

What Happened to Good Summer Jobs? Kraig Peel, PhD

My oldest son just graduated from high school and needs money if he wants to go to college in the fall. We have made it a requirement that he has to have a certain amount of money in his account that he can contribute to this university “experience” that he thinks is required for professional success. It will come as not surprise to anyone reading this article that at 18, he is sure he knows what is the best course of action for his life. Even though his dad spent 15 years as a faculty member at a major land grant university! So instead of spending a lot of energy trying to convince him that his plan is wrong, I have instead decided to make him have more skin in the game than his siblings. So, with all of that said, he needed a job for the summer in order to generate the “skin” that is required.

I do not know how many of you have been in this situation but it has become really hard for high school age kids to find short-term jobs. We could get into the politics of the immigration issues currently facing our country but will save the bulk of that discussion for next month! Summer jobs for young people have the opportunity to help them understand the value of money and what it takes to make money. They can also get some experience with working with people other than their parents and even what it is like to have a bad boss. There are a lot of benefits to a having a summer job. I have talked to some other parents after our experience and found that they were experiencing the same issues trying to find summer jobs for their kids. I was surprised and thought the situation was worthy of discussion.

We thought about some of the obvious and what just a few years ago was pretty much a guaranteed summer job. The days of getting a paper route are long gone. The local paper said they only have 2 carriers currently because the bulk of readers subscribe to the electronic version of the paper. They actually told us that the only paper copies go to offices and retirement communities!

My next course of action was to contact some hay suppliers that I know in the area. When I was in high school that was always a sure job. All the hay guys needed people to pick up bales and deliver them to customers. There was normally a bonus to deliver the bales and stack them for the customer. So I contacted 3-4 of the local guys that I have bought hay from in the past and asked if they needed help from a good hardworking kid. The common reply was sorry, we have tractors and bale machines that do all of that work now. Most also responded that the small bale market is primarily for horse owners and even though there is significant mark up on the per bale price, they still have machinery that picks up the bales and then puts them in a stack. There is another machine that will grab the bales from the stack, deliver them to a location, and then drop them off at the new location still in the stack. People are only required to drive the machines! The funniest part of the horse hay discussion was that they were willing to pay the same for a 50 pound bale as a 70 pound bale because they were easier to carry to the stall! Most of my hay farmers said that they were able to use a crew of 3-5 full time guys that worked with the farming and the hay delivery and were not looking for any part time help.

We then contacted some of my veterinary contacts in the area to see if they needed help over the summer. Many of these contacts are people that I had in class

and they would be more than willing to hire my son if there was a need. I found out that the local community college has a vet tech program and that they are required to do a certain amount of hours as an internship and the community college actually pays my veterinarian friends to provide this internship. So they were getting paid to provide a summer job for vet tech students and were therefore reluctant to pay my son to work when they were making money on the same work!

Finally we talked to a guy we know that has multiple rental properties around town and he was looking for some summer help to work with the maintenance of his properties. He has been at work for a week and the job has been very beneficial to the ways of the work force for my son. He has installed rock in landscaping and has had to do some really good manual labor. I just never thought it would be so hard for a kid to find a summer job. Keep in mind, any time that your kids are making their own money, it will always help your bottom line!