

## Informational interviews: How intentional conversations can set students up for professional success Dr. Maggie Wray interviews Beth Hendler-Grunt

**Beth Hendler-Grunt**, founder and president of Next Great Step, is a dynamic leader, advisor and facilitator who has extensive experience consulting to start-ups, Fortune 500s firms, universities, high schools and individuals. The sole focus of Next Great Step is to guide students and recent grads to help them achieve career success. Ms. Hendler-Grunt leverages techniques and insights of guiding CEOs and brings those secrets to students to help them stand out and get the job. Next Great Step provides one-on-one coaching, group sessions and public speaking engagements for individuals and schools. She has enabled hundreds of clients to achieve success and has been featured in The New York Times, SiriusXM radio, NJBIZ and many other media outlets. Her clients have landed jobs at Amazon, Yelp, JP Morgan, and Major League Baseball to name a few.



**Dr. Maggie Wray** is the founder of *Creating Positive Futures*, an academic life coaching company that helps students develop the mindset, executive skills, and study skills they need to thrive.

Maggie earned her bachelor's degree in Astrophysics from Princeton and her Ph.D. in Neurobiology and Behavior from Cornell. She is an ICF-certified Life Coach with specialized training in both Academic Life Coaching and ADHD coaching for teens and college students. Her coaches provide personalized private and small-group coaching services for high school and college students who want to learn how to earn better grades with less stress by developing more positive habits and beliefs .

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**Dr. Wray:** Hi, everyone. Welcome. I'm Dr. Maggie Wray here from Creating Positive Futures, where we are on a mission to help high school and college students earn better grades with less stress and get into colleges and careers they love. So we really specialize here with my team of coaches in helping students become great at school. We help them with organizing time management and study strategies.

We do not help them, though, with the college and the career process, and this is such a huge piece of the puzzle for so many students because you can be a great student. You can excel at school and you can have all the skills in that area but still have a tough time translating that into getting into a college that is a great fit for you or finding a career that is a great fit.

I really feel like the career piece is essential here because you could get into a wonderful college and then have no idea what you're doing for your career, graduate and then really have a tough time translating that degree into a successful career as an adult.

And so I wanted to talk with people as part of this "Your Teen Ready for College" series about not just college, but how do you translate your time in college into being successful in your career? And that's really the focus of our call today and why I'm so excited to have Beth Hendler-Grunt here with us.

So she's going to be talking with us about how informational interviewing and having these really informed, thoughtful, planned out conversations with people in fields that your teen might be interested in going into as a career can help set them up for success professionally. She is a great person to talk with about this as well.

She's the founder and president of Next Great Step which advises college students and recent grads on how to achieve career success and help them stand out in their jobs. They provide one-on-one coaching, they do group sessions, they do public speaking engagements for individuals and schools, and they really help students figure out both what they want to do for kids who have no idea what that would be, and then also how to get their foot in the door if they do have an idea of a career that they want to pursue and they're not sure how to take that next step.

So thank you, Beth, for being here with us today. I'm just so thrilled to get to share your insights with our audience.

**Beth:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here.

**Dr. Wray:** Me too, and I'm excited too because I think that there is a lot of misinformation out there and there are a lot of mistakes that students are making when they go about trying to get into a career. First of all, they don't know what they're doing. There's not a lot of training on this, which is such a shame because most schools have career departments or they have places where you're supposed to be able to get some help and support, but it's not really in a structured way. It's up to kids to go there. They might meet kind of haphazardly with somebody who looks at their resume and that's about it.

So I'm curious what mistakes you see recent graduates or soon-to-be graduates making when it comes to finding careers.

**Beth:** Sure. That's a great question. There is so much emphasis put on to getting into college, which is a big deal, and there's a lot of time and investment. But you want to make sure that you maximize your experience when you get to college and I think one of the first mistakes that I see is that the search for figuring out what kind of career you might be interested in, as well as getting practice in talking to

people and interviewing skills, the feeling of “that can wait”. I’ll just wait until my junior year when I need an internship. I don’t need to do that as a freshman. I’m too busy getting acclimated.

And it is true. It’s an adjustment. But one of the suggestions is to start doing a little bit as soon as you get to school are things like just meeting your professors. Professors love to get to know their students. It’s also really good to help if there are any issues with grades or understanding material, but professors also have access to other people who might be hiring for interns, ultimately. But get to know your professors, get involved, and even go to the career fair as a freshman.

A lot of people will say, “Why would a freshman go to the career fair?” and the number one reason is just to get comfortable and get practice. So many of my students that I work I ask, “Did you go to the career fair?” They say, “Well, I went but the lines were so long and I was so overwhelmed that I just turned around and I left.”

You need to practice and get comfortable doing that because that’s going to be a part of how you are interviewing for jobs as you progress through college. So just practice talking about yourself. When someone says, “Tell me about yourself,” do you know what you’re going to say?

**Dr. Wray:** But it’s such a scary question. It’s such a scary question for students who don’t know the answer yet. And so you’re right. That’s a great thing to practice because what do you do? Otherwise you’re going to be a deer in headlights.

**Beth:** Yeah, and normally it is, and by the way, people don’t actually want to hear your life story too. They don’t want to hear elementary school all the way through high school of your life story when you say, “Tell me about yourself.” So think about how you can have a clear answer and having a sense of yourself, of the skills you have. So those are a couple of mistakes.

And then very early on, employers are looking for internships and the search for internships starts a year ahead than you want one. The summertime, now is a great time to think about how can I think about the internship for the following summer, which for some people, they say, “Wow, that seems so far ahead,” but employers like to plan. They actually like to get to know you a year or two ahead of time before they potentially bring you into a program. So start early, get practice.

One other mistake that I think a lot of students make is that they just assume Mom and Dad will just hook them up with all of their connections to get them a job. And I’m all for that. By all means, use whatever connections you can, but I have so many parents that say, “Well, my connections are not in the same field as what my child wants to do,” or “I made an introduction and maybe my son or daughter weren’t really prepared and they kind of blew it,” so they’re not able to use that connection going forward.

So I teach young adults to make your own connections. You have this university with thousands of people who went there to reach out to alumni, talk to them, be curious, ask questions about what they studied and what they did with that major just to learn. I think just the more you can be aware and just start learning as much as you can early on, the better you will be.

**Dr. Wray:** That’s a great point and it does make me wonder because like you mentioned, a parent might set their teen up with a connection or introduce them to someone or just might not be able to introduce them to someone. It sounds like it’s a hard thing to do for them to really support their kids with this process, especially if they’re off at college. You’re not there seeing them every day. You can’t make them

go to the career fair. So what can and should parents be doing to help their kids with this career search process? And I'm also actually kind of curious if you have any ideas about what they shouldn't be doing.

**Beth:** That's a good point too. So the overall feeling, kind of what I said a little earlier, is that parents should advise their young adult or their adult child that they really need to have a strategy going into college. It's not just "Okay, great. I'm here. Let me just focus on class," which is important too, but what are you going to do every year that you're there to kind of help build your experiences, your skills?

Do you have a LinkedIn profile? Do you have your resume up to date? Have you visited career services? You should maximize the resources. Not enough students go. So have that conversation with your child upfront about expectations, but also to use the resources that are there. As I tell parents and college students, this is the only time in your entire life that employers and recruiters come looking for you.

**Dr. Wray:** That's so true.

**Beth:** They come to you. They come to find you where you are as opposed to you having to seek them out, so you want to take advantage of that as much as you possibly can.

The other thing that parents can do is help your college student figure out what are those skills that they're really good at so when they have a conversation with someone, they can explain what they are. So what do I mean by that? It's not that you're just trustworthy, responsible, and dependable. Those are great things. But those are more of attributes.

Are you a good writer? Are you analytical? Can you solve problems? Those are great skills to talk about and you've done them in class work, in part-time jobs, in after-school activities. Work with your child to help them explain how they're good at those skills. It's probably one of the hardest things for young people is to explain themselves verbally face to face, and the more you can practice with them to help them know what those skills are and then to say them in a really polished and confident way, I think that would be a really good thing.

And then one other thing for parents just to kind of keep in mind is one size does not fit all. It's very hard. I'm going to full disclosure I have a son who is in college, who's a sophomore in college and I have a sophomore in high school, so I'm living both of those situations right now. You have to kind of take a step back and realize that one size does not fit all.

So just because you hear that STEM is the hot major or you want them to be in the business school or study law or maybe study something that you wanted to but you never did, you need to let them find their way a little bit and not impart to them what you think they should be doing. They have to make some mistakes. They have to figure that out. Let them kind of go through that process because it's hard. You want to help them succeed, but you also need to give them a chance.

When students have things that are forced on them, it sometimes comes back later in their career that that wasn't really what they wanted, so just try to give them a chance to explore for themselves.

**Dr. Wray:** That's so true, and it's so true that it could end up backfiring. You never want to be in that position where even accidentally – because I think it can happen accidentally – parents are expressing more excitement about a particular career path than others. You might not even mean to be pushing your kids into something, but it's always a bad idea to be directing where you want to go rather than reflecting back where it seems like they want to go.

And I love that you shared, too, about helping them explain in words what they're good at because I think that is really hard, and sometimes students have a hard time even knowing what they're good at. But as a parent, you probably can see what they're good at. You're probably bragging to your friends about how your kid is amazing at this, or that, or the other thing. Or at least, you're internally acknowledging it even if you don't say it out loud. So helping them realize that is fantastic because I do think you're right.

Kid have a very hard time saying what they're good at out loud and owning their strengths. It sounds like bragging. It sounds like they're full of themselves. They try not to do that and seem like they just think too much of themselves. That humility is a great thing to have, but they need to be able to balance that with being clear about what they're really excellent at and where their strengths lie.

And I think that they're much more comfortable, oftentimes, having conversations like that virtually, so writing out in an e-mail, a description of themselves or applying for a job online. I was just talking with a student – this is high school instead of a career – about getting a summer position and he has basically just been going online and clicking “submit, submit, submit” and he hasn't heard back. Surprise, surprise.

**Beth:** I could go on about that.

**Dr. Wray:** Oh, my gosh. I was curious about that too. I know we have spoken before about having these face-to-face conversations, having these kind of informational interviews with people, whether it's for finding a job you're interested in or whether it's for getting a job once you know what you're interested in. Why do you think that's so important to actually get face-to-face and not just do everything online where you might be more comfortable?

**Beth:** Let me give you two statistics, and the first one is that 80% of jobs, internships, part-time jobs are achieved by referral, not online but by referral. And referral means you had to have spoken with someone who can put you in touch with the right person.

The other thing is that 75% of the jobs that you see on the job board are not the jobs that are available. 75% are not posted, so you're not even accessing everything that's possible when you hide behind online applying. And I know it seems so easy and “Oh, I'll just click, click, click, click.”

I talked to students. They apply to 100, 200 jobs and they don't get opportunities or it's a scam or it's posed as one type of opportunity but it's not and they get there and it wasn't really the right thing. It's so hard to apply online. Just take the time to try to talk to someone face-to-face or over the phone. I know for this age group you're so much more comfortable in texting and Snapchat, but people need to talk to you.

The more you can get comfortable and practice talking about yourself, which is why I mentioned those skills and if parents can help their child to get comfortable, that's how people want to hear from you. No matter what's on your resume or an online application, ultimately, people hire people and they want you to talk to them about the value that you add and the skills you have and your experiences. It's just critical.

So it's hard. We're in a technology-focused time and this age group has only grown up dealing more and with technology, but in the work world is still, there's this conversation and dialogue that has to happen and getting comfortable. I think the more young people can practice talking face-to-face, over the

phone, a cup of coffee, the more that they will get more comfortable and do better at talking to people about themselves. And that's how you get hired.

**Dr. Wray:** It totally makes sense. I'd be curious to learn, too – because you mentioned practice and I think that's so important – about how students can maybe start to build this skill before they even get to the point where they're trying to get jobs because I know for a lot of families who are watching right now, they might have a high school student and they might be thinking, "This is great advice for when they're four years from now, ready to graduate from college but I don't need to think about this right now."

And I would argue that you actually do and it would be really beneficial to start having those conversations maybe not for the second piece of what you all do with getting students jobs, but for the first piece that you do where it's helping them figure out what they're passionate about.

So I'd love if you could tell us a little bit more about how those face-to-face conversations could actually help kids identify a potential career.

**Beth:** Sure. Absolutely. One of the big things that I work with is that so many students will come to me and say, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to major in. I am not sure. I like a lot of different things. How do I figure it out?" And you can go online and look up different types of jobs and research, and that is a good start. You can look around on the Internet, look at companies that you're interested in. But what we think is the best way to get smart about possible jobs and things that you might like is through conversations.

One of my favorite ways to do that is by using LinkedIn. Now not all high school students are on LinkedIn. It's getting there. I think some are realizing it, but there is actually a big push. LinkedIn wants students on there. They want high school students, college students, and it's totally to your advantage. It's easy to use and it's such a great way to find people who have a job that you would be interested in.

Maybe you want to talk to somebody who has a job that maybe you would want one day. Just reach out to connect. Now there's just a quick tip about LinkedIn. As opposed to just saying, "Will you connect?" or using the default language of "I'd like to connect with you," there's an option to put a customized note.

The best way to get someone to connect with you that you've never met or maybe doesn't know you so well is to write a note saying, "I looked at your profile," or "Like you, we both went to the same high school or college, and I see you studied this and I'd really like to learn more about how you got to where you are." Great. Let them connect.

Then you have access to their whole profile. You can message them. Ask them then for maybe a 10-15 minute conversation on the phone or to meet for coffee. You have access to their regular e-mail as well. That's a great way to get some clarity about what you might want to do without looking for a job. You don't have to apply for anything. You just need to kind of do your own self-education on different opportunities that you might want to take a look at.

**Dr. Wray:** That's a really interesting idea about actually getting on LinkedIn as a high school student. I'm not sure why most students don't do that. Probably they're just not thinking about it. What would you advise a student who is maybe a little bit intimidated about that? Which is ironic, by the way, because

most students are so on top of social media. But they're on top of social media for fun and socializing with friends, not necessarily from a career standpoint.

So how would you advise them to get started if maybe they've never even thought about getting connected on LinkedIn and it feels a little scary and intimidating?

**Beth:** I happened to do a talk for graduating high school seniors last week and the very question that came up was "Well, what if my experience isn't very good? What if I only was a babysitter or I worked at a bakery or I just worked at a day camp?" They're very concerned that their experience doesn't warrant even being on LinkedIn.

I would tell you the opposite. It absolutely does because all of those experiences show skills. You have to be a good communicator to be a camp counselor. You have to be able to problem solve if you're doing certain things or if you're watching children or multiple children at the same time. So you're not supposed to have fancy experience. You're in high school. You should just put it there.

And then the other question that came up – I encourage them to use metrics as much as you can; say you watched three children at once – is, "What if my numbers are low? What if I don't have a lot of great metrics or I only worked one day a week?" or "Should I exaggerate?" Absolutely no. Never exaggerate or lie on LinkedIn or your resume, so let's just put that out there.

But don't worry about the number. Nobody's judging you. It's just more that you have a sense of you know what you accomplished in that role and how it impacted that person or business and it's totally appropriate to put down your experience. You have to create, by the way, a mini resume to apply to college. I know colleges want to see a listing of all of your activities. Those same things should be on LinkedIn and as you evolve, and as you go through, get into college, every semester, you update it with your new activities. Some things come on. Some things might come off. And it evolves over time.

**Dr. Wray:** That's a great point and it's great either way. If you're already in the process of applying to college, it's great because you've already got that resume put together. Or if you haven't yet applied to college and you're maybe a little bit earlier in the high school process than that, great, this is going to be good practice.

If you put together your LinkedIn profile, then you'll have things you can put on your college resume and your activities list and all of that and it'll get you thinking also about "I don't have all these great skills. Okay, how do I develop them? I can go to work on that. Now I have some steps to take because I can imagine what I would like to put on my LinkedIn profile if I had it. Now I can go find it and make those connections." So I love that, just giving students permission to start where they are and not feeling like they have to look impressive.

**Beth:** Yeah, if I could offer one piece. There was an article written in Forbes where they interviewed the Head of Admissions at Northeastern and they commented. They said that, when they see high school students with LinkedIn profile, they see them as a step ahead. They see them as someone who is already forward-thinking. A lot of schools, by the way, are looking you up when you apply too.

So whatever your online presence, LinkedIn actually has a pretty high ranking in Google, so I think that would be better to have that show up versus maybe your Instagram profile depending on what's on there. But they really look at students who have a LinkedIn profile as those that have taken initiative, that are forward-thinking. So that's just from one admissions counselor.

**Dr. Wray:** That is a great point. It's also something that can really open up some doors for you, to your point about connecting with people: maybe personalizing that invitation, saying "I notice we both went to this school," or "I really love your career field. I'd love to ask you a few questions about it." How receptive do you find people to that kind of a question to a high schooler? Because I feel like that would be pretty intimidating for a lot of students.

**Beth:** I think people are quite receptive, but I think you have to be careful about what you write in the letter. If you write in the letter saying, "Hi, I'm reaching out and I see that you're the Vice President at JP Morgan and I really need a job next summer. Can we talk?" They don't know you, so you're asking for way, way too much. It's like asking a stranger on the street, "Will you hire me?" or "Will you admit me into your college?"

So what I encourage them is to look at the profile. See if there's something, one, that you have in common because it makes it easier when you have like things. People can relate to that. Like, "Like you, I'm from this town," or "I see that you know some similar people." "I see that you have this role or you started out in there and I really would like to learn more. Can we connect?"

I think you can't ask for too much in that connection though. Your goal is to get them to connect, so then you have access to their e-mail, their phone number, and all their other contact information. Then you can say, "Thanks for connecting. Would you spend 15-20 minutes with me to talk further so I can learn more about what you're doing? Here's where I am. Here's what I think my skills are and maybe you can guide me." Seek them out as a mentor before you need the job.

So it's great to ask people for advice and then a year or two later, say, "Remember when we spoke? Now this is what I've learned since we last spoke. Could you potentially connect me with anyone that might be hiring?"

**Dr. Wray:** That's a great point, to lay that foundation before you need a job because if you are in that place where you're graduating next month and you're desperate and you really, really need a position, it's going to be hard at that point because you're going to feel like you're asking for so much and you will be asking for so much. That's not really a great time to build those connections. You almost want to build that network before you need it, so that's a great thing to start thinking about early.

And I would imagine, too, for people who are getting those requests, if they know this is a high school student who's telling me, "I think your career field is amazing. I'm so impressed by what you've done in your career. I want to be just like you someday. Would you be willing to talk to me for 15 minutes?" who's not going to be flattered by that?

**Beth:** Right. Who doesn't like a little flattery and praise? Of course you'd be interested. If anyone from where I want to college said, "I'd like to learn more," I'd say yes to everybody. So yeah, absolutely.

**Dr. Wray:** Okay, so let's say they've done this. They've got their profile. They've reached out to a couple people. Those people have said yes, sure, I'd be happy to connect with you and then I'm imagining if you're a student who gets that back, you think, "Oh my gosh, now what do I say? What do I do? How do I approach this conversation so I don't make a complete fool out of myself and make them sorry that they agreed to talk to me?"

**Beth:** Yes. There's the panic moment of "Oh no."

**Dr. Wray:** I got what I was asking for. Now what?

**Beth:** Yes.

**Dr. Wray:** How do you handle that? What do you advise students do to prepare to make the most of those conversations?

**Beth:** So I teach them a technique that helps give them some structure and guidance to these conversations because sometimes one time could be limited. If you really are limited to 20 minutes, you really have to think about how you're going to carefully get what you want out of it. So I give them a structure, and this structure is what I call the three As. So I'll tell you quickly. Actually, if you look on the screen behind me, if I move around, it's up there. I'm just realizing that.

But if the three As, the first one is action. So you want to think about if this conversation went really well and we learned a lot about each other, what would I want that person to do at the end of the conversation? Do I want them to make a referral? Do I want them to introduce me to someone? Do I want them just to be a mentor and stay in touch with me?

So I just want to think, "What's the end game that you want from this conversation?" or "Do you want to be hired?" That may not be the most appropriate thing to ask on the very first time you meet with someone, but things that can put you in motion towards that.

Well, if you're going to ask somebody to do something, then you want to think, "Well, what do I want them to know about me? What attitudes do they have to come away with?" We come back to the same skills. What are those three skills? I could tell you to pick three because people can't listen to much more than that. What are your top three core skills that you want that person to know about you?

If I was interested in finance, maybe I want them to think I'm analytical, I'm strong at math, and I'm really good at solving problems. And think about, if you say those are your skills, then three examples of how you've demonstrated that. Maybe you had to analyze a spreadsheet for a project in class. Maybe you had to work with others to solve a problem. So you have to have these ready to go. Write them out. But you have to be ready to talk about it.

And once you have your skills ready, think about, "Okay, then what answers do I want? What questions should I ask to get the answers that I need to help me make a better decision as to whether I'm interested in this kind of field or I want to learn more about it?" So that's kind of how you plan. You plan out your actions, then your attitudes and the answers you want.

But then when you're in the meeting, you flip it because you don't ask to be hired first or you don't ask them to do something. You first start off with "Tell me a little bit about how you got here. Can you tell me about your career path? Tell me what's important to you when you look for candidates. What advice would you offer to someone like me who's just starting out?"

Then at some point in the conversation, it flips. They'll say, "Well, tell me about you." "Sure. These are the top three things that you should know about me. I'm good at problem solving, financial, mathematics." So those things and then they have an understanding of you and then by the end of the conversation, you could say, "Based on what I shared with you, do you think you could refer me to someone? Could you introduce me to someone?" so it makes it easy for the person to take an action because you've kind of asked them great questions.

You took an interest. You've explained yourself really well, and then you're asking them to put you further in the process. And we find that that structure, it's a script but not because everyone has their own script. But it's the structure to keep everything on track, to know how you're doing and that you're getting to your objective of what you want out of it.

**Dr. Wray:** That makes a lot of sense and I like that you've got that idea of the three As so it's easy to remember. You're not going to forget that and then also, it's something that it's a goal for the conversation, but it's not such a tight script that you're going to get thrown off if somebody says something you weren't expecting and I think sometimes there is this tendency to want to think through, "Okay, exactly what am I going to say?" and "Exactly what are they going to say?"

But you can't predict exactly what they're going to say. You can't prepare for that level of detail or else you're going to get thrown off. But you also don't want to use that as a reason to throw all preparation out of the window and say, "Well, I'll just wing it," because then you will get tongue-tied in that moment where they ask you, "So tell me about yourself," and you say, "Uh, uh."

**Beth:** You need to be fluid. It's part of the process.

**Dr. Wray:** That completely makes sense. I am curious. Actually, thinking back to that question I asked earlier about connecting face-to-face and why that's so important, is there an advantage to doing those conversations in person versus, say, over the phone? Or is it really helpful either way?

**Beth:** I think there's the practicality of it. If you can do it in-person, I think it's always great. I know people are in different places. Students go to schools in different locations. But over the phone is really good. I think also out of respect for the person you're talking to, if they have a really busy day, allow them to know, "Okay, I'm going to give the next 15-20 minutes but I don't have to travel anywhere and I don't have to get in the car and go somewhere." So I think it's out of respect for their time too, and then if things continue on, if you can meet in-person that's good. But a phone call is great.

**Dr. Wray:** Right. If you were going to meet in-person – again, I'm just kind of thinking through this from a student's perspective – they might think, "Where do I ask them to meet? Should we meet at a coffee shop? Am I supposed to go to their office?" What do you usually recommend in terms of setting up these informational interviews? Where should a student be asking to meet if they were going to get together in-person?

**Beth:** I like a neutral place. I like a coffee shop, library. But by all means, if they said, "Come to my office," that's great because maybe you could get a little tour, maybe you can just get a sense of what it's like there, whatever works for both.

I think my suggestion when I tell students when you're asking for somebody's time is you want to make it as easy for them as possible to say yes, so you give them "I'm available this day at this time or this time. Which one is good for you?" as opposed to saying, "You just let me know." Make it easy. Give them two choices and offer, "I'd be happy to come to your office or we can meet at the coffee shop on this street." Be precise so people can just give you a quick answer of "Great, Tuesday 10:00. I'll meet you at Starbucks."

**Dr. Wray:** Right, and you're maybe looking up that place so that it's close to their work and you're not asking them to go all across town. I'm thinking about how, here in Atlanta, we've got such bad traffic

and I know a lot of other metro areas are the same. You don't want to ask them to drive 30 minutes out of their way to meet with you. That is no longer an easy yes, so you want to make that easy for them.

**Beth:** Yes.

**Dr. Wray:** Because they're really providing a lot of value for you. Even just having those conversations to learn more about their day to day like and how did they get started in their career and what would they advise someone who is starting out to do. What are some mistakes they made that they could recommend that you avoid?

So this is just so helpful to start to get an idea because so many students don't really know the reality of what a job is like. They might have an idea in their head or maybe they've watched a show about what some career is like and so they have this idea. But that's not always the reality, so it's just so helpful to actually get real, live feedback from actual people who can make real connections in the field and help you figure out what you might want to do.

So say that that's happened. They've had that great conversation. They prepared effectively so hopefully it went well. And now they want to make sure that they follow-up effectively after the conversation to either thank that person or keep the connection going. What do you recommend they do afterward?

**Beth:** So the number one most important thing – I'll tell you this is the number one reason why a lot of students don't get jobs, because they don't do it – is you must send a thank you note within 24 to 48 hours. And it doesn't have to be very elaborate, but I think a little recap of "Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. I enjoyed learning about this."

So recap something that they shared with you that you paid attention to – you took notes, you were listening – and restate maybe just a reminder, "These are my skills and I think I could add value to a company like yours," or maybe restate the commitment of the action they said, "As you agreed to, you said you would refer me to somebody or you said I can come back and shadow you for the day. I look forward to speaking with you. I will follow up with you on this date to confirm the next steps." So again, you're precise as opposed to leaving things open-ended.

But the thank you note is so critical. I know a lot of employers who, even if they loved the candidate, don't get a thank you note will put them in the no pile. And they were going to hire them.

**Dr. Wray:** Interesting, so it's that important.

**Beth:** I think it's so important. Even if it's as simple as "Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate it. I hope to stay in touch soon," even if you didn't recap it as detailed as I just mentioned. But I think absolutely e-mail. Handwritten is great too. You can do both. It's still incredibly well-received to get an e-mail quickly as well as a handwritten note.

**Dr. Wray:** And you answered my next question which was going to be the format. So thanks for clarifying that. That's not overkill to do an e-mail and a note?

**Beth:** I don't think so, no. But if you don't have time, absolutely the e-mail for sure.

**Dr. Wray:** That makes sense, totally. And so I'm wondering too, for families who are maybe watching this and maybe they're just that super proactive parent and they're on here and their child is in, I don't know, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade – they're not really in college application phase yet, but they might have a career or two they're interested in – is there a too early to get started having these kinds of

conversations with people or do you recommend that they maybe wait until they're a junior or a senior in high school? What are your thoughts on that timeline idea?

**Beth:** I think it's never too early. I think something as simple as when you're at a family dinner, asking your aunt or uncle, "What do you actually do for a living?" because I think a lot of children and young adults don't even know what their family members do for their employment.

**Dr. Wray:** That's true.

**Beth:** So if you ask, "Explain to me. What do you do?" and "How do you do it?" and "How did you get into it?" I think just start with your family when you're young to have a sense of what those careers are about as a starting point. Ask family friends. Look at the people around you, especially if you're in high school. I don't think you need to go far, but if you have an interest or you're thinking, "Wow, you know what? I love video games but I'd love to be able to figure out how do you create them, how do you design them?" That's another whole level. That's with computer science and digital imaging.

Maybe there's somebody who went to the same high school. Maybe there's a family friend or someone who lives in town just to ask them about what they do and learn about it and just be curious. I think, when you're in high school, that's just the best thing you can do. Ask a lot of questions and be open to hearing about it.

And then as you get older into college, you can be more targeted with "Wow, I think I want to speak to even more people about it or more alumni or someone with the same major," so you could be more directed. But just learn. It doesn't all have to happen in the classroom.

**Dr. Wray:** That's a great point. It strikes me that what you're encouraging them to do by having these conversations is really also building that skill base of being able to connect effectively with people, being able to express yourself when you're asked what you do, and that you're laying that foundation to be successful in your career, no matter which career you end up picking because it doesn't really matter even if you go into a research field where you're going to be spending all day in a lab and not interacting with a lot of people. You still have to go on job interviews and you still have to have connections with your colleagues.

So no matter what you do, having that ability to express yourself clearly, especially in a high pressure interview type situation and communicate calmly about what you do and to follow-up effectively with people afterwards – all of those are such valuable skills no matter what job or career field you go into.

So obviously, the more practice you have at anything, the better you're going to be. If you're the kid who started doing that in high school or started asking your family friends what they do when you're in eighth grade or something like that, you're going to be so much better at it by the time you're a college senior than the kid who just says, "Oh well, I'll figure it out when I need a job."

**Beth:** I'll just offer one other point. So just how you opened with initially, I do have a lot of clients who studied STEM. I have a lot of engineers and they're brilliant and they go to top schools and they have straight As and they have a really, really tough time talking to people. So even though they might have the smarts to be in a job, if you can't communicate what you have to offer, the value you have, the skills you have, if you can't have the conversation, you can't get to the other side until you communicate it. I don't care how fabulous your resume is and all the numbers that define you. But the conversation still has to happen.

**Dr. Wray:** That's so true. Well, and I am wondering, too, in addition to those interview skills, is there anything else you've seen in your field, because you do so much work with students on helping them get jobs and helping them get their foot in the door, in addition to what we've talked about today that you'd advise students to do that could help them stand out in the process? I know that's a huge question.

**Beth:** So people come to me, even right now. It's graduation month, graduation season, and they say, "I don't understand. The job market, unemployment is so low. Why are my grads not getting a job?"

It's a couple of reasons. One is it's very competitive, so there are lots of jobs but there's more people competing for them and it's still hard as a recent grad to have all the skills. And one of the things that I share with parents and young adults is you have to be able to differentiate yourself.

So the pieces that we tie together is that you have to have a really clear sense of who you are and the skills that you can bring to a company, a person. But it's also, what is the value? What is the benefit? And how can you make their life better or how could you help that company achieve their goals because of you?

So it's not just showing up and telling someone, "I got it all. I got the grades. I went to a great school. I have all the skills." That's only half of the part. The other half is understanding what's important to that person or that company or what are the metrics that they want to improve?

If you can show how you can help them achieve their goals and make it less about you and more about them, that's what helps you stand out. That's how people get hired. That's a secret. I'm just sharing that now, but that's the secret of how people get hired. It's being able to add a lot of value and showing how you're so focused on that employer or that person and making their success even more important than your own.

**Dr. Wray:** That's such a great point and it doesn't require a ton of time and effort to do that, but I'm always surprised, even just doing interviews myself, of how many people will show up and they don't even know exactly what we do. I'll say, "Okay, well, that's a huge red flag. You haven't even looked at our website. You have no idea what our mission is. You don't have the slightest idea. You're just looking for a job. No, there's no way. There's no way unless you're connected with our mission and you have a sense of how you're going to help us achieve that. No, not a chance."

And I'm sure every other company out there, especially in such a competitive world, they're going to be looking for that too and want to see how you can help them and it's not that hard to put the pieces together. You just need to do some research or learn about those companies and what they want, and then think about, "How could I step into this environment, in this job, in this role, and help them achieve their goals? I'm not just in it for me."

Really putting yourself in their shoes is such great advice and it's surprising to me that more people don't do that, but the fact that more people don't do that can probably help you stand out. So that's great.

**Beth:** I guess it's good for our business. But look, it's something that everybody needs. It's not even just young people coming out of school, even people who are older who interview. You just have to remember that it's not just about you.

**Dr. Wray:** So true. Well, thank you, Beth. This has been so interesting. For people who want to follow-up with you – I love the beginnings of the conversation here we were having about LinkedIn; I think we could probably do a whole interview just on that, so we'll have to have you back – I know you mentioned to me earlier, before we got on our call today, that you have a gift you want to offer people about LinkedIn, in particular, and give them some more resources on that so I'm so excited to share that. Could you tell us a little bit more about it?

**Beth:** Sure. So the gift I want to share is that I have actually recorded a course, a short video course, on how to use LinkedIn for college students but it actually applies to high school students as well, and it really covers the most important things that a young person would need to know about LinkedIn. So there's a segment on creating a great profile, what are the most important pieces to have filled out, and the other ones that we don't have to worry about.

I teach how to use this LinkedIn alumni tool which I mentioned earlier, for, if you can seek out fellow alumni from the same schools you went to, how to find people who have the same major. It's a tool that most people don't know how to use and I teach you how to use it. And then I teach a little bit about an effective way to look for jobs and be notified of the right kind of opportunities from LinkedIn as well, so really simple, concise, to the point. I'm showing you the screens and I'd be happy to give that as a gift to your clients.

**Dr. Wray:** Thank you so much for that, Beth, and I have to say I want to check that out now because I know that there are things I'm probably not even doing right on LinkedIn. So anyone who's watching, definitely make sure you grab a copy of that, even if not for your teen. Maybe you want it for you. So we're going to put a link right below this video and make sure and check that out.

I think it's going to be a really great resource to get students thinking about this because there is so much of our lives around technology now and it's always shocking to me when I'm working with students on time management or organizing. They have all these great skills with their phone when it comes to having fun and socializing and they're not thinking about all of the ways that this technology can really help them both personally and professionally, to be more organized, to be more on top of things, and in this case, to get more connected with potential employers and people who could be real mentors in the field.

So I'm excited to get them using their technology for good instead of to pull them off track and get them distracted. So this is a wonderful resource. Thank you, Beth, and thank you for being here. This has been so, so informative.

So anyone who's watching, just to make sure, if you have anyone else in your life who could benefit from this – maybe you have other friends who's kids are just about to get to the point where they're thinking about careers, they don't know what they want to do, and maybe they have no idea how to get started – having these conversations is a great way to get started. So help share this information with them.

I think so many kids are going about the process of figuring out what they want to do the wrong way. They're just saying, "Oh, I'll get into college and then I'll figure it out." That is a very expensive time to figure it out. Please don't do that. It's also not something that you want to sit around at home and just kind of wait to get this insight, a magical insight into, "Oh, I'm meant to be a this in my career."

That's not how you figure things out. You figure it out by getting in the real world, doing things, talking to people. So all of what Beth shared today is a really, really good first step and then it also is going to help you when it comes to getting a job because applying online thing that we were talking about at the beginning? "I'm going to click on Indeed and apply to 400 jobs." No, it's not going to work.

So please steer your kids in the right direction and encourage them to start having these conversations now wherever they are in their process. So the more people we can share this information with, the better we can all help our kids get into the kind of jobs and careers that they love where they really thrive. So share the replay.

The replay will be available for 48 hours, so just encourage anybody you know who could benefit from it to go to [YourTeenReadyForCollege.com](http://YourTeenReadyForCollege.com) and they can get just a link where they can log in and access all these videos as well and watch Beth's interview too. So also make sure to share it with your teen if you feel like they would benefit, so you can replay the parts. You don't have to watch every single bit, but maybe replay just the parts that you think would really resonate with them so that they can take action on this as well.

And then if you do want to get access to the replay, the recordings, have lifetime access to all of this as well, just go to [YourTeenReadyForCollege.com/event](http://YourTeenReadyForCollege.com/event) and it's \$100 off right now on the event package if you want to grab a copy of that. And that'll include the transcripts and the videos, and bonuses from our speakers and everything. It's actually worth way, way more than what we're charging for it, but we want you all to have access to this information as long as you would like.

So thank you, again, Beth. This has been so fantastic. I learned a ton. I know our audience did too and I just really appreciate your time here today. Thank you.

**Beth:** My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

**Dr. Wray:** Thanks, you all as well, for joining us and we'll see you soon. Bye.

**Beth:** Bye.