



FOCUS GROUPS

Bemidji

Northwest Technical College

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All of you are headed here to get a technical degree at some point. Why? Is it because of the prospects for high paying jobs, or because it is what you want to do?

- I've always been a hands-on guy, so I can't see myself working inside an office or anything, so I've always been kind of technical, thinking about stuff, and planning it out in my head. Mechanical stuff. I've always been tinkering with stuff.
- I like working on cars and building stuff. I have for my whole life. I never really wanted to be part of an office; I like to be outside if I can be. I just kind of enjoy building things.
- I also just like building stuff and being outside and working with my hands.
- I have two friends in engineering, and I like the programs at the high school and that is just kind of what I want to go into.

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Do you participate in the robotics program at the high school? Does it make you more enthusiastic about pursuing a technical degree?

- Yeah, yeah.
- Yeah, yeah.

You have to do more than nod at the tape recorder!

- Well, it's an engineering class. So, it is a weighted class, and you get college credit and, it takes you to engineering, it kind of brings you into it.

Let's go back to middle school. Were teachers or counselors and people like that encouraging you to do the things you're doing?

- Mostly they'd talk about colleges, engineering degrees and stuff like that.
- This past weekend we went to UTI and they had a statistic that if you take their two-year or one-year program there, you will be out and working and making money more than the average four-year degree.

Who organized the tour?

- It was a tour for just my family.

Is there a good shop at the local high school?

- There is mechanical and there is the auto shop, and then there's the welding shop. There is also the wood shop, and there is like the home electronics shop where you can do stuff like make lights, figure out stuff like basic electronics, things like that. So, there is a pretty good feel for it all.

Are those teachers good resources for you?

- Well, if you have an interest and say, "Hey I'm kinda looking at this," they can then say, "Well, I think you'd be a good fit here." Kind of stuff like that. They give you pointers, and they would be a good reference for you.

How many teachers are there?

- Five or six.

- At our school we have a class level like we had at the first robotics level, and the class works on a totally different platform of robotics, and there are three sections of 30 kids this year.
- And then our team, where we did the first robotics competition, had 32 kids on it.
- North Dakota draws a lot of students from the North West, they must have a very good program. The Brainerd Group that I did last year had maybe 16 people in it, 13 of them were going to UND, and they were very, very excited about that.

Are you thinking you'll stay here after school, or will you follow the money?

- I think I'll be traveling around. But if I wasn't working around here, I would rather be traveling around.
- It depends. I think I like it here, and I'm sure I'll stay, as long as I am making decent money.

Where do you get career advice? Counselors? Teachers? Parents?

- There aren't enough counselors to get any one-on-one time.
- I don't really talk to them.
- You have a question about your schedule and that's when you see them.
- Yeah, right, that is when I see them.
- My mom, I think, wants me to go to Northern but my dad probably doesn't care whether I go to a four-year school or a two-year school.

How about friends, who you know are being pushed to go to a four-year school? Who probably would do a lot better enrolling here and getting a good job, and a good well-paying career over time. Do you see that in school over time?

- Sometimes.
- Not really, but I think they would be better off at a tech school.

- Not really, but I mean, there are a lot of people you see who are going to a four-year college that you would ... it's almost like they are expected to from their parents, so they just do it anyways. I think a lot of people would benefit from a two-year college.
- Well, I will get the training I need and go out and work. I don't know, I'd like to be my own boss.

You'd like to start your own company some day? Anyone else in that boat, thinking about doing your own thing?

- Yeah, I'm in that boat. I'm going to be an electrician and then come back and also get a business degree possibly, so that I can maybe open my own business. I have family friends that are in business, so I've kind of grown up around it. I followed it and got influenced by it.
- For the summer I'm planning on working at _____. It's an OSB... but on my off time, because they only give you 1,000 hours, but once I'm done, I have a couple job offers to work for a couple of electricians, so.
- I work at an auto body shop, so that's what I'm going to do this summer, and then fall semester starts late August so then, at Brainerd I think it's a 10-month program so, I'll do that.
- I'm a carpenter, I'm going to work with a local contractor.
- I'll find a job somewhere.

How important are internships these days?

- Very important because I think it requires what you need to study up on at school or tells you what you need to go into to learn from that. Say you have an internship that welds, they kind of help you out with the computing side of that, and tell you what you need to go into a little bit more.

Have you ever heard of "soft skills?" I call them "alarm clock issues," you know, people that don't show up, they can't show up on time, or they say, "Oh, it's really nice out there today, I quit." What's your sense of that? Do you see that among your friends?

- I see it a lot. I've worked with a few people that have just, they don't care necessarily whether they have a job or not because they've been evading one their whole life or they just don't have a sense of, I don't know,

but they won't acknowledge that it's a job that they have to do, you know.

- If an employee doesn't want to show up, or doesn't show an interest in being a good employee or in the job, then they are not really a usable asset.
- I feel the same way, yeah. If they don't really want to show interest or feel like they want to show up on time, I would have fired them.
- I feel like there is that problem in this generation than earlier generations. It is probably because in this day and age it seems there is a sense that you can survive even if you don't have a job, so you don't have as much of a desire to get one. If they don't start getting better there is no use to them being there.

Knowing what you know, what things would you advise other students to study, if they want to get a job in tech industries?

- I take a lot of industrial-type classes. I think other than just that classroom setting, you've got to be a little more hands-on, like the industrial-type area I would recommend for sure, because you just got to be able to... instead of seeing things on paper you have got to be able to be pretty hands-on, I think.
- It's hard. But I enjoy math.

How about reading and writing?

- It's probably one of my least favorites. But I know I'll need it somewhere.

What do you like about the tech classes?

- You can do more stuff and actually understand everything.
- Well you do like online learning, like learning about different hydraulic systems and how everything works and then you actually go into the lab and put it together.
- Just one-on-one.
- I mean, if you work on something with someone else, they may figure out part of it and you figure out the other part of it, and you really don't get the sense of how the whole thing works.

- You have to figure it out, the instructor usually won't help you. They make you figure it out yourself. They will give you pointers if you just can't do it. But he won't tell you, "You can change this and you get this result." It isn't like he just won't talk to you, he'll give you pointers to get through it, but he just isn't going to give you the answer.
- They try to teach you critical thinking.
- And problem-solving.

One of the college presidents told us that he estimates about half of high school seniors have no idea what they are going to do after they graduate, for school or for working. Does that surprise you?

- I mean people won't go out and get jobs as soon as they used to.
- I don't think people used to just go and get jobs earlier, and they will start figuring out what they want to do sooner or later.

Do you get anything out of job fairs?

- I have heard about them, but I have never been to one.
- Because most of the people interested in those kinds of stuff usually don't go to career fairs.
- But usually it's after school and if you're already going to school or working, you miss it. And if you have a job after school you miss that training after school.