Finding Your Future
Business executive, TV-show host, and actor Nick Cannon tells teens they owe it to themselves to explore career options before becoming adults

By Jill Lederman

It wasn’t business school that landed Nick Cannon a top position as chairman of development at the television network Teen Nick. Nick never earned a college degree in business; instead he developed his acumen for show business by working hard as an actor and entertainer.

At the young age of 15, Nick was a successful stand-up comic. He performed shows at noted Hollywood comedy venues like the Improv, the Laugh Factory, and the Comedy Store. That landed him a job warming up the studio audience for the Nickelodeon show All That. Before long, he was cast to be in the show. His success in front of the camera led to the creation of his own series, The Nick Cannon Show. Nick went on to act in movies such as Men in Black II and Drumline, in which he had the starring role.

But despite all his success as a comedian and an actor, Nick wasn’t satisfied. Success as an actor can be fleeting. You can be a star one year and an afterthought the next. Plus, the business side of entertainment intrigued Nick. He studied how TV shows and movies were created. He was still a teenager, but he was preparing for his future as an adult.

"Don’t Wait"

Nick, now 30, encourages teens to follow his lead. "Whatever field you want to be a part of - and for me that was show business - you should be a part of that field," Nick tells Choices. "Don’t wait for anyone to say, 'You're too young,' or 'Wait until you're older.'"

The teenage years are ideal for sampling your interests. "The advantage of experimenting when you're younger is that there are no final decisions to be made," says Lynn Berger, a career counselor in New York City. "The most important thing is that if you think you want something, look into it. Try to get as many jobs and internships as you can. [An internship is a temporary job for students.] Internships and volunteering provide a try-out experience to see if it’s the right career opportunity for you."

Andrew Dublin, a 17-year-old senior at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in New York City, has done just that. When he was in middle school, Andrew became passionate about playing the piano and decided that he wanted to play professionally when he grew up. When he entered high school, he saw how some of his peers approached playing music. "I saw people who were dedicated and I knew that if I wanted to make it a career option, then the level of intensity of my private practice would have to be greater," he says.

Finding a Mentor

Andrew joined his school's jazz band and began practicing in earnest. He also began composing his own music. He didn’t stop there. After spotting a flyer offering music lessons from a visiting teacher, Andrew jumped at the opportunity. "I was already working on some of my own compositions, but I wanted some guidance from a teacher," Andrew says. "He was very enthusiastic to help."

Seeking help from others who are involved in your interests is a good idea. "Ask as many questions as possible, and when you think you’re done asking questions, ask more questions," Nick says.

Keep in mind that it’s not necessary for a teen to figure out his or her career while in high school. Berger points out that many adults change jobs over their lifetime. Nick is an example of someone who has altered his career path over the years. He started out as a comedian before becoming an actor. These days he’s a TV executive, radio-show host, and host of the TV show America’s Got Talent.

Andrew understands the importance of having a backup plan. In addition to pursuing music, he’s also studying math and science. "I’m keeping all doors open," he says. "I’m not limiting myself to one thing. Better to have many options than be narrowed down to a few."

The key is that Andrew is taking advantage of the opportunities he has now to pursue his interests. He’s not waiting. Nick didn't wait either, and he encourages every teen to do the same. He says, "Whatever it is that you want to do, you have to speak it into existence."

SAT/ACT WORDS
Acumen: keen insight; shrewdness
Alter: to make a change
Earnest: serious in intention, purpose, or effort
Andrew, a budding pianist, is considering a career in music.
TEST YOURSELF

Use the information from the story to answer these questions.

1. Nick Cannon's first job in show business was as ________.
   a. a host of a TV show
   b. an actor
   c. a comedian
   d. a writer

2. Andrew Dublin is considering a career in __________.
   a. music
   b. science
   c. math
   d. all of the above

3. An internship is a ________.
   a. full-time job
   b. temporary job for students
   c. great way to gain experience working
   d. both b and c

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What activities are you involved in now? Could you see yourself as an adult having a career that is related to activities you are doing now?
2. How has Nick Cannon's career in show business changed since he started out as a comedian? What do you think he learned about show business along the way?

Answers

1. d
2. d
3. b

SUMMARY: This article explains how Nickelodeon executive Nick Cannon began building his career back when he was a teenager, the article also profiles a teen in New York City who hopes to pursue a career in music.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• How much did you know about Nick Cannon before reading the article? What is your view of him after reading the article?
• It takes a lot of work for a young person to succeed as an actor. Nick accomplished that goal as a teen. Why do you think he wanted to do more with his life?
• Think about a situation in your life in which an adult said you were too young to do something. How did hearing that make you feel? How did you respond to the adult?
• What do you think of how Andrew is handling his interest in a music career? Does he have a backup plan in case a musical career doesn't work out?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Teaching point: This activity will help students use the information in the article to help them reach their own goals. Ask students to think about a career to which they may aspire. Have them write the career down on a piece of paper. Then challenge them to list things they need to do to reach that goal. They may need to do research on the Internet to help them make the list. Next, ask them to list things they could do now that might help them reach their goal. If students aren't comfortable talking about career goals, then have them write down a goal they want to accomplish as teens and list what they need to do to meet their objective.

Resources


Job Information. The following Web sites list helpful information on jobs for teens: www.quintcareers.com.
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