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“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens by improving the linkages between education and workforce development.

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# Education Works!

## Arresting the Future

By Tom Broussard

I recently read a research article entitled, "Possible Selves: Envisioning the Future." It suggests that in order to move ahead in careers as in life, people need more than the removal of the traditional barriers to education—time, money—time again!

Their research indicates that the absence of obstructions does not necessarily translate into progress.

### Programs don't work

I have often heard it

said that programs don't change anything (at least in sustainable ways). In trying to understand that statement, I think the point of this research may be what people have in mind when they say that programs don't work.



Maybe what they mean is that *programs alone* are not enough.

In some youth, welfare-to-work and adult transition programs, it is recognized that part of the difficulty people-in-transition have is that they have a hard time seeing the future. They have trouble seeing themselves as being any *different than they are today*.

As a result, in many ways many people in transition have lost the ability to see ANY futures--or certainly any futures reflecting a version of themselves they do not recognize.

Analogously, submarine sailors lose (albeit temporarily) much of their long distance sight while submerged for months at a time. While at sea, their "visible horizon" is limited to the length of the compartment. That is as far as they *need* to see so their eyes lose some of their ability to focus at a distance. With lack of use, the muscles atrophy.

Similarly, people whose life horizons have been limited to issues of survival--this week's paycheck, next week's food bills, etc. in many ways lose their ability to see--to imagine

different options. In many ways people in this situation don't just lose their sight, they lose the confidence required to envision a different horizon. As far as they are concerned, the world might as well be flat.

So, while removing barriers is very important, it is equally important that individuals in early education (K-12) are not told either implicitly or explicitly, that somehow they do not NEED to see themselves as college graduates or as lifelong learners.

If we allow that to continue to happen (through tracking, for example) our students will cease to believe that they have a personal future over which they have any control whatsoever.

No matter how many barriers have been eliminated, the *belief* that barriers still exist will arrest progress as surely as the barriers themselves.

Providing access to much needed additional education for working adults is not just a matter of walking into a building; it is not just a matter of eliminating barriers. The *trust and belief* that choices are there for them is first and foremost required in order to overcome the other barriers.

Losing the ability to see is one thing. Losing the ability to *choose* is quite another and a threat to lifelong progress in a world that demands it.

