

CHAPTER ONE

The One Way to Win Myth

How beautiful is youth! how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams.

—Longfellow (1807–1882),
“*Morituri Salutamus*”

Each year, almost three million teens graduate from high school, and most do the same thing. They heed the ubiquitous “one way to win” message and head off to college, mostly 4-year colleges, and then a large percentage fail. Of those who go to 4-year colleges, or to 2-year colleges with the intent to transfer, about half at best will graduate, and of those who do, about half will end up in jobs they could probably have gotten right out of high school. But this is only half the story, because not all teens graduate from high school (one-third drop out and do not graduate), and among those who do graduate, 30% go to work. In either case, these teens are viewed by their teachers, their peers, and society in general as “losers”—failures because they failed to heed the one way to win message, they did not do what everyone else did, they did not go to college.

As will be documented shortly, if the only acceptable goal we have for all teens is a 4-year college degree and finding commensurate employment thereafter, the present success rate in the United States is 10%. That’s right, *ten percent*. Not very impressive, is it? One wonders if we could not do a little better—by creating and

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valuing other ways to win for some teens, particularly the majority from the academic middle.

THE ACADEMIC MIDDLE

The focus of this book is on today's high school-age youth, though not necessarily all of them. Not the 10% who are already winning: the academically blessed, the kids who take advanced placement or honors courses. These teens are doing just fine; if anything, they already are getting more attention than they deserve. This book is about most of the rest, the largely silent and neglected academic middle: the students who fall in the second and third quartiles of their high school class, those who make up the invisible middle. Sometimes they are referred to as the "unspecial," neither being academically blessed nor fitting into special education categories—those whose academic record and college entrance tests predict a questionable future in baccalaureate education (see Chapter 4).

One way to picture those who make up the academic middle is to think back to the last high school graduation you remember: the long line of graduates in caps and gowns, some jubilant, some crying, most just silent and pensive. There were those whose names everyone knew, the so-called "future leaders," the National Honor Society members, those who were heading off to those name brand colleges that are the hope of every parent. But what about all the rest? What about the academically average kids, whose names even their teachers have a hard time remembering? These are the teens who make up the silent middle of their high school class. They exist in every high school, no matter how wealthy or poor, or how urban or rural the district.

Given the present prevalence of the one way to win message that everyone should be preparing to go to college, the tack taken here is to define the middle in terms of how well they are prepared academically for college (see Table 4.3). Using the criteria of the 4-year high school grade point average, courses completed in high school, and College Board tests, and using the most liberal definition of academically prepared, research suggests that at least 60% of high school students who graduate are neither academically prepared for college nor special education students with significant learning disabilities.

Some (30%) of these teens go to work full time, though few will have been prepared to do so by their high school. And the rest? They go to college not really knowing why, except that they do not know what else to do, and despite being somewhat unprepared to handle college-level academic studies. And, of course, most fail with mathematically predictable certainty.

This book is about these teens from the academic middle. They are the real challenge for education reform. Their post-high school plans are largely inconsistent with reality; they are floundering, and ultimately, many end up failing. The objective of this book is to help all those who would—teachers, parents, and policy makers—do a better job by creating and valuing “other ways” for these teens to win.

There are, of course, many reasons why teens in the academic middle lose out in high school, starting with the Taylorist idea that they are somehow less important than the academically blessed (see Gray, 1993). This is not, however, the central problem. The core issue is that virtually everyone has come to believe in the “one way to win” paradigm.

SECTION I

The One Way to Win Paradigm

The “one way to win” mentality is best explained by expressed views of teens themselves. Such insights can be gained from the annual national survey of college freshmen (American Council on Education, 2004), as well as survey and other data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The one way to win paradigm preaches a three-part doctrine (what teens should do when they graduate from high school, why they should pursue this course, and where in the labor force they will find their reward) regarding the path all teens should follow because it is the best chance of leading to future economic success.

The One Way to Win Paradigm Defined

The one way to win proponents have a three-part message for teens.

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1. All teens should pursue a 4-year college degree.

Within two years of graduating from high school, 72% of graduates have enrolled in higher education. Ninety-eight percent of college freshmen in the 2003–2004 American Freshman Survey, for example, were 18 or 19 years old and had just graduated from high school that same year. One might expect that at least half would be pursuing 1- or 2-year associate degrees. Not so! Eighty percent indicated that they expect to earn bachelor's degrees. Only 2% indicated that they planned to study at the pre-baccalaureate 1- and 2-year level in technical fields such health care, information technology, or manufacturing; only 1% of women so indicated.

2. Why? Because it is the only sure way to get a high-paying job.

Most young adults are in college in hopes that it will lead to future economic gain—economists call it “labor market advantage.” Table 1.1 reports the results of asking 2003 college freshmen what were important reasons for matriculating. Arguably, four of the top five are economic reasons. In an earlier survey, a somewhat startling 72% of freshmen reported that they already foresaw the need to go to graduate school.

3. Where? In the professional ranks.

When asked what job they would like to have by the time they are 30, high school students overwhelmingly pick professional occupations (see Table 1.2). About half of all young men and more than two-thirds of all young women surveyed as high school seniors pick

Table 1.1 Reasons Noted as Very Important in Deciding to Go to College: 2003 College Freshmen

	<i>Total (%)</i>	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>
To learn about things that interest me	73	73	80
To get a better job	70	70	70
To get training for a specific career	70	66	73
To make more money	70	73	66
Parents wanted me to go	40	37	41

Plan to go to graduate school: 72%.

Source: Compiled from American Council on Education, 2004.

Table 1.2 Percentage of High School Seniors Who Expected to Be Employed in Various Occupations, by Gender

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>All seniors</i>		<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
	<i>1972</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1992</i>
Clerical	14.2	3.5	1.9	1.2	25.5	5.7
Craftsman/trade	7.5	2.8	15.1	5.3	0.5	0.3
Farming	1.6	1.0	2.7	1.6	0.6	0.4
Homemaker	3.1	1.2	0.0	0.1	5.9	2.2
Laborer	2.5	0.8	4.9	1.4	0.3	0.1
Manager	3.1	6.0	5.1	6.6	1.3	5.4
Military	2.4	3.2	4.1	5.6	0.8	0.8
Operative	2.3	1.2	3.9	2.1	0.8	0.2
Professional	45.4	59.0	41.8	49.3	48.8	68.8
Proprietor	1.8	6.7	3.2	8.7	0.5	4.8
Protective services	2.2	4.1	4.2	6.9	0.4	1.4
Sales	3.0	1.9	2.7	2.3	3.3	1.5
Service	4.2	2.6	1.6	0.6	6.7	4.6
Technical	6.6	6.0	8.8	8.4	4.6	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: Compiled from *National Longitudinal Study, 1972 (base year)*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1972, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; and *National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, 1992 Second Follow-Up*, by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

professional occupations. Only 8.4% of males and 3.7% of females indicate aspirations in technical occupations. In a period of significant and growing skill shortages in skilled blue/gold-collar occupations, it is noteworthy that only 5% of males and virtually no females (0.3%) expected to be employed in the highly lucrative and in-demand skilled craft careers. As a result, many industries are experiencing skill shortages, which can only be solved by importing non-native-born workers or transferring the work overseas.

With this final piece of information about high school graduates' career plans, the "operational definition" of the one way to win paradigm is complete.

The one way to win paradigm is the belief that the only hope for future economic security for today's youth is to earn at least a 4-year

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college degree because it will lead to a good-paying job in the professions.

The extent to which all high school graduates appear to be internalizing the one way to win paradigm, or at least the get a baccalaureate degree part, is truly astonishing. The most recent Department of Labor Projections predict a steady decline in the percentages of recent high school graduates who pursue anything but a 4-year degree. In a 2003–2004 survey of entering college freshmen, 98% indicated that they planned to get at least a bachelor's degree; 74% were already planning on graduate study.

Equally intriguing, if not depressing, is to realize that it is the one way to win message that is at the heart of present educational reform efforts and the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. Preparing everyone for college is the goal of this legislation (*Vocational Training News*, 2004). While the title may suggest each child deserves individual attention, the legislation in truth suggests a one way to win fix for all.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2004) defines *mania* as "excessive or unreasonable enthusiasm." The current enthusiasm for a 4-year college degree is excessive and unreasonable; thus it does not seem unjust to suggest it is manic in nature. It is excessive because it is expressed without any consideration of the reality that not all teens are blessed with the academic talent to do college-level work or mature enough to pursue college at age 18, or that many just plain do not like school.

Furthermore, the one way to win mantra and the legislation that flows from it ignore the reality that while most teens indicate that they want to go to college to get a good-paying job, very few have taken the time to think about the details of such a goal and to consider in particular the reality that the economy will not generate enough jobs that pay them a college-level wage even if they were successful in completing a baccalaureate degree. Most teens aspire to the professional ranks, but only 21% of all jobs in the United States require a 4-year degree or higher; in fact, only 12% require just a 4-year degree. Meanwhile, less than 2% of teens aspire to pre-professional technical careers, which are among the fastest-growing and largest sources of high skills employment in the economy.

But the teens themselves are not necessarily to blame for such restrictive and unrealistic views regarding future career opportunity. Adults share much of the fault. It is the adults who preach the one

way to win message to all and who are unwilling to accept alternative education and career choices. The fact is that many teens go to college because they have no idea what they want to do or what options are available other than attending a 4-year baccalaureate degree program. It is what their parents want, so they apply, and with few exceptions, getting admitted somewhere is all but guaranteed. Higher education, particularly at the university level, has become the default decision for today's youths and their parents as well. Not knowing what else to do, they head off to college with about the same level of commitment as if they were going from middle school to high school. And then most, particularly those from the academic middle, end up failing.

SECTION II

The Human, Financial, and Economic Development

So what? you may ask. Who cares if the majority of teens from the academic middle of American high schools go to college, despite being academically unprepared and lacking even the most rudimentary career motives? After all, it's a free country; it is their and their parents' decision to make, isn't it? And it is true that this would not be a cause for general concern—or none of our business, for that matter—were it not for the facts that (1) students are mostly subsidized with public money, not just spending their or even their parents' money, and the majority of higher education costs are borne by the taxpayers, many of whom never have kids in college; (2) most teens from the academic middle who try the one way to win route are not academically qualified in the first place and thus fail; and (3) the whole situation has led to the country's having to rely on non-native-born immigrants to fill many of the most critical jobs in the economy, thus creating potential for serious long-run negative impacts on the nation's economic health. While public opinion pollsters report that the public generally agrees that "all students who are capable should go to college" and are willing to support this with tax dollars, few understand that probably at least half who go to college are not qualified and/or have no idea why they are going, except that they do not know what else to do. One doubts that the public would be so generous with its tax dollars were this reality widely known.

COSTS OF THE ONE WAY TO WIN PARADIGM

For the academically blessed (the top 20%—those who attend a so-called medallion or prestigious college or at least a college employers may have heard of), the one way to win paradigm makes sense. The rest would be wise to at least consider other alternatives, and the nation would be wise to provide, promote, and value those who pursue these alternatives.

Wise because there are human costs, financial dollars and cents costs, and economic development costs associated with the one way to win mentality. Wise because the one way to win paradigm is not benign for many students. It is not like trying out for the senior play or some athletic team in high school where, in the long run, the stakes, win or lose, are not a big deal. But pursuing the one way to win paradigm without adequate academic qualifications or at least tentative career motives has long-run consequences, and they are a big deal. The resulting costs accrue to the students, their parents, and society.

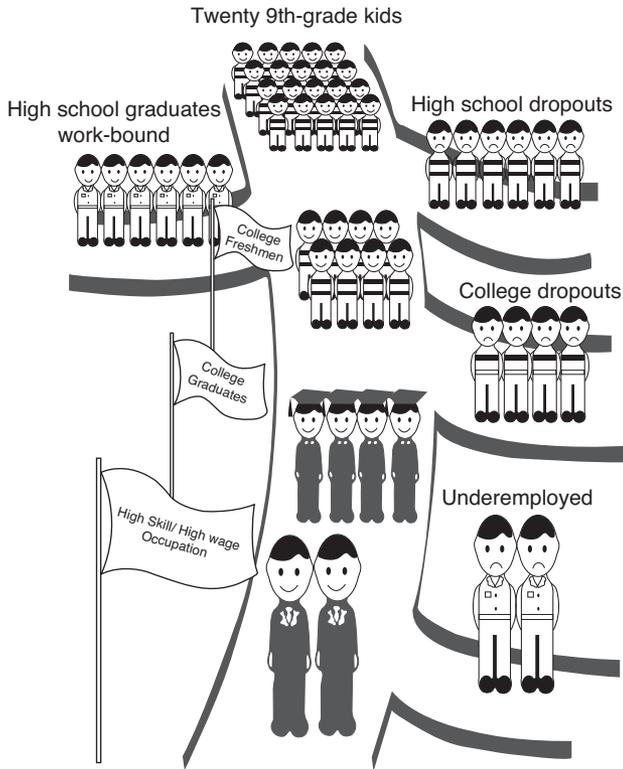
And let us not forget the more than half of all teens who either drop out of high school or do not go to college. The one way to win philosophy, as will be pointed out below, hurts them as well, even though they never see a college dorm.

THE HUMAN COST OF THE ONE WAY TO WIN PARADIGM

There is a fundamental problem with the one way to win philosophy. If the only way to win is to get a 4-year college degree in hopes that it will lead to a high-paying job in the professional ranks, then at best, only 1 in 10 high school graduates will win.

To illustrate this problem, let us imagine a typical ninth grade classroom of 20 teenagers and, using national data, project how many, under present educational policy, will win the one way to win game.

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the first reality is that the national dropout rate in the United States is now 33%. The dropout rate has increased in all but seven states since the beginning of the 1990s. Six of the original teens will not graduate from high school. Importantly, the dropout rate has risen at the very time states have added more

Figure 1.1 Human Cost of the One Way to Win Paradigm

Note: Illustration by Kee Ho Choi.

graduation and testing requirements and de-emphasized alternatives such as career and technical education (CTE). As a result, it is difficult not to conclude that there is a cause-and-effect relationship and to conclude that public policy based on the one way to win mentality makes some kids liabilities; they leave school and no one much cares.

The second reality is that even during the economic boom years of the 1990s, a persistent 30% of high school graduates went directly to work, and this statistic is not likely to change soon. Thus, of the 14 from the original 20 that do graduate from high school, 30% will go to work directly after high school.

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We have now accounted for one half of all entering ninth graders. Half of all teens who start the ninth grade in public high school either drop out or go to work, not college, when they graduate.

It is hard to see how the one way to win philosophy will lead to education programs that will help them. In fact, if anything, this philosophy and the educational policies it spawns, such as No Child Left Behind legislation, seem mostly to ignore these kids or even to justify their neglect and the elimination of programs—such as high school CTE—that could serve them by providing occupational skills that pay well and are in demand.

The third reality is that the national combined dropout rate from 4-year colleges and 2-year transfer programs at community college is at best 50%. By one estimate, only 18% of entering high school ninth graders will earn a 4-year college degree. Thus, of the 10 teens in the original ninth grade class who went to college, 5% or 25% of the original group of 20 will graduate from college. Was the college experience of benefit to the 5 who did not graduate? Probably not. The research is clear that the labor market benefits from college go only to those who graduate. One thing that is clear, however, is that the experience was not free. The majority of students who drop out of college do so with student loan debt and statistically are the most likely to default on their student loans.

The final reality is that while we might suppose that the 5 young adults who earn a university degree are the winners, the well-kept secret is that there are not enough 4-year college-level jobs to go around; in fact, there are almost twice as many 4-year college graduates as there are job openings that require this level of education. The most recent studies suggest that 43% of today's 4-year college graduates end up in jobs that do not require this level of education or have career potential. Colleges love to report how many graduates find jobs; what they do not report is what kinds of jobs the graduates end up in. Do the jobs pay a wage that justifies the expense of college, or could students probably have gotten the jobs directly out of high school?

This leaves 2 of the original 20 ninth graders who win. Just 2. Losers in the world dominated by the one way to win message outnumber winners 9 to 1. Such a waste! And while among the 18 losers, some will, in fact, do just fine economically, but they are nonetheless often stereotyped as inferior and looked down upon, and they know it.

The Rope Climbing Allegory

A less publicized but more insidious and cruel human cost that results from the one way to win mentality is the resulting pejorative attitude toward all who do not pursue and earn a 4-year college degree or who get one but end up in low skill/low wage employment. To illustrate the human cost of the one way to win paradigm when preached to all kids of all ages, let us recall an experience some of us may have had in elementary school—an experience where most of us were losers and many of us had no hope of ever succeeding—and remember how that situation felt. Some kids must also feel the same way in high schools that value only one way to win.

If you attended an elementary school that had a gym, chances are that unless it was a new one, it was equipped with what was then standard physical education equipment, namely, a set of exercise ropes that hung from the ceiling. Their use was quite limited (once or twice a year) and, in today's litigious times, a bit alarming. Specifically, the ropes were used to test fifth and sixth graders' rope climbing skills by seeing if they could shinny up the rope to the gym ceiling.

Once or twice a year, students were marched down to the gym, the PE teacher would fiddle with some little rope on the wall, and down would come the big ropes from the ceiling. Of course, safety equipment was provided. It took the form of gray, dusty mats that were at most two inches thick and, even to an elementary school kid, not very reassuring.

To this day, it is not clear exactly what the point of this experience was. We never practiced rope climbing, we never did math problems related to rope climbing, and we did not read about famous people who climbed ropes.

The important point, though, of this allegory is that there was only one way to win or to pass the rope climbing test: climb to the top of the rope. Getting just a little off the ground or even partway up did not count. Nothing else was valued except total success in climbing all the way up to the ceiling of the gym. The way this rope climbing in gym class was conducted is similar to the way society values only the one way to win goal of pursuing a 4-year degree and nothing else.

Of course, some kids, not many but a few, approached the ropes with confidence and proceeded to shinny to the top. It was, to the rest of us, something close to mystical; we were awestruck. Looking back on it today, it would seem some kids were just blessed with rope

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climbing intelligence: they did not practice rope climbing, it was not something they worked at, they could just do it. And, of course, because it was the only way to win, these kids got much praise for their achievement. It reminds one of what must be the experience of high school students who are academically blessed at birth. Many of these students do not have to study much at all in high school, but they do very well and become the stars of every graduating class.

But what about the rest of the student population, those who were not born blessed with rope climbing intelligence? We got a chance to fail in front of everyone else. We were certified failures in rope climbing. For those of us who could hardly get off the ground, the rope climbing test was not a very motivating experience.

The problem was that to those of us who were weak or fat, there was, in our eyes, no hope that we would ever be able to climb the ropes. For many of us, the only effect of the experience was to confirm that we hated gym, and similarly, many teens who find academics difficult learn to hate school as well. Clearly this was a scene we were never going to be a part of, so why bother? In fact, if we had a choice, we would not have gone to the gym at all; we would have in effect dropped out of the whole experience. The point is that this is how many kids in the academic middle view high school. What we want them to do, they view as impossible; in turn, what they want to do (go to work, go to technical schools, etc.) and what they can do are not valued, so they either stop coming to school or they come and go through the motions. Educators label them as unmotivated, but in fact, their attitude is the same as those of us who knew we could never pass the rope climbing test nor would we want to if we could; to some of us, climbing to the top of the gym on a rope was terrifying even if we could have done it. Likewise, teens in today's high schools who do not buy the one way to win idea are alienated, left out, unmotivated, and looked down upon. It is not right!

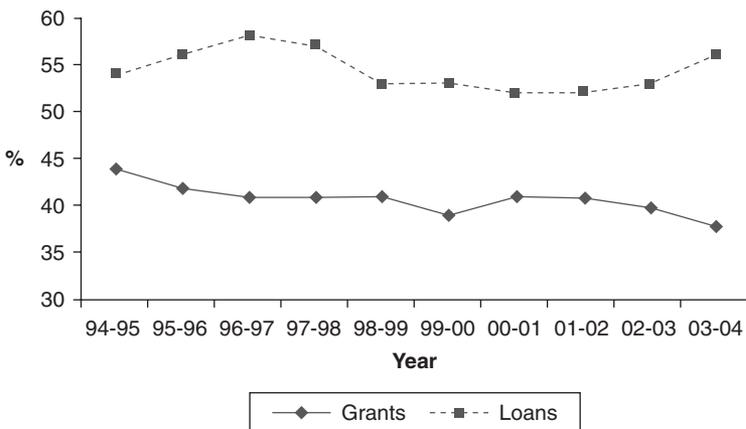
THE DOLLARS AND CENTS COST TO STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

The one way to win mentality that has gripped the nation might not be a concern—or at least as much of a concern—if students and parents were spending just their own money and they found it affordable. In reality, however, and despite efforts by higher education to debunk the truth, college is costly; college costs continue to increase

at rates higher than inflation. Between 1986 and 1996, tuition, room, and board increased 20% at public institutions and 31% at private. According to the College Board Annual Survey (2004), college costs rose 14% in 2003–2004 and another 10% in 2004–2005. More important is the ability of families to pay. To paraphrase research by the NCES (1998), after a period of decline in the 1960s and 1970s, tuition, room, and board rose to 15% of family income at public institutions and 42% at private. For a family at the 10th percentile of family income, it amounts to 32% of income at public and 88% of income at private colleges.

A second reality of higher education costs is that now, the majority of all full-time students need financial aid. According to the NCES (1998), 76% of all full-time undergraduate students in 2003–2004 received financial aid. More important, financial aid is today just a code word for debt. In the 1970s and even the early 1980s, only a small part of a student financial aid package was loans, whereas now, it is closer to two-thirds. Of the full-time students receiving financial aid in 2003–2004, 62% of the aid was student loans that must be paid back. The States Higher Education Research Project (Gross, 2004) reports that based on normal public sector lenders' standards, 39% of students who graduate do so with "unmanageable" student loan debt and thus will have poor credit ratings the day they graduate. Forty percent of graduates leave with a debt equal to or greater than \$20,000.

Figure 1.2 Grants and Loans as a Percentage of Total Aid, 1994–2004



College Board (2004). Trends in Student Aid 2004. Princeton, NJ. Author.

THE DOLLARS AND CENTS COST TO THE PUBLIC

Although the rising cost of higher education for students and parents is well publicized, the cost to the taxpaying public through direct government aid to institutions and financial aid to students is not. At public institutions, state and federal governments pay the largest part of the costs. Federal and state appropriations/grants and contracts account for 62% of revenues at public universities and 65% at public 4-year colleges. This does not include financial aid to students; the federal government alone allocates billions for financial assistance and guaranteed loans to students in higher education. These expenditures have, for a long time, gone unquestioned. No longer! Facing a \$4 billion shortfall in 2005, the U.S. Office of Education changed the funding guidelines to save money, making an estimated 89,000 students no longer eligible for financial assistance from the federal government.

Particularly at the state level, elected officials are beginning to ask what they are getting for their multibillion-dollar investment in higher education and student financial aid. If the goal is to provide opportunities for graduates, how much opportunity is being created as indicated by job placement? If the goal is to stimulate economic growth, are the degrees awarded consistent with the labor market needs of the state? These are increasingly issues of accountability directed to officers of higher education institutions.

When state officials charged with oversight of higher education examine the outcomes of the public investment in higher education, they typically find all the predicted results of the one way to win mania. Specifically, they find that (a) the vast majority of enrollment is in 4-year degree programs or 2-year general studies transfer programs, (b) graduation rates are 50% or lower, (c) students take longer and longer to graduate, (d) growing percentages of graduates are underemployed, (e) the degrees awarded are out of sync with the economic development needs of the state, and (f) many graduates leave the state. As a result, a few states are implementing performance funding (Schmidt, 1999), which is based on graduation rates, employment rates, and successful certificate exams passed.

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COST

While the primary casualties of the one way to win philosophy are teens and the most visible costs are best defined in dollars and cents

terms, there is a final, less noticeable problem. Because the one way to win message itself is contrary to labor economic demands for 4-year college graduates, it results in a surplus of young adults with degrees in nontechnical majors and in low demand and a shortage of adults with skills that are needed to grow the economy.

Technical Skill Shortages

By the mid-1990s, a quiet national dilemma had developed in the United States. There is now an unprecedented shortage of skilled technicians, traditionally trained in high school CTE programs or post-secondary certificate, diploma, or associate degree programs. At the same time, there is a growing percentage of underemployed 4-year college graduates. Be it information technology, precision manufacturing, electronics production, building construction, or health care, virtually all industries that employ technical workers—workers who use mathematics and science principles to make decisions on the job—are dealing with shortages of technician-level workers. The Hudson Institute, as far back as 1997, predicted that unless this skills gap was closed, the gross domestic product could be negatively affected by as much as 5%.

At the state and local levels, it is now apparent to policy makers that economic growth in general and plant expansion and relocation in particular depend as much on the availability of a suitable labor force as on tax breaks and transportation systems. In most labor markets, companies locating to a new geographic area can usually find unskilled or semiskilled individuals who could be trained on the job in a matter of weeks, and they either bring their professional engineers with them or recruit nationally. They prefer, however, to be able to recruit technicians from the local labor market and thus choose to locate or expand where this is possible. To quote a study conducted by the Pennsylvania Economy League (1996), “A region that does not have a growing percentage of its ‘non-professional’ workforce trained at the postsecondary pre-baccalaureate level will face increasing difficulty attracting and keeping high valued added employment” (p. i).

The reality of such predictions is confirmed by a study of the impact of labor shortages on economic development (Passmore, Wall, & Harvey, 1996). For example, the inability of one firm to hire 30 precision machinists required it to curtail expansion plans. This curtailment, in turn, led to a direct and indirect countywide loss of

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\$20 million in economic output and \$3 million in tax revenue. One can find similar news reports from virtually anywhere in the country today, indicating economic losses related to the lack of workers with technician-level skills, while the nation's colleges turn out graduates with few skills in demand, forcing firms to seek workers from abroad.

Foreign Workers, 9/11, and Exporting of Jobs

Unable to fill technician-level vacancies in the 1990s, employers increasingly turned to recruiting foreign-born workers and relied on the Congress to increase the number of H-1B immigration/work visas. Between 1996 and 2000, foreign-born workers made up almost half of the entire labor force growth in the United States. Of new additional jobs created by the economy during this period, foreign-born workers filled 31% of technician and 49% of precision production and craft vacancies (Mosisa, 2002). Presently, there are over a million foreign-born workers in the United States working under temporary H-1B visas. It is important to note that these workers did not take these jobs away from native-born young adults; our kids simply did not have the skills needed. Many had degrees, and few had skills.

The reliance on foreign-born workers became increasingly problematic after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The Congress is now much less willing to grant H-1B visas, and foreign-born workers are less willing to come to the United States. Importantly, employers faced with technician-level labor shortages in the domestic labor market firms have three choices: turn work away, try to get a special visa to enable them to recruit non-native-born workers, or move operations overseas where a trained and willing labor force exists. The reality is that if firms cannot find skilled technicians in the domestic labor market and are no longer able to rely on foreign-born workers coming to the United States, they will likely move operations abroad.

Predictably, the schools, both high schools and colleges, are the first to be blamed for this situation. A common charge is that skilled-labor shortages are somehow related to insufficient math and science course-taking and achievement in the U.S. high schools. But data suggest that the average high school student takes more math and science than ever before, and most high schools now offer math and science courses that were previously available only in college.

We would suggest a little different explanation for technical-skill shortages. The problem is not that students are not taking enough math and science; the problem is the one way to win message. The shortage of technicians may be ascribed to the simple reality that, among those with the necessary talent, few are interested, or they are discouraged by the one way to win message from pursuing pre-baccalaureate technical occupations. Statistics regarding college enrollment patterns and intended majors of incoming freshmen confirm this view; less than 2% indicate any interest in technician-level occupations.

The shortage of technicians trained at the pre-baccalaureate level will not disappear until the nation's youths choose to pursue careers in areas of high technical demand. In the United States, the government has neither the power nor the will to mandate these decisions. It is up to the individual. The only hope is that teens will make better choices when they are better informed, when the myth of the one way to win mentality is exposed, and when technical education becomes valued by adults they look to for advice and by their nation's leaders. The purpose of this book is to assist those who would take on such a task.

SECTION III

The Argument for Creating Other Ways to Win

From experience (this is the third edition of this book), it seems wise to summarize the other ways to win theme lest there be some confusion about what is being argued and not argued. This is not an anti-higher education or college-bashing book; the intent is to document that there are alternatives to baccalaureate education, alternatives that make a lot more sense for some teens. The following five points summarize this argument.

1. The one way to win paradigm, the message that the best hope for future economic security lies in getting a 4-year college degree that guarantees a high-paying career in the professional ranks, is not just false; it is destructive to many kids, particularly those in the academic middle of their high school class. Those who preach the one way to win mantra may have good intentions, but they set the majority of teens

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up for failure. Most teens either fail to graduate or, if they do, fail to find commensurate employment and end up in jobs they themselves report have limited prospects and do not require a baccalaureate degree.

2. There are other ways to win—ways that do not require a 4-year college degree, ways that result in salaries comparable to those earned by university graduates, and ways that actually provide more net opportunity, particularly for those in the academic middle.
3. All students should go on to some form of post-high school education or training but only (a) when and (b) if they can benefit from the experience. Postsecondary training includes 4-year baccalaureate education but also pre-baccalaureate technical education at the certificate, diploma, and associate degree level, as well as other occupational training opportunities such as formal apprenticeship programs and the military. The “go-to-college” message here is a qualified one. First, many teens are not ready right after high school to leave home and go to college, and many are not adequately prepared or occupationally focused to succeed. Second, some teens simply are not intellectually or emotionally equipped to do legitimate college-level academic work at the baccalaureate or any other level and never will be. Present educational policy seems to deny they exist. Yet we all know that not only do they exist, but they also exist in significant numbers, and they deserve some attention from their school and their country.
4. High schools have as much responsibility to teens who are at risk of dropping out of high school and those who want to go to immediately to work after graduation as they do to those who are bound for 4-year college. Those who have a pejorative attitude toward teens who do something other than pursue a 4-year college degree should rethink this prejudice; it is just plain wrong, it is unethical, and it is destructive. These kids (a) are the majority and (b) are just as deserving as the academically blessed.
5. The traditional academic program of study alone is not likely to serve well those in the academic middle who, after

graduation, go to work, pre-baccalaureate technical education, or some other form of postsecondary occupational education. If anything, academic courses alone will increase the dropout rate in most schools. Leaving no child behind in today's high schools requires alternatives for teens with different ambitions and talents, and alternative transitional pathways to prepare teens for other ways to win.

These are the five points that are the basis for what follows. We have argued in this chapter that many of today's graduating high school seniors, particularly those from the academic middle, are seriously adrift. They have been led to believe that a baccalaureate degree will lead to a career in the professions and is the only way to ensure future economic security and status. This mentality, in turn, has fueled baccalaureate mania: the unfounded faith in that the economic return from a 4-year degree is guaranteed. This one way to win paradigm is a myth, but it is not benign: it has significant costs to the country and to its youths. Most devastating, it has caused many youths to give up hope. This one way to win mantra is blight on the nation. Like any affliction, its pathology must be understood before a cure can be developed. This analysis is the purpose of Chapter 2.

However, should there still be any doubt about the problems caused by the one way to win mantra, this chapter ends by relating a true story of one young man and the one way to win doctrine.

A CASE STUDY

Keith and the College Game

Keith was 17. His high school academic record was mediocre at best; at the time of the interview, he was not certain he had enough credits to be officially called a senior. His principal ambition at the time was to obtain his driver's license, but he lacked the academic skills and ability to pass the "rules of the road" part of the driver's test, which he had failed several times.

During the interview with his counselor, he was asked about his postgraduation plans. The counselor expected a reply about the need to find full-time employment; instead, Keith said, "I haven't decided

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yet what college to go to. I'll decide next year." The counselor was speechless. Meanwhile, Keith gave the counselor one of those "are they going to buy this or not" looks, a look familiar to those who work in high schools.

The gulf between Keith's abilities and his stated postgraduation plans leads one to conclude that this young man was seriously adrift; fantasy is an inadequate description of his plans. Then again, perhaps he wasn't fantasizing; perhaps he was just playing the one way to win game, saying what he thought the adults, like his peers and possibly his parents, wanted to hear. Perhaps he really knew that college was not a viable option for him.

At any rate, not long thereafter, Keith left school and left home. He may have realized the folly of the idea of going to college and decided to spare himself the embarrassment—a hint of the human cost of providing only one way to win. He and literally millions like him, most of whom are blessed with considerably more academic ability, see only one way to win. These teens call this situation "the college game." "College mania" seems more appropriate. There needs to be more than one game, more than one way to win.