

Teens say 'Charge!' to job at mall

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Opinion by Steve Symanovich

Hey teens, just imagine getting paid to go to the mall!

That's totally awesome! Or so say one in four American teen-agers who would rather work in a store this summer than, like, anyplace else.

This bit of intelligence comes from a new poll of high school and college students regarding top choices for summer employment. Fully 27 percent of teens polled said retail is the place to be. Whatever is fueling the rush -- the employee discount, the food court or the air conditioning -- the movement has knocked last year's king of the hill, "fast food and restaurant jobs," off its perch. Just 20 percent of teens rated the food-service trade as their top choice, despite free, unlimited access to french fries.

Yes, nearly half of the nation's youth -- count 'em, 47 percent -- dream of summer inextricably linked to shopping and food. We have Generation X. We have Generation Y. Introducing Generation Zzzz!

But let's not be too hard on these youngsters who are drawn to what they know best. We're not talking about a lifetime commitment. Many see these jobs as early springboards to success.

Anyone who has ever worked in a clothing store, for instance, can attest to the valuable lesson learned by making sure that no smalls or mediums intermingle with the larges. And, make no mistake, there's always some shopper out there waiting to mix things up. A clerk engages daily in a battle no less heroic than Order vs. Chaos.

The lack of appreciation for these positions might be generational. But imagine being young again and seeing your career rolling out at your feet like a carpet. Maybe you're an aging industrialist. How much sooner might you have attained fame and fortune if you, like young people today, had the opportunity to sit behind a microphone in a fast-food drive-up window instead of pouring molten metal into molds at your father's foundry?

But back to Generation Zzzz. An online jobs service, www.teens4hire.org, compiled its top 10 ranking of jobs after polling 6,000 teen-agers.

The results get more interesting the deeper you go. If you jumped to the conclusion we're raising a generation of consumption-driven, fast-food-addicted mall rats, you're only half right.

So what did the other half have to say?

In the No. 3 slot, 9 percent ranked arts, entertainment and media as the best way to earn while they learn. Why fiddle with a deep fryer when you can wile away the summer months as a performance artist, Hollywood heart throb or network news anchor?

Trailing that glamorous category was No. 4-ranked sports and recreation, with 6 percent. These teens believe in the principles of "sound mind, sound body" and "no pain, no gain." Those who land jobs as lifeguards get the added bonus of plentiful dates.

Health services ranked No. 5, with 5 percent of teens well-positioned to aid those people who injure themselves in sports and recreation or during their plentiful dates.

Talk about a true calling: The No. 6 position, with 4 percent, was a job in customer service or call center. This group represents people who need people, who are the luckiest people of all.

Jobs in education, training and libraries ranked No. 7, with 3 percent of teens seemingly unwilling to accept that school's out.

In the No. 8 spot, computer software jobs also garnered 3 percent -- although slightly less when worked out to 10 decimal places and run through the Excel program.

Office/clerical rolled in at No. 9 with 2 percent, attracting teens who can't bear to see things out of alphabetical order.

And rounding out the list at No. 10: 1 percent of teenagers polled ranked accounting as their to-die-for, summer dream job.

Maybe fast food doesn't sound so bad after all.