

# Stop Asking Children What They Want To Be When They Grow Up



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We are all guilty of it—asking a young child or teenager the age-old question: *What do you want to be when you grow up?* When I was very young, my first response to this question was “Woody Woodpecker.” I would run through the house screaming for my mother until she finally responded. “What is it, Danny,” she would ask. “Mom,” I would say, “I wanna be Woody Woodpecker because I like him.” And there you had it. A child aspiring to be his then-favorite cartoon character (at least I gave a reason). Flash forward not too far into the future, and I wanted to be “a motorcycle man, like Ponch from CHiPs.” Yes, like so many other

Americans around 1980, Erik Estrada had stolen my heart, and I wanted to be the coolest guy on television.

Now a father of two beautiful and extremely energetic boys, I often wonder about the adults my children will someday become. Mostly, I wonder about what their purpose in life will be. I don't necessarily wonder *what* they are going to be when they grow up; instead, I wonder *why* they are going to be when they grow up. After all, there could be a number of ways to pursue achieving your purpose (that is, *how* you will achieve your *why*), which will ultimately lead to *what* you do professionally. However, if what you do does not somehow invoke your passion, or *why*, then you will never truly be happy, which as parents is all any of us wants for our children. It is probably also what we mostly want to leave for our children when we are gone.

The difference between *what* and *why* is the same as the difference between your *estate* and your *legacy*: your estate is simply what you own; your legacy is the totality of who you are—it reflects your *why*. I don't want to leave my children an estate. I want to leave my children a legacy—a legacy of happiness and fulfillment, of service and hard work, of perseverance. I want my legacy to show that I woke up everyday and gave my best effort to be my best self. I want my children to look at my life and say, "He did it, so can I." More than anything, that is my *why*—to live as an example of a life spent in pursuit of its purpose, to empower my children and others to surrender to fulfilling their own purpose and to embrace the freedom that comes from that surrender.

*What* you do should simply be a vehicle for your *why*, and what you do today to fulfill your purpose may very well not be what you do tomorrow. *What* you do depends on external factors and the opportunities presented to you at any given time. Understanding your *why* gives you a framework within which to field those opportunities. The reason so many children and young adults do not know what they want to be when they grow up is because they are being asked the wrong question. You cannot know *what* you want to be until you know *why* you are.

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*particular set of facts or circumstances. You need to contact a lawyer licensed in your jurisdiction for advice on specific legal issues.*

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