

# Lighter Side

## Taking a Year Off



by John Kasun

For the purpose of full disclosure, let me state that my wife and I do not have any children. To some people, that might mean I have no experience or right to comment on proper parenting practices. On the other hand, it does give me an opportunity to look at things from a practical standpoint as opposed to one with an emotional attachment. With that said, I continue.

While I was getting a haircut recently, the barber and I chatted about our families in general. The barber told me her daughter was doing well in her first year at college, where she was studying to be a respiratory therapist. However, she continued by saying that her daughter's boyfriend, who had also been going to college, had quit and decided to play football instead. I am not sure how you make a living playing football unless a team wants you. He changed his mind and thought he would instead get a job. After a few more snips of my graying locks, the barber added, "But he wasn't sure what he wanted to do, so he decided to take a year off." The only thing that kept me from leaping from the chair was my concern that I might wind up with an accidental Mohawk.

When my heart slowed to a flutter, I said, "I think I know what your daughter needs."

"What?" the barber asked as she came around to face me in the chair.

"A new boyfriend," I replied. "This guy's a loser."

Everyone's life has transitional times when they may not be sure which direction to take or what decision to make. Although this type of confusion or indecision happens more often with young people starting out on the road of life, it can happen at any age, as we all face decisions related to jobs, relocation or business decisions. Life is complicated and is filled with difficult decisions we all have been through or may be still going through. Of course, the more real-life experience you have, the easier it is to make major life decisions. However, one option I often hear when talking with people with children or grandchildren in this category is one I never heard when I was young: "They (son or daughter, granddaughter or grandson, fill in the blank) are going to take a year off."

Take a year off? From what? From eating? From driving a car? From going to parties? From letting their parents continue to support them? Exactly what do you do when you aren't working, increasing your education level, learning a skill or starting a business? When I was growing up, no one ever told me that "taking a year off" was an option. My parents were wonderful, hardworking people but I feel pretty sure if I had announced that I was "taking a year off," I would

be looking for my next meal behind the grocery store, picking through the wilted lettuce that got tossed out because it was unfit to sell.

Life is what happens while you are taking a year off. Life can be compared to paddling a canoe up a fast-flowing stream. Far upstream, there might be some flat water in which you can just float and relax but to get there, you have a lot of paddling to do. If you stop paddling, you may feel like you are getting a free ride but that ride is taking you downstream and will only make the trip paddling upstream harder at a later date. Life is also like running a marathon. You have to train, be ready and run your best race. You don't stop partway through

the race to drink a beer and eat a cheese steak hoagie and still expect to win.

It would be foolish to suggest that these are not difficult times but they are difficult for everyone. If someone cannot decide if they want to be a nun or an exotic dancer, it is obvious that they should take some time to think it over but they also need to eat in the meantime. I do not think it is a parent's responsibility to support their children until they finally decide to wash their own socks.

If someone told me they were "taking a year off" to dig fresh water wells in Africa, to build homes in a flood disaster area or for some other humanitarian purpose, I would be in total support and might even kick in a few bucks to help. However, if they just want to "hang out" for a year, sorry; don't look for sympathy here. I am not certain what has happened within our society but I am sure the "everyone gets a trophy" mentality has something to do with it.

Another interesting aspect of life's picture is the recent high school and college graduates looking for a job. Many have a slanted view of what life "owes" them. I talked to a recent graduate who said, "I am not just taking any job; I should be able to get at least \$50 per hour. After all, I have a degree."

"Yes," I said, "you have a degree. The problem is you don't really know anything and for at least a year, you will be worthless to the company that hires you." He was shocked but the truth hurts. A degree is a ticket to get a chance to prove yourself. How well you succeed in life is dependent upon what you can do, not upon what you did. There will always be jobs and the opportunities available today in working for a small business or large company or in starting your own business are endless. Not easy but endless. Actually, in many ways, those opportunities are increasing daily because so many people have decided to "take a year off," which eliminates a lot of the competition.

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