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### Leading Tomorrow

The true objective of a college education in today's world is clouded. Many actors, for many reasons, attempt to sway your opinion one way or another about higher education. Critics of higher education might say: It's expensive, it teaches skills that you can teach yourself, and it wastes time that could be spent working and acquiring wealth. Proponents act like it's a necessity, akin to water or air, but few really explain the fundamental point behind higher learning. What is then, the true meaning of a college education in the modern world?

I believe the reason why so many forgo college education is because its true purpose is never properly explained. The point of a college education is to create the leaders of tomorrow. By improving technical knowledge, historical acumen, and interpersonal skills, higher learning institutions guarantee that their alumni will have a large impact on the world. Going to college exponentially increases your chances to be in the history books for generations to come. We remember the tales of the great leaders - the role of the common man is often forgotten in the fog. Can you honestly look yourself in the mirror and say you want to be forgotten? Few who are not clinically depressed do. In the following paragraphs, I will outline how a college education will not only lead to a successful life, but if properly utilized, will also lead to an impactful life as a leader in the free world.

Educated people are always a danger for tyrants, as the educated can easily spot injustices

that the common man might overlook. Malala is a great example of how an educated person can make a large difference in a terrible situation. Her town in Pakistan was being systematically oppressed by the Taliban, so she decided to get as much worldwide attention on the problem as possible. In her interview with John Stewart, Malala describes how she was pushed to action: “why should I be waiting for someone else? Why should I be looking to the government, to the army...why don’t *I* raise *my* voice, why don’t *we* speak up for *our* rights?” (Comedy Central). I would venture to say that if Pakistan had a few more bold, college educated leaders, they wouldn’t have half the mess they currently do. They wouldn’t have terrorist cells or mass oppression of women. Those ideas die out naturally when a population is exposed to higher education. There is a reason why terrorists around the world, including the Taliban in Malala’s hometown, attack schools. Education enables a level of self worth and freedom that is incredibly dangerous if you need an enslaved population. As free people, we have a responsibility to bring a higher level of education to *all* people. Education is the enemy of war, famine, and oppression. Education is synonymous with peace and prosperity. That sounds like something we should support and spread as much as possible.

Majoring in a specific field makes one a specialist innately. If you have specialized knowledge, you are automatically one of the only people capable of pushing society forward in that area. You are a leader by default. Take a Biological Engineering major for instance. Advancements are waiting to be made in almost every avenue that this specialization touches - from biofuels to food production, there are an infinite amount of ways that the technological knowledge bestowed by a college degree leads to a better life for everyone. You can churn out the same thing as everyone else with your degree, or you can be a leader and push your craft forward, exceeding past limits. However, technical knowledge is often seen to go hand in hand with an overall level of higher education. More specifically, In Calo Rotella’s *No, it Doesn’t Matter what you Majored In*, he states, “you have spent four years developing a set of skills that will serve you in good stead in

the postindustrial job market. You can assimilate and organize large, complex bodies of information; you can analyze that information to create outcomes that have value to others; and you can express your ideas in clear, purposeful language.” (Rotella). This is exactly the backbone of the type of skill set most employers are looking for in their workers. If you can fulfill all of these, you will naturally rise to a leadership position. Owners want executives that understand these principles, and executives want managers that understand them as well.

Having a degree choice that synergizes with the skills you want to employ in life is beneficial, but it’s not always required. No matter what you major in, there is real world value in it. The western world having a high number of college graduates and also a high quality of life is no fluke - this is a direct correlation. We’ve been set up for success with our institutions of higher learning, if we are willing to step up to the challenge. Majoring in *any* field will yield results in *any* occupation you choose. By expanding the mental canvas beyond previous limitations, problems shrink or become new opportunities. The level of thinking acquired in college leads to thinking process to have in a leader. Assignments in college often force students outside of their comfort zone, and this forced change of perspective has benefits. Complex ideas become much easier to dissect and digest. If you can alter your perspective inward, outward, or around at will, you can typically have the right perspective to handle the situation. When discussing how executives can best deploy resources at their company, Sheard and Kakabadse state, “Networks of relationships are considered from the perspective of group working, and also groups working with other groups.” (Kakabadse). When you think about things from the appropriate perspective, usually multiple perspectives from different angles, allocating resources appropriately becomes much easier. Being able to shift your perspective is critical in any solid leader, and exposure to multiple perspectives in various ways in college is the best way to temper this skill.

Further on the line of skill - specialized knowledge from college education leads to longer

stays in companies, which leads to more opportunities for advancement into leadership positions. Quality Assurance in software development, for instance. Automated testing can be far more efficient than manual testing, and “automation testers usually need a computer science degree from a four-year university” (McDowell). Manual testers are getting replaced by people who can run automated tests. This is another area where college graduates become leaders by default - manual testers for software are sought less and less, as automation picks up steam. If you cannot automate test cases, the chips will be stacked against you advancing to a leadership position in Quality Assurance. Employers want leaders who fundamentally understand the roles of their subordinates. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to do this properly without a high level of education.

The ability to communicate effectively is an attribute synonymous with being a college graduate. When you think of a speaker who rarely struggles for the right words to elucidate their thoughts, a college education behind their clarity. One such speaker is David Foster Wallace. In his Keyton College commencement speech, he states, “the most dangerous thing about an academic education - at least in my own case - is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract argument inside my head, instead of simply paying attention to what is going on right in front of me” (Wallace). Running through the courses of higher learning give you the tools to be able to communicate, which let you escape from the over-intellectualization in your head. Brilliant thoughts mean little if they are not written down and shared with others. A higher education enables you to write down and share all of your ideas, no matter how complex. Wallace’s anti-irony, modern moralist writing struck a chord with many, and he would have never started writing at all had it not been for his college education.

A high level of education often enables one to realize when and how they should act. By learning from the mistakes and successes of the past, one can form better plans of action for the future. The higher our level of education becomes, the less we are creatures of reaction and more

creatures of preparation. On the employability of college graduates, Hager writes, “critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and interpersonal understandings...enabled them to meet unexpected or challenging situations with a sense of purpose and confidence” (Hager). This sort of intellectual mystique around college graduates is not all smoke and mirrors. Due to the intense rigors of higher learning, daily tasks required in the office seem rather easy by comparison. What would swamp an average educated person is easily planned and managed by a college educated person. While many people might be able to perform a task, not many are able to properly plan and execute.

Education enables you to have an expanded perspective, allowing you to see things from multiple viewpoints. “Understanding others is a necessity for all leaders. It is also one of the most sought after skills in college graduates.” (Wagner). This makes college educated people better mediators on average, and being able to mediate conflicts is a solid attribute in any leader. The higher the responsibility of the leader, the more a college education goes from being a luxury to being a requirement. You may not need a college degree to run a restaurant, however you will need one if you are going to lead a team of engineers on a billion dollar project. Not simply because of the technical skills required, but also because of the interpersonal skills required. Having managers properly in tune with their personnel matters more and more as the cost per employee rises. When you are paying a team millions in salary, there is little to zero chance that team is going to ever be lead by someone without a college degree. There is simply too much risk that a lack of mediation skills leads to a valuable employee leaving, which has a cascading effect much larger than if that employee was kept happy and communicating. It’s difficult to weigh the exact value of a college education, however it definitely outweighs the cost. Especially in the eyes of a recruiter looking for leadership talent.

In a bad situation, when everyone is sitting around wondering what to do, true leaders form

a plan and act. This is why every branch of the U.S. military requires their officers to have a college degree, and this is why there are systems like ROTC scholarships to entice college graduates to join as officers. Not only because graduates can handle stressful situations with ease, but also because their higher level of education helps them solve interpersonal issues with finality. The higher level of education of officers allows them to operate with a level of autonomy, limiting the risk to American troops. There are very good reason why James Mattis is the Secretary of Defense of the United States. His successes in the Marines, while immense, seem rather secondary when compared to his intellect. Not only does he have a masters degree, but he fundamentally understands the need to never stop learning, and how it makes life easier when we do so. In an interview with Military History Magazine, Mattis is asked why he sometimes says “there is nothing new under the sun”. He replies, “If you read enough biography and history, you learn how people have dealt successfully or unsuccessfully with similar situations or patterns in the past. It doesn’t give you a template of answers, but it does help you refine the questions you have to ask yourself. Further, you recognize there is nothing so unique that you’ve got to go to extraordinary lengths to deal with it.” (Lauterborn). It’s hard not to learn something yourself every time you listen to this man speak. He has criticized U.S. military leaders in the past for not having a firm enough knowledge of history, in some instances drawing accurate parallels between the failures in Iraq and the failures of the later stages of Alexander the Great’s campaign. James Mattis is a walking testament to the value of education, and it’s a relief to have a man as intelligent as he is at the helm of the strongest military on Earth.

Having an extremely high level of education is one quality shared between all great leaders in history. Good or evil, those that are followed in society are followed for good reason - they are extremely intelligent and worth following. Alexander the Great was tutored by Aristotle, and this enlightened education no doubt was the root of the devotion shown by his followers. Alexander’s education also helped explain the deliberate, slow progression Alexander showed in his campaign,

making sure to fully and completely assimilate a region before moving on. He made sure to not only rule over people, but he also raised the standard of living substantially in most areas that were assimilated. I believe the U.S. military overextending in Iraq, and being unable to secure the support of the local people entirely is why the U.S. ultimately failed to stabilize the region. Had Secretary Mattis been in command then, I highly doubt we would have repeated the same mistakes of our ancestors. Being able to learn from the mistakes and successes of the past is only really possible through higher education.

Some people might say a college education is optional to be a quality leader in today's world. In some cases with highly motivated individuals this is entirely correct. You could work your way up the corporate ladder, or you could save up enough funds to open your own business. However, this is a rarity. Often, people without college educations run into "glass ceiling" problems. Your company may not want to promote you any further, because they are seeking someone with a college education to fill a management position. You may be unable to secure funding for your business idea, because investors do not trust someone without a college education to handle millions of dollars of investment properly. You cannot get to the point of selling your idea to potential investors in the first place, because you lack the ability to articulate your ideas to the point of action. There are many ways where not having a college education can gate your ability to progress in life. While it is possible to skip a college education and have a successful life, it is nearly impossible to be a successful leader without one.

The financial burden of college is often cited as an excuse as to why attendance is optional for the cognitively able. "Unfortunately, many American students do not have access to affordable college education. Most colleges and universities are beyond the financial reach of many students and their families, leading them to borrow staggering amounts to finance their undergraduate educations." (Drew). While the costs of college are increasing to an encumbering degree, the loans

required by most to attend college are easily paid back within a few years of graduating. Those that are properly applying themselves and leading with the skills bestowed upon them via higher learning should have no trouble paying it back, anyway. Often in the workplace or otherwise, it falls on college-educated people to lead. If you were not planning on leading, skipping college may be a good idea for you. However, if you have any inclination of shaping the future, getting a college education is a given.

An extremely high level of education was paramount in all of the founding fathers of the United States. While it is true that three of the seven founding fathers did not have formal college educations, higher learning helped propel and calcify the best ideas of the age. When pen hit paper and our Declaration of Independence was written, who was the author? Law School-educated Thomas Jefferson. The zeal and vigor of highly intelligent people is not incredibly rare. Having the audacity to form your thoughts into structures and plans, and actually act on them - that is a rarity indeed, and one often only seen in college educated people. Drive is common, having the ability to engage your drive through systems you create for yourself isn't. A college education gives us the technical skills required to transmit complex ideas fully and with little ambiguity. This often leads to ideas that last generations, centuries, even millennia; these great thoughts often built upon but never replaced. The best way to have your ideas shared is to have ideas worth sharing; the best way to have ideas worth sharing is to have a college education.

Modern society claims to stand on the shoulders of giants, yet that is only really true for those that successfully pull themselves up to the level of the intellectual giants of the past. From here, we can step off into the future, setting new heights for future generations to launch off of themselves. It is not only our right to pursue higher education, I would venture to say it is our responsibility to do so. If you have the cognitive ability to be able to process higher education, you should pursue it - otherwise you are not building upon the successes secured by our ancestors. We



must all do our part to secure a brighter future. Some of us, whether we like it or not, are destined to lead.

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