

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace, through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges. How do we prepare our kids for careers post high school? College? Apprenticeships? What is the best pathway for career exploration? These are important questions that Jean Eddy, president and CEO of the nonprofit American Student Assistance explores in her book, *Crisis-Proofing Today's Learners: Reimagining Career Education to Prepare Kids for Tomorrow's World*. It is my pleasure to welcome Jean to the podcast. Jean, good to see you.

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

Great to see you as well, Ramona.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you've been doing this for a while. You've been working with kids, preparing them for college, but I think the shift in the last couple of years for ASA has been more about career exploration. Is that correct?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

Yes. It's very correct. At ASA, as you just mentioned, we helped kids help them finance their education. It was primarily for college. And we helped kids figure out how to repay their loans once they left college. And that really showcased a lot of things for us. We had an awful lot of young people telling us that they wish they hadn't borrowed as much money or they wished that they had had more certainty before they started college, or in some cases they left college because they didn't know why they were there. It was eye-opening and it basically made us want to pause and say, "Okay, how can we get ahead of this problem?"

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you made that shift. You saw a need for it. How are you working with students now?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

We're working with students in a few ways. But the first is we have digital programs that are entirely free that kids can use to start the process. And it's important to start the process, and I'm going to say in the most informed way. So we believe, I believe emphatically that we have to start early. Our research shows that middle school is prime time to start with young people. And the first thing we need to help them figure out is who they are. What do they love to do? What are they good at? What do they get fun from? And use that to basically then go and see the number of careers that are possible by doing that. And I think within the book that I talk about the fact that if we have kids basically figure out what they love, what they're good at, what the world needs, and what they can be paid for, at the end of the day, they're going to have a successful future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I look back on my own middle school years, careers weren't even discussed at that point. It was like just try to figure it out. And it also depends on your social network on who might be pushing you toward a

career or helping you explore it. So do you find now that this shift has helped a lot of kids talk about it at least, to start thinking about it?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

I think definitely. In our digital platforms, we have over 12 million young people using them. And it has everything to do with the fact that we started off on the premise that it had to be fun. So if you think about how often kids are playing video games or on social media, they're out there trying to have fun, they're trying to connect, et cetera. So we decided to go to where the kids are and provide them with an opportunity to go exploring and do that. But I also think, and we have supported many school districts in this, there are some really amazing teachers out there and superintendents out there who are incorporating career exploration in the middle school grades. And we have seen great success with those programs, allowing young people to start to figure out what their path might be, before they even have to choose courses in high school.

Because if you think about it, you cannot take courses in high school and then suddenly find that you are not ready for that next thing. So it's really important to be able to start this early and be able to help kids see a path very early on.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So in your book, you talk a bit about how college is not for everyone. So what are some of the other pathways that you're exposing these kids to?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

I think, and you mentioned it when you first started this conversation with me, apprenticeships are an amazing opportunity for young people. Internships, the same thing. That kids can figure out if they like something or they don't, or if it fits in what they feel as though they want to do for a long time to come. And I understand that usually there are going to be many careers in a person's life. You and I have already seen that. We have switched careers a couple of times. People today are switching them more and more. So to get them ready to see what's out there, apprenticeships are a great way to do it. But there are some certificate programs. There are some training programs that can really allow someone to get a feel for, what is that next thing.

I talk in the book about a young woman who was really just fascinated with aviation and aeronautics, and she went out and basically did some research because she was trying to pursue something that she loved. And she ended up enrolling in a program that allowed her to get that experience and she's now in a job that she absolutely loves. And that's what we need to basically provide for our young people, give them those opportunities.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

There's that saying, if you can see it, you can be it.

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

Exactly.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So that idea that exposing somebody early, and I love the thought as you said, that young woman loves aviation and didn't know what to do with it. Now she does. It's a really remarkable experience I think for

a young person to have that. One of the other things is technical schools, trade schools have been around for a while and we all remember shop class and that in high school. But it's taken it to a new step in a lot of school districts. I noticed in Louisville, Kentucky, they have high schools that are focusing on healthcare, focusing on data science. So you can go and get your regular career education, but you can also get that extra step of training. So I want to give a shout-out to Louisville, Kentucky on how they're approaching that.

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

There are some amazing opportunities in high schools right now. In fact, in Massachusetts for an example, the technical high schools in Massachusetts have waiting lists. It used to be that there was some stigma attached to a technical education in a trade school. That is dissipating thank heaven. And finding more and more young people want to pursue that and they want to be able... I think this generation of kids is very focused on getting their hands on something that they can feel and experience. They don't want to wait. They're not the most patient crowd. But again, I think that if they use that for good, they're just going to enhance the possibilities for what their future can be like.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Well, quite a few now big companies are dropping their college requirements. And I think there's still maybe a misperception out there to some young people that you have to have that college degree. So what does that mean to you that employers are recognizing you don't need that?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

It basically means to me that employers are basically saying that they need the skill sets required for the jobs that they are offering. And oftentimes they believed that a college degree was going to automatically bring those skill sets. And it doesn't. In large measure, it doesn't. So what we have to do right now is help young people see that, there are things that they can acquire and do in their learning process. Things like adaptability, things like problem solving, critical thinking, data analysis, digital literacy, those kinds of things. Employers are saying that they are looking for those things now. And I think again, with education, if we can do a better job, I also think I'm going to go back to apprenticeships again and internships. Employers who are willing to take on students who can actually discover those things and realize that they don't have to take an immediate step to go to college, we are going to get the word out in a bigger way.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That misperception is one thing, but also access is another. We've talked a lot on the podcast about the digital divide. Not all schools are equipped with all the latest technology that they need maybe to share this with students. How do we bridge that gap? How do we make sure everybody has that option?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

So one of the things that I do talk about in the book is about the fact that we need to make our educational systems be more hybrid. One of the things that we've learned is, and one of the reasons why we decided to basically approach young people with their... Everything is through a cell phone these days. Kids have cell phones. 95% of them have cell phones, which is why we went mobile and decided to offer the things that we offer that way. I think one of the things that we all learned during COVID is that there has to be learning opportunities that are hybrid. And to be able to do that, we need to figure out how to be able to take some of the technology that we've developed and broaden it to

partner with school systems, to be able to offer those kinds of things so that every kid has this kind of opportunity.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you see progress being made in making that connection now? I asked this question before, but I'm really curious on where you see that career readiness, that K-12 being that starting point. Do you see a lot of people embracing it?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

Well, certainly just from our own experience, young people are embracing it, which was our first focus. But I would tell you that there are some amazing school systems out there, that have embraced it and are doing wonderful things. Like the school districts in Cajon Valley are doing amazing work. I spent some time in Tacoma, Washington. I would have to tell you those high schools out there are beyond impressive. We're doing the kinds of things that you and I have both been talking about on this podcast. In New York, one particular school system that is beyond impressive and it is catching on more and more.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What do you think is the biggest obstacle right now for this becoming just the way we do business moving forward with our kids?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

I think what we've got to understand is that this is an issue that everybody needs to be involved with. We have teachers, they put in an awful lot of time, they have an awful lot of things to deliver within a very short window. And now we are saying, okay, let's switch it up and let's do more. Let's figure out how to get career education exploration into all of what you already do. Parents have got to be involved in this and help. Teachers have to basically put pressure on the systems that they're within. It's school departments. It's employers too, and policymakers. We have to understand that this is an issue that one person is not going to be able to fix. Or one system is not going to be able to fix.

I was in a conversation last week with a school superintendent who talked about the fact that teachers today, they were in school and learning methods. I don't know if you ever took any teaching classes when you were in college. I did. There are certain courses that you take and there are certain things that you do to deliver the education that all of us are used to. That has got to change too. We can't expect teachers who have gone through the process that most people who have taken teachers courses have, can expect to now go into this new land and have everything be fabulous. It just doesn't work that way. We have to do a better job of incorporating that with the teachers that we work with and the budding teachers that we work with.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do you think there is a future still for four-year colleges? Do they have to adapt to this new focus on careers?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

I think they absolutely do. It's not just a question of, I know there are many conversations about return on investment and heaven knows college gives you so many things as you referred to before. It's not just

the fact that you come out of college with a career. There are a whole host of things that you can come out of college with. But I would say some adaptability and some of the way courses are described, or not even courses, but courses that are offered, not described, but offered, there could be a way to incorporate all of that within the system. And I think, again, there are many forward-thinking colleges that are out there doing those very things right now.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Jean, moving forward, how would you like people to embrace this and adapt this and use it in the school system?

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

Well first, I'd like them to go to our website at [asa.org](http://asa.org) and look at all the wonderful programs that we offer young people that are totally free, that can be used by students directly within a hybrid situation, et cetera that will enhance what's happening in classrooms. But also, please go out there and also on our website, look at my book, [Jean/Eddy/book](#). I hope you'll take a read of it, and I would love your comments on it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Jean, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.

Jean Eddy, American Student Assistance CEO:

It was a pleasure, as always.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Jean Eddy, the president and CEO of ASA, American Student Assistance. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thank you very much for listening.