



JORGE UZON THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Corey Shular, a Grade 12 student in Toronto, is looking ahead. He works after school at the Morningside Cineplex Odeon because 'tuition is expensive.'

## Finding a balance

- If possible, limit work to no more than 10 to 15 hours a week.
- Avoid tackling a job that requires a lot of responsibility and time commitment unless you're at least 16 years old.
- Try to find an employer who is flexible and sensitive to the challenges of being a student.
- If you're feeling overwhelmed, ask yourself if you really need the money or whether you can live without the expensive pair of pants, haircut, etc.
- If you're having difficulty balancing school and a job, but you need the extra cash, talk to your guidance counsellor or your teacher.
- Keep a good level of communication with your employer.
- If you're still feeling overwhelmed but need to make money, try working out a job scenario with a family friend, relative or even your own parents (e.g. babysitting, mowing a neighbour's lawn in the summer, shovelling walks in the winter).
- Learn how to budget early so that you use or save your money wisely.
- If your job is affecting your schoolwork and you don't need to work for financial reasons, take the advice of Barbara Nicholson: "You need to put the time in to make your education count for all it's worth, and the money will come — it doesn't have to be now."

— Elisa Birnbaum

## EDUCATION

# Money versus marks

Whether they really need the money, just crave some extra cash or are hoping to get useful experience, more and more students are taking on part-time jobs. But what does that do to classes and homework? **ELISA BIRNBAUM** reports

The summer is officially over and the kids are finally back into the daily grind of school. By now, the multi-coloured highlighters and trendy back-to-school outfits have been purchased, the students have already caught up with friends they haven't seen all summer and homework has been brought back into the nightly routine.

But for teens like 16-year old Jessica-Lyn Sansom, the routine is challenging. Working three to four shifts a week at her local Tim Hortons in Saskatoon, this Grade 11 student at Mount Royal Collegiate Institute is watching her homework start to pile up.

And she's not alone. For a large and growing percentage of students these days, returning to school would not be complete without securing a part-time job. In fact, a recent study by Scotia Economics reported that in 2004, 35.2 per cent of students aged 15 to 19 held jobs while attending school. That figure is below the pre-1990s recession peak of 41.5 per cent, but significantly higher than the 25.9 per cent of their parents' generation. And including the more "informal" jobs such as babysitting and tutoring, currently not included in official labour-force statistics, would un-

doubtedly raise the figure even higher.

What compels so many of today's teens to work varies, but economic necessity and the escalating costs of impending university fees are definitely a major factor. Corey Shular, a Grade 12 student at Timothy Eaton High School in Toronto, says his job at Toronto's Morningside movie theatre not only gives him "money to do stuff," it also allays his postsecondary concerns. "Tuition is expensive," he says.

Teens are heading off to work for more than future tuition.

Some of course crave greater discretionary income. And in trying to keep up with the mini-Joneses, they purchase items that their weekly allowance won't allow — from trendy jeans to stylish haircuts and from must-have iPods to the essential car.

Others hope to gain work experience and learn life skills to help them succeed in the increasingly competitive work force.

For Bryan Mestel, a Grade 11 student at West Island College in Montreal, his job as a referee at a children's hockey league was not motivated by money but, rather, by a passion for the game. He says the lessons he has gained — from learning how to deal with a boss to taking

on numerous responsibilities — are priceless.

"Studies show that senior students who work a reasonable amount of hours are more organized, learn how to meet deadlines, gain self-esteem, feel more independent and mature a little faster," explains Claudia Bourdon, a senior guidance counsellor at Rosemount High School in Montreal.

Yet while part-time jobs help students save for tuition, learn significant life skills and buy status items, they also exact a price. If a student takes on a job hoping to better her future, just what does that do to her present schooling? Especially if, like Jessica-Lyn Sampson, she's exhausted?

On some nights, Ms. Sansom returns home from a three-hour shift and is faced with assignments that keep her up into the early-morning hours. And the tiring schedule is often repeated the next day, as she races from school to the coffee shop and back home again to attack the mounting coursework.

Barbara Nicholson, a mother (whose two children worked throughout high school) and a school principal with more than 25 years of experience in education, knows the benefits of part-time work, but she says that "I unques-

tionably notice the issues of attendance and lateness with my kids."

Ms. Bourdon thinks the problems arise once students work beyond 15 or 16 hours. She says trouble concentrating due to lack of sleep and lateness are quite prevalent among those who try to work longer.

Robert Munro, principal of Kennebecasis Valley High School, says teens can avoid potential pitfalls of being both employee and student by finding the right balance. Situated in Quispamsis, N.B., a quiet suburb of Saint John, the school was selected by Maclean's as one of Canada's top-rated high schools of 2005 — noted particularly for its high academic achievements. "It's surprising how many of our students work," he says.

Considering the exceptional academic report card given to Kennebecasis Valley High, it is evident a balancing act between school and part-time work has been successful. "It's not the jobs that are the issue but the amount of time spent with them," Mr. Munro explains.

He adds that while 10 to 15 hours a week is reasonable, anything beyond that would probably drain the students' energy and time, although each situation is dealt with individually. "There needs to be a balance between employment and

school, but if work interferes, school must take priority," he cautions.

Of course, that balance is more easily attainable when employers are flexible and sympathetic to the challenges of being a high-school student with a part-time job. Mr. Munro credits the sensitivity of some of his community's employers with helping students achieve on both fronts.

One such boss, whose flexible schedules and supportive approach has made working for him the most sought-after part-time job in town, is Tim Dewar. Owner and manager of the Kennebecasis Valley Dairy Queen for almost 30 years, Mr. Dewar tries hard to accommodate his young employees. Whether giving them the night off before exams or ensuring they don't miss important football games, he adjusts schedules accordingly. "I always found that if you treat kids with respect and flexibility, you get a much better selection of students to choose from," he says.

Part-time employee Malorie Dobbin, agrees. Aged 17 and a Grade 12 student at Kennebecasis, she has worked three or four shifts a week at Mr. Dewar's Dairy Queen for the past year. "I love it here," she exclaims.

The flexibility allows her to main-

tain good grades, play the sports she enjoys and make the money she desires. Determined to head out of town for her postsecondary education, she puts her cash directly into her university fund.

Ms. Dobbin knows that her boss is special, and she says her friends who work elsewhere are not as lucky, often having to miss games or go to school exhausted before exams.

Bryan Mestel also credits his employer's adaptability and understanding with allowing him to manage school and his part-time job successfully. Meeting with his boss each month to determine a mutually acceptable schedule has been an invaluable exercise.

And although his guidance counsellor, Suzanne Simard-Stern, believes that the priority of most parents is for their kids to succeed academically, she acknowledges that a part-time job — if balanced properly — can provide the best of both worlds.

Learning how to communicate, be responsible and deal with authority are all excellent life skills," she says, "just not at the detriment of school."

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