



WE CANNOT ALWAYS BUILD THE FUTURE FOR OUR YOUTH,
BUT WE CAN BUILD OUR YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE.²

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INTRODUCTION

The Readiness Challenge

We love talking to people about writing this book. Recently, a physician shared that his son is graduating from college with a degree in computer science. That meant getting a new suit, having it tailored, and going on interviews. He sent a note to his parents after the suit was tailored, saying the suit was great. Where does he go to get his shoes tailored?

What?? Ever hear of a shoe tailor?

More discussion followed. The same doctor then shared he thought that kids have lost their commonsense knowledge that's developed by the socialization with other kids. You know, working on cars together, being harassed by each other and in that harassment, learning how the world works. He even shared a story that a teen wanted to put wiper fluid in his car thinking that the motor oil cap was where the wiper fluid goes. Nope, that'll kill a car.

The doc said kids were so focused on the digital world that they don't function in the real world. Know any kids like that? Smart, ready, and still no clue on so many fronts.

Many kids today aren't ready for adulthood and they're paying with their peace of mind, as anxiety and self-doubt creeps in on them. They don't realize it. But you do, and if we don't step in, who will?

Frank has a friend, a retired college professor, who recently told him:

From my point of view, parents are most often to blame for kids who have no manners, no life skills, and no willingness to find jobs and do well working in them. I can't tell you the

number of times I have seen children acting out in public spaces while the parents either blithely do nothing or are so ineffectual at their attempted discipline that the kids simply ignore them. When those kids are three or older, I know that the parents have already failed in their parenting duties, and the bad behaviors will only get worse. By middle school, it's mostly game over because indulgence has been the habit from small kid time.

Another person told Bill that when he and his wife were leaving a restaurant, a pre-teen was pushing through the front door, stopping them from leaving. Mom did nothing. From behind, Grandma angrily said to her daughter, “Darlene, get hold of your kid and teach him manners. Have him hold the door for these folks.” Ever see something like this before?

This book is about these kids and the parents who raised them. The parents may be competent managing their own lives. They may be successful or not. Engaged in the world or not. And they have kids who are heading for adulthood—ready or not.

Warning: Adulthood May Require Assembly

Your teen fumbling a job form, your kid melting down over a lost phone — these are voices in your head whispering, “Something’s off!” Ignore them and your soon-to-be adults might flop in the real world. We’re not here to panic you. We’re the ones waving a neon sign yelling, “It’s time to get your crew ready.”

As told to Bill by a banker a few years back, their bank ran a quirky experiment that lit up this problem like a Fourth of July sparkler. They hired fifty young adults for a one-day gig...staple stacks of papers, three pages here and four there, with a shiny promise of potential full-time jobs. Easy, right? Clear instructions, staplers ready, no rocket science. By day’s end, only two nailed it. Two. Not twenty. Not ten. *Two*.

That’s not a whoopsie. That’s a klaxon blaring, “Houston, we’ve got a problem!” Those mis-stapled piles weren’t just paper chaos. They were proof that many young adults can’t handle basic tasks, can’t focus. And this wasn’t

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a fluke. Employers everywhere are pulling their hair out – 75% say they can't find hires who show up, communicate, or lead like pros.³ Over 60% are like, “Where's the grit?”⁴

This isn't a glitch. It's a full-on “readiness challenge”, a generational disconnect between what kids know and what they can do. It's a full-court press that's impacting families, schools, the workforce, and society at large.

Your kids? They're smart, bursting with potential, but too many are merely stumbling into adulthood. We're not criticizing. They're not lazy or entitled. They just may not have been prepped for the wild ride of grown-up life. Honestly, that's on us, the parent squad. We love our kids but are we handing them tools to soar? Or are we setting them up to text us, “Mom, how do I do taxes” at 25 years old?

More than half of 18 to 29 year-olds are still bunking at home, the highest in over a century.⁵ They're wrestling with money, choices, and a basic “how am I gonna do that?” attitude.

What's the fallout? Kids unprepared for independence are paying with their mental health. No matter if *your* kids fit this description, that's eye-opening.

So, How Did We End Up Here?

Once upon a time, families and schools were a dream team. Kids learned not just math but also how to solve life's puzzles, cook a meal, fix a faucet, and own their mistakes. Then poof!—the script flipped. Schools got hooked on test scores and ditched home economics and hands-on trade skill classes like last year's phone. Parents? We got busy with jobs, bills, and the never-ending juggle. Sometimes we hover. Sometimes we bulldoze. Sometimes we're just too nice. Either way, kids lose out on the grit-building stuff. Life skills are no longer taught in many schools, and more mental illness is showing up.

There's evidence that schools are trying to bring some life skills and technical training back. Yet, they're in “catch-up” mode.

Truth is, parents aren't perfect either. Overdraft fees, job stumbles, “oh crap” moments. We've lived them. We're products of this system. But here's the plot twist—parents are also the solution.

Kids were made to climb mountains, not sprout like mushrooms in a dark basement. But too often, that's what happens when we overprotect and under-

prepare them.

And the job market? It's shifted, too. Those high school gigs—flipping burgers, stocking shelves? Mostly gone. Now it's “get a degree or bust.” College costs a fortune and kids drown in debt chasing jobs that barely pay. Schools push calculus but skip budgeting or workplace basics. They churn out grads who ace tests but can't navigate life.

Culturally? Independence isn't the hot ticket it once was. Back when Grandpa turned 18, it was “see ya, I'm out!” Now, chilling with Mom and Dad into your 20s is the trip. Gig economy, social media, and a “no rush” mindset don't help. We've kinda bought in. We ease off the pressure. But economics aside, we're letting this curveball delay our kids' takeoff.

***Here's the good news—you can change
the trajectory and get them ready for life.***

With a few intentional tweaks, you can raise young adults who don't just leave but lead productive, capable, and grounded lives. Doing that takes more than teaching. It takes leadership. Willingness. Responsibility.

Yet, every parent carries a quiet question:

Am I actually preparing my child for the world they're going to face?

Parents don't doubt their love. They doubt whether love alone is enough. Somewhere along the way, parenting became crowded. Experts multiplied. Systems expanded. Screens filled the gaps. And without meaning to, many parents stepped slightly to the side - still caring deeply, but no longer fully owning the role they were meant to play.

This book is built on a simple, grounding truth:

Children don't need perfect parents. They need present, intentional ones.

No program, institution, or device can replace the steady influence of a parent who is willing to stand fully in their role.

This book is about helping parents do exactly that. Growing up isn't about age. It's about readiness. Right now, too many young people are stranded.

Let's change that.