

Discussions on Youth Finding Happiness in Your Work

This is the 8th installment in a series of discussions on youth between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division chiefs Hidenobu Kimura (young men's chief) and Kazue Igeta (young women's chief), representing the members of the high school division.

Kimura: Today, we'd like to ask about employment and careers. Everyone has different hopes for the future. Some people want to become diplomats or kindergarten teachers. Others dream of becoming computer programmers, singers, journalists fighting for a just cause, welfare workers, refugee relief workers, makeup artists, cartoonists or educators able to awaken great hopes and aspirations in their students.

Even among those who say they know what they want to do in the future, I'm sure some are working hard to realize their dream, while others aren't taking any concrete steps toward attaining it.

Igeta: I often hear students say things like "I was told to become a doctor, but I'm not sure if that's what I want to do," or "I wanted to become a flight attendant but I don't think I have what it takes," or "My choices are limited because of the subjects I've taken," or "I'm an only child and I'm confused as to whether I should carry on the family business," or "I'm not interested in anything in particular, but I'd like to be famous in some area and be in the spotlight," or "My dreams keep changing with every new person I meet."

Some students have also said to me, "I get scared sometimes because I have no idea what I want to do in the future."

Ikeda: Life is long. The true result of your daily struggles will be revealed in your 40s, 50s and 60s. So it is important that you find something — it doesn't matter what — with which to challenge yourself while you are young. Regard your youth as the time to study and train yourself.

Everyone has a unique mission that only they can fulfill. That doesn't mean, however, that you should sit around and do nothing, waiting for someone to tell you what it is. It is fundamental that you discover your mission on your own.

Precious gems start out buried underground. If no one mines them, they'll stay buried. And if they aren't polished once they've been dug out, they will remain in the rough.

All of you, high school division members, have a rare jewel in your lives. You are each like a mountain concealing a precious gem. What a shame it would be to end your life without having uncovered your inner jewel! So when your parents or teachers at school tell you to study hard, they are saying in effect, "Unearth the jewel in your life and polish it!"

Of course, studying is but one means by which to reveal your inner gem. So please don't evaluate yourself based solely on the grades you get. Human potential is not so limited that it can be measured merely by one's aptitude for rote learning.

It has been said recently that one's EQ (emotional quotient) is more important than one's IQ (intelligence quotient). This attests to the importance of such broad-ranging human qualities as compassion or an indomitable fighting spirit, which no IQ test can gauge. For this reason, it is foolish to think that the grades you get at 16 or 18 will determine the rest of your life. There's much more to human potential than that.

The problem is when you fall into the trap of thinking that grades are the be-all and end-all and decide that your present grades doom you to a less-than-bright future. If you think

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this way, you will keep yourself from nurturing those abilities you have. If you give up on trying to mine the gem in your life, your development as a person will cease. This is something to avoid at all costs.

Some people get accepted into university but fail to work hard once there. Others stop striving for personal growth after entering a big company or becoming bureaucrats, doctors or lawyers. Many people, achieving the careers they aimed for, forget the spirit to work for others. Such people give thought only to what they want to become — not to what they can do to contribute to society. Actually, achieving such goals is just the beginning, not the final destination.

Kimura: Some students believe they are incapable because their grades are poor. Others think that they no longer need to make efforts once they've landed a great job. You're saying that both of these attitudes are wrong.

Ikeda: Exactly. People should constantly strive to unearth the jewel in their life and polish it. There are countless examples of people who did not stand out during high school but who struck a rich deposit of hidden potential when they entered society and gained life experience. Therefore, getting a job is just the starting point in uncovering your true ability; it is absolutely not the final goal. There is no need to be impatient. It is important that you make your way up the mountain of life steadily, without rushing or giving up.

I want those of you who have already decided what you want to do in the future to forge ahead purposefully. You mustn't be halfhearted. When you pursue something with a strong determination, you will have no regrets even should you fail. And if you succeed, you can achieve truly great things. Whether you fail or succeed, your steady efforts will lead you to your next path.

For those of you who have not yet decided your future course, please concentrate your energies on the things you need to accomplish right now. You will discover your path as you keep searching, chanting earnestly to find your direction and seeking advice and guidance from those around you.

Igeta: Some people tell me that they don't have any special talents.

Ikeda: That just isn't true. The problem lies in people limiting themselves. There is a saying that everyone has some kind of gift. Being talented doesn't mean just being a good musician, writer or athlete. There are many kinds of talent. You may, for instance, be a great conversationalist, or make friends easily or put others at ease. Or you may have a gift for nursing, a knack for telling jokes, selling things or economizing. You may always be punctual, patient, reliable, kind or optimistic. Or you may love taking on new challenges, be strongly committed to peace or bring joy to others.

Each of us is as unique as a cherry, plum, peach or apricot blossom, like the Daishonin states in the Goshu. Cherry blossoms are cherry blossoms and plum blossoms are plum blossoms. Accordingly, you must bloom in the way that only you can.

Without a doubt you have your own jewel, your own innate talent inside you. The question is: How can you discover that talent? The only way is to exert yourself to the limit. Your true potential will emerge when you give everything you've got to your studies, sports or whatever.

The most important thing is that you get into the habit of challenging yourself to the limit. In a sense, the results you get are not so important. The actual grades you receive in high school, for instance, won't decide the rest of your life. But the habit of pushing

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yourself to the limit will in time bear fruit. It will distinguish you from others without fail. It will bring your unique talent to shine.

One saying goes that people will not exceed their dreams. So you should have big dreams. But you must recognize that dreams are dreams and reality is reality. It's natural, therefore, that to achieve big dreams, you must view your situation realistically and work with your entire being to see that they come true.

The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, once said, "It is vital for youth to have the tenacity to become the very best at something." Tenacity is crucial. You cannot make the gem inside your life shine with easygoing efforts.

Kimura: High school students in Japan seem to have a very narrow view of what work is all about. Television portrays a good job as one where you wear nice suits, carry a cellular phone and use computers. And many students want to become TV celebrities or musicians. It's difficult to know what a good profession really is.

Ikeda: For those of you who just can't decide what kind of work you'd like to do, why not start out with a job that you can get easily, something you are familiar with? That way you can gain practical experience and find out what you're good at.

Many young people may be under the impression that it is better to work for a large company or a government agency than for a small, unexciting factory. But often this is not the case. There are so many things you just won't understand until you actually start working. Plus, there are as many kinds of companies as there are people.

Therefore, it is important to have the inner strength and common sense to learn everything you can where you are, to develop the means by which to support your life, to pursue substance rather than the ephemeral, and to explore the depths of your potential. It is vital that you become irreplaceable wherever you are.

I once heard the following story: In the 19th century, the president of France was invited to a banquet sponsored by one of his wealthy countrymen. Strangely enough, the French leader found himself seated not as the guest of honor but in the 16th seat from the head of the table. A railroad engineer occupied the first seat, a literary scholar the second and a science professor sat in the third.

A guest, puzzled by the seating order, asked the host why. The response was: "The guests have been seated according to their true importance. By people of true importance I mean those people who possess an outstanding ability and cannot be replaced by anyone else." In other words, because the guest of honor was the world's foremost authority on trains, he was irreplaceable. The guests occupying the second and third seats were also leading experts in their fields. The president, however, could be replaced: Someone else could take over his job.

Whether this story is true or not, it takes a truly mature society to openly spread such frank, candid ideas.

I want you, the high school division members, to become people who support society not in name but in substance. I also hope you will create a society that cherishes such people.

At any rate, we have to make a living to survive. That's why jobs exist. Such is the way of society; it is the way life goes.

You have the right to decide what type of job you want to do; the choices are open. Having said that, however, many jobs do require a certain level of academic qualification and experience. Some people start working right out of high school, either out of choice or because of their family situation. Others join the workforce after graduating from college, while others become homemakers. Some people aim to become public servants, and still

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others strive to gain technical proficiency in some field. The bottom line is that there are many different options, all of which you are at liberty to choose from.

Igeta: What criteria should we go by when looking for a job?

Ikeda: The Japanese poet Takuboku Ishikawa (1886–1912) once penned this verse, which I recorded in my notes when I was young: “Would that I had a vocation / To carry out with joy / Once I have fulfilled it / I wish to die.” He is talking about his mission, the work he was born for.

However, few people are fortunate to find their ideal job from the outset. Sometimes the career you wish to pursue may differ from the ideas your parents or others in your life have for you. In such a situation what are you to do?

President Toda once said the criteria for selecting a job could be found in “The Theory of Value,” a philosophical treatise by his mentor, founding Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Mr. Toda upheld the path of mentor and disciple throughout his life.

Mr. Makiguchi taught that there are three kinds of value: beauty, benefit and good. In the working world, the value of beauty means to find a job you like; the value of benefit is to get a job that earns you a salary that can support your daily life; the value of good means to find a job that helps others and contributes to society. Mr. Toda once said, “Everyone’s ideal is to get a job they like (beauty), that offers financial security (benefit), where they can contribute to society (good).”

Kimura: I couldn’t agree more.

Ikeda: But not many people can find the perfect job from the start. Some may have a job they like, but it isn’t putting food on the table; or their job pays well, but they hate it. That’s the way things go sometimes. Then there are some who discover that they’re just not cut out for the career they dreamt of and aspired to.

President Toda said that the most important thing is to first become an indispensable person wherever you are. Instead of moaning that a job differs from what you’d like to be doing, he said, become a first-class individual at that job. This will open the path leading to the next phase in your life, during which you should also continue doing your best. Such continuous efforts are guaranteed to land you a job that you like, that supports your life, and that allows you to contribute to society.

And then, when you look back later, you will see how all of your past efforts have become precious assets in your ideal field. You will realize that none of your efforts and hardships have been wasted. Mr. Toda taught that this is the great benefit of the Mystic Law.

Kimura: What about people who set out to achieve one dream, but then have a change of heart and pursue a different path altogether?

Ikeda: That’s perfectly all right. Few people started out with the ambition of doing what they’re doing.

My experience was that I wanted to become a newspaper reporter, but my poor health prevented me. Today, however, I have become a writer who can hold his own in the literary world.

At one point, I worked for a small publishing company. Because of its limited number of

staff, I had to work very hard — but to the extent that I did, I gained practical experience.

After the war, I worked for the Kamata Industries Association [established in 1946 for the promotion of small- to medium-sized businesses in Kamata, Ota Ward, Tokyo]. It, too, was a small operation, but what I went through on that job gave me a chance to really look at myself. Everything I learned back then is of value to my life now. The important thing is to develop yourself in your present situation, to take control of your growth.

Once you have decided on a job, I hope you will not be the kind of person who quits at the drop of a hat and is always insecure and complaining. Nevertheless, if after you've given it your all you decide that your job isn't right for you and you move on, that's perfectly all right, too. My concern is that you don't forget you are responsible for your environment when you make your decision.

Taking your place as a member of society is a challenge; it is a struggle to survive. But wherever you are is exactly where you need to be, so you must strive there to the best of your ability.

A tree doesn't grow strong and tall within one or two days. In the same way, successful people didn't get to where they are in only one or two years. This applies to everything.

There is a saying that urges us, "Excel at something!" It is important to become trusted by others wherever you are, to shine with excellence. Sometimes people may dislike their job at first, but grow to love it once they become serious about doing their best. "What one likes, one will do well," goes another saying. Growing to like your job can also enable you to develop your talent. Once you have decided to work at a certain place, it is important that you pursue the path you have chosen without being discouraged or defeated, so that you will have no regrets over making that choice.

Kimura: Some students say, "I just want to get into a big-name company."

Ikeda: Well, everyone is free to select where they'd like to work. I hope those students will work very hard to achieve their goals.

Japan, however, is in the midst of an economic recession; the outlook isn't good. What's more, Japan has one of the largest budget deficits in the world and its system of lifetime employment is breaking down. Companies once considered prestigious no longer guarantee security, while educational background alone no longer assures a good job. These days even large companies go under. You won't be protected just because you work for a company with a big name. That's the reality today.

So what, then, is important? The answer is true capability. It is vital to develop all kinds of strengths and abilities — such as an inquisitive mind, specialist skills, mental strength and flexibility.

Study is a lifelong endeavor; just graduating from university isn't enough. Someone once said that we learn only about 10 percent of what we need in life from college, no matter how prestigious the school. There are also some who never go to college or others who go back to school later in life. You can also participate in a correspondence program like Soka University's.

All of you face the challenge of triumphing in a society that stresses real ability more than ever.

Igeta: Some people have friends who, given the choice, wouldn't work at all, or who only want an easy job and won't take on work if it's strenuous or requires getting dirty, or who go to college because they don't want to look for a job right away.

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Kimura: Some view work as an unpleasant chore they must do to earn money to support their leisure activities.

Ikeda: I'm not going to criticize this line of thinking. However, I will share with you words of the Russian novelist Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) from his play *The Lower Depths*, in which one of his characters says: “When work is a pleasure, life is a joy! When work is a duty, life is slavery.”¹ Your attitude toward work, which takes up the better part of your day, decisively determines the quality of your life.

Dr. David Norton, the late professor of philosophy at the University of Delaware, once said something like: “Many students are caught up in the notion that the only purpose of employment is to earn money, that happiness means having money to gratify their desires. But since there is no limit to those desires, they can never truly be satisfied. Real happiness is found in working. Through work, one can develop and fulfill oneself and bring forth the unique value that lies within — and share that value with society. Work exists for the joy of creating value.”

It is just as he says. Someone else observed that a person's work should bring happiness to others. Life is truly wonderful when you're needed somewhere. How boring and empty life would be if, for instance, just because we had the means, all we did every day was pursue idle diversions.

Igeta: I think people can gain something much more valuable than money from working.

Ikeda: Yes. It's natural to work if one is earning a salary; work is essentially a contract between the employer and employee. But to slack off at work just because one's salary isn't high is foolish.

Moreover, all of you are young. It might even be a good idea to have the spirit, “I'll do more than I'm paid for!” This is how you can train yourself.

To receive a salary — anything earned through honest labor — is precious, regardless of the amount. Of course, there's nothing better than receiving a good salary, but \$100 earned through one's hard work and efforts is a golden treasure — whereas stealing that same \$100 or acquiring it through some other illicit means has no more value than dung or rubble. Stolen or extorted money is dirty. It will not bring happiness. As the saying goes, “Ill gotten, ill spent.”

There are some who once enjoyed great prestige as influential government officials but who accepted bribes and consequently must live the rest of their lives labeled as criminals.

Depending on one's state of life, money can be used either toward ill-intentioned ends or noble ends. The state of one's heart can change everything.

When you get right down to it, the greatest happiness is found in applying yourself with confidence and wisdom in your workplace as an exemplary member of society, working hard for a fulfilling life and the well-being of your family. A person who does so is a victor in life.

Igeta: Some people are worried about how they will get along with their co-workers upon entering a company.

Ikeda: Certainly, when working in a company — which is like a society or community all its own — it is important to create harmonious relations with your colleagues and superiors, using wisdom and discretion along the way. If you incur your co-workers dislike

by being selfish or egotistic, you will be a loser in work and society. Wisdom is vital to being successful at one's work.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, "The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd. ed.], p. 240).

Society, in many ways, is full of contradictions. Some parts are quite ugly, while others are pretty harsh at times. I hope you will not take a complacent attitude toward such things and let society get the better of you. If that happens, then no matter what excuses you make, defeat is defeat. You must forge your way adeptly through the rough seas of society, always keeping your head above water.

President Makiguchi said there are three types of people in the world: those you want to have around, those whose presence or absence doesn't make a difference and those whose presence causes problems. Please become a person others appreciate having around. This means becoming someone who is liked and trusted at work. You also mustn't forget to do your best. This is the correct way of life for believers in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which teaches that Buddhahood is eternally inherent in our lives.

Kimura: Many students say they want to work for world peace or promote the humanistic principles of the Daishonin's Buddhism through their work and have asked what kind of job they should do.

President Ikeda: Aspiring to devote oneself to a humanistic cause, to upholding human rights and spreading the ideals of Buddhism out of a desire to work for the people's happiness and welfare, is a truly laudable ambition.

That does not mean, however, that you cannot contribute to peace unless you're in some special profession. Of course, while I highly commend anyone who wishes to work for the United Nations or become a volunteer worker overseas, there are many people striving for peace in their own, humble specialties.

I have met many such people, like Argentina's Dr. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a sculptor and architect who won the Nobel Peace Prize as well as the 1996 Global Citizen Award of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, for his activities to protect human rights. And Rosa Parks, the mother of the American civil rights movement, who was working as a tailor's assistant in a department store when she became the catalyst for the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala., in 1955.

The important thing is to be proud of your work and your capacity, to live true to yourself. There have been many revolutionaries throughout history who lost their lives in the struggle for reformation. Theirs, too, was a worthy vocation.

At any rate, I want each of you to be active in all fields. Activity is another name for happiness. What's important is that you give free, unfettered play to your unique talents, that you live with the full radiance of your beings. This is what it means to be truly alive.

World peace and widespread understanding of the humanistic ideals of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism will be achieved by each of you excelling in your respective fields.

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1. Maxim Gorky, *The Lower Depths and Other Plays*, trans. Alexander Bakshy (Chelsea, Michigan: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 14.