

Thursday, February 18, 2010

LIFE SKILLS FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS



Lately I have started to observe an interesting trend on my couch. I will call it a trend because I can count with the fingers of two hands the number of times I have seen it. The occurrence would present as follows:

A young (late 20s or just crowned 30) man or woman, glamorous-looking and articulate would arrive in a R400k-plus vehicle for an appointment. The address they put on the file would suggest they are fairly well-off for their age and they are often employees of a blue chip company or would be running their own business. They would

project an image of what the media have branded black diamonds. They would have good education and a blooming career with all its appurtenances. The immediate impression they project would be that of a person who has a good life - materially that is.

What I have noticed about many of these young people is that although they are bright and have a good education that propelled them to career success, they take very bad, sometimes self-destructive, decisions in their lives. These bad decisions are manifest in the realm of relationships. Either they are caught up in destructive romantic relationships or they relate with their loved ones in ways that are not fulfilling for all involved. In short, they cannot manage relationships in their personal lives, sometimes in their professional lives too. The bad decision-making often results in unhappiness and self-destructive behaviour such as overindulgence in alcohol and other substances (increasingly not just illegal substances but over-the-counter medicines such as sleeping tablets and pain killers). Overindulgence in substances is often related to other forms of reckless behaviour such as accident proneness and risky sexual

behaviour.

This observation has got me thinking: To what extent do young people professional people require life skills education?

My hypothesis is that these are bright minds that have succeeded academically and professionally. Their intellectual advancement, however, has not been matched by advancement in emotional maturity and personality integration. It appears that our education system places a high premium on intellectual development while not paying any attention to spiritual and emotional growth. Young people go to universities to obtain the qualifications and skills required for a good career. They achieve this goal it seems at the expense of a well-rounded sense of self. Their career success seems to be the focus of their whole sense of who they are. Once the professional identity is taken away, they are left with an emptiness and loneliness that changes their life orientation completely.

I am thinking that there is a need for life skills education for young people who are about to complete university so that they are prepared for the transition ahead. On leaving university they discover, much to their chagrin, that life does not have a recipe book. Education provided them with the ingredients and they must mix everything and prepare a meal that they (and those close to them) will have to eat.

What do the young professionals say about this?

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