

Physician forges the future by teaching students about the rewards of skilled work

ROY MacGREGOR

His problem, he says, is that he lacked the “God” thing — so he became a creator instead.

He is a 60-year-old volunteer high school shop teacher in Victoria, a man who loves his “job” so much that he cannot bear Fridays. A man who says, “If I wasn’t happily married, I’d happily sleep at the school.”

David Winestock is a welder, a simple trades man.

He is also, however, a doctor, a physician trained in Canada and the United States and a recognized specialist in neuroradiology and neuropathology

He no longer practises medicine but practises a trade, and is on a mission to persuade young students that, in many cases, there can be no better, and no more satisfying a calling than to work in a skilled trade that produces visual results at the end of the day.

He also says it is time to put an end to discrimination.

We live a culture, David Winestock says, that looks down on people who get dirty while they do their job.

“How do I know this?” he asks. “Simple. When I meet new people and they ask me what I do, sometimes I tell them I’m a doctor and some times a welder. When they know I’m a doctor they are glued to my every word.

“When I’m a welder they’re searching over my shoulder for someone else to talk to.

‘And that, by the way, is a controlled experiment. Because I am the same person, interesting or dull, whether I say I’m a doctor or a welder.’”

He is not, however, valued as the same person, doctor or welder, and this, he says, is at the crux of a problem Canada increasingly faces. Unless something changes, Canada will suffer a short age of roughly a million skilled workers within 15 years. As an editorial in this paper put it last week, “Canada’s youth are being short-changed by an education system that puts too much emphasis on the aspirations of parents and not enough on the abilities and dreams of the young people themselves.”

Winestock believes we have become a society that has turned university into a “religion,” with parents so caught up in the worship of degrees — which he says unnecessarily shackle too many young people to debt — that they fail to see the sensible, even smart, options that are there for their children.

He himself was the son of a physician and was quietly expected to follow suit. His great passion growing up in Winnipeg, however, was shop class — to the point where he would skip regular classes to spend more time in shop. But it was never presented to him as a potential career.

He trained in Winnipeg and in California and ended up teaching, researching and practising in San Francisco.

“I always wanted to build things,” he says. But there was never time and it never seemed possible until the day he realized he lacked some thing significant in being a doctor.

“I didn’t have the ‘God’ feeling,” he says. “It’s really important to have that, I actually think We pooh-pooh it and say doctors are haughty But if they believe in themselves then the patients will believe in them, too, and I happen to think belief is a major part of healing.”

His own role in medicine, however, gave little satisfaction. “I was a bearer of bad news,” he says. “When I was really doing my job well, really on top of my game, I was finding things that had gone wrong. I was maybe too sensitive for these things, I don’t know.”

Shortly after he turned 50, he realized that his real-estate investments could make early retirement possible, so he moved his family to Victoria and began playing more tennis. One of those tennis partners, Bud Price, talked him into coming and taking a welding course at Victoria High School, where Price was about to begin his final year of teaching, and a passion for both welding and teaching was sparked. Price was, says Winestock, an exceptional teacher, totally non-judgmental and especially effective with bright students on whom other teachers had long since given up.

Winestock signed on as a volunteer and now spends every day he can teaching. On forced weekends off, he still works, this past Saturday constructing a special high-temperature forge for the school.

“I get a huge reward from it,” he says. “When Friday comes around, I’m the only person in the school who’s upset.”

He encourages young women to take up welding — a summer course he offered for women welders ended up with 120 applications — and he preaches, daily, the satisfaction of such work. Real work, real progress, real results — and, he emphasizes, real money.

“I honestly don’t know how we got to this,” he says. “Who doesn’t watch somebody who comes to do work at your home? Who doesn’t stop and stare at a construction site?

“Who wouldn’t want to be doing something that when they go home from work they can be proud of something they made?”

Who indeed?