those who graduate and go to work. That has been corrected in this edition. A second focus addresses the argument that career maturity and career planning are correlated with postsecondary success.

The second edition of *Getting Real* has significantly grown from eight to twelve chapters. All chapters have been rewritten and expanded. A chapter was added to specifically address the dynamics of today's teens and parents that focuses on efforts to help teens get real. Reflecting on what will be the next major educational issue, a chapter has been included that emphasizes the unique career development needs of teens who are potential drop-outs, and high school graduates who go to work. New information regarding occupational gender and race stereotyping has been added, and all labor market data has been updated when available. The chapter on labor market projections was expanded to emphasize the opportunities in technician-level careers and the newly defined middle-level skill occupations. The chapters on strategies to promote career maturity were also expanded. The now widely used six-step plan for teens and parents to follow in order to increase the odds of success after high school has been modernized as well.

While the book has been mostly rewritten, much of the basic rationale and the message remain the same, though often reworded. Postsecondary success still hinges more than ever on two factors: academic skills and commitment that comes from career direction. This statement is not opinion, but rather is based

on new research findings. Whereas academic maturity has long been a priority of the schools and the nation, career maturity has not. This attitude must change. Poor academic skills and lack of career focus both predict postsecondary failure.

*The goals of this edition still include: (1) to illuminate the quiet dilemma in the United States that stems from a mismatch between teens' aspirations and the economic/labor market realities they will face as adults; and (2) to guide educators, parents, employers, elected officials, and anyone else who is interested in helping teens develop career direction and make better postsecondary decisions.* The overall goal is to stimulate efforts designed to develop a level of maturity—*career maturity*—among teens that allows them to make postsecondary plans that have a high probability of success.

This book is a sequel to *Other Ways to Win* (Gray & Herr, 2006), which argued that most teens have concluded, mostly from taking cues from adults, that there is now only “one way to win”—namely, get a four-year college degree. The results of this strategy have not changed. At least for those in the academic middle, it leads to failure and disappointment with almost mathematical predictability. Fortunately, however, there are “other ways to win”—specifically, in the areas of high-skill/high-wage technical careers that may require higher education but not a four-year degree.

After more than ten years of speaking around the country and conducting further research, I have concluded that these “other ways to win” are largely ignored because many teens and their parents do not consider alternatives to a four-year degree. In fact, many teens do not plan at all. For them college is a default decision; not knowing what to do, they go to college and then fail. This must change if the goal is postsecondary success. Parents and teens need help in making better postsecondary decisions; only then will the “one way to win” mentality diminish.

Teenagers are not entirely to blame; conventional wisdom actually works to downplay, if not discourage, career decisions. Furthermore, overexpansion in higher education has removed all barriers to admissions, including the ability to do college-level academics. Thus, I have concluded that those who could benefit from considering “other ways to win” will not do so until they have been helped to become better decisions makers, more focused and willing to face reality; when adults in general begin to communicate

that all levels of higher education, both baccalaureate and pre-baccalaureate, are equally valued; and finally when we all recognize that these noble goals ignore completely the plight of half the teens, namely those who go to work or drop out. This book is for those who would help *all* of them reach this plateau.

This book includes twelve chapters organized into three parts. Part I explores the state of career immaturity that is rampant among teens, the mindset of teens and parents, the challenges presented by dropouts, and occupational stereotypes that tend to limit occupational choices of teens. Part II provides an overview of labor market basics, occupational projections, and career development. While Parts I and II can be viewed as the background sections, Part III deals with how to improve career maturity for all teens.

As an introduction to Chapter 1, it is worth observing that the importance of the three academic “Rs”—reading, writing, and arithmetic—is well understood. Not well understood at all is that, for this generation, a fourth “R” is needed; this “R” stands for the willingness to deal with “reality.” It is easy for teens and parents to postpone dealing with reality. Open-door college admissions make it all too easy. Sooner or later, however, reality calls. Very few beat the odds, and the odds are not good. Failure to deal with reality predicts failure. I hope this book promotes success by helping teens “get real” and by so doing, improves their individual odds of success.