PERSIST

The Parent Guide

A short guide to the conversation after The Four Roads

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You just walked the four roads. This guide holds the four questions, what each road actually costs, and the conversation to have with your student this week. Every quotation is from *Persist: Your Destiny Awaits*.

Start here

> Your child's path should be informed by who they actually are, not by what looks impressive on a graduation lawn sign. Your job as a parent is not to choose the road for them. Your job is to hold the standard while they find it.

The standard

The standard I hold in my house is this. You are going to do something. You are going to contribute. You are going to be educated in some form, whether that is a four-year university, a community college, a trade school, the military, an apprenticeship, or a path we have not named yet, and while you are doing that, I will support you. Education, mentorship, accountability, a roof, food, the truth when you need it.

That is the standard. Not the school. The standard.

The four questions

Apply these to any road your student is considering. Write yes, no, or unsure for each one.

1. Does this fit my personality?
2. Does it fit my season?
3. Does it fit my access?
4. Does it fit the standard I have committed to live by?

If all four answers are yes, the road is yours.

If any one of the four is no, the road may still be available, but it will require deliberate building of the gap before you take the next step.

What each road actually costs

Figures are from Persist: Your Destiny Awaits, published 2026, and reflect United States figures at the time of writing. Costs change every year. Treat these as the starting point for a conversation, not a quote.

Road One: The Residential Four-Year University

Tuition, fees, room, board, books, transportation, and incidentals at a public four-year university average roughly $28,000 to $35,000 per year for in-state students, jumping to $50,000 to $60,000 per year for out-of-state students. Private nonprofit four-year universities run $60,000 to $90,000 per year before financial aid. Across four years, the all-in cost ranges from roughly $110,000 to over $360,000.

Who it does not fit. This road is often a poor match for students whose primary motivation is parental expectation rather than internal alignment.

Road Two: The Military and Trade Path

Military enlistment costs the service member nothing in tuition and produces a salary, housing, and benefits from the first day of service. Apprenticeships are typically paid positions, often starting around $35,000 to $45,000 per year and rising to $70,000 or more by completion. Vocational programs range from roughly $5,000 to $20,000 total. Across the board, this road carries the lowest financial risk of the four.

Who it does not fit. This pathway is a poor fit for students whose chosen careers genuinely require a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Road Three: The Entrepreneurial Creative Path

The financial cost ranges from almost nothing to substantial, depending on the specific path. What this road costs in dollars is often less than the residential four-year university. What it costs in psychological tolerance for uncertainty is often much higher.

Who it does not fit. Students who are being pushed onto this road because their family cannot afford the alternatives, when in fact a more structured path would serve them better.

Road Four: The Nontraditional Credential Stack

A community college associate's degree followed by transfer for the final two years of a bachelor's often saves $20,000 to $50,000. A working-adult degree completed while employed, with employer tuition reimbursement, can produce a credential at minimal personal cost. The financial flexibility of this road is one of its strongest features.

Who it does not fit. Students who need the residential experience for developmental or social reasons.

The conversation

Do this within the week, while the roads are fresh.

> Sit with your student. Ask them to share their answers to questions three and five only. The other answers are for them, not for you. Then share your own. Tell them which road you took at their age and whether it fit you. Tell them the road you wish you had been able to take and what was in the way. Most importantly, tell them what you would have needed in order to walk a different road if you had wanted to.
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> This conversation does two things at once. It hands your child your real story instead of a polished version. And it shows them that you have a story too, which makes it safer for them to write their own.

Four ways to keep it open

- Ask for only the two answers named above. The rest belong to your student.
- Go second on nothing. Share your own road before you evaluate theirs.
- Name the cost out loud. Money is a fact, not a verdict, and students can handle facts.
- End with a next step, not a decision. One call, one visit, one question to research.

Write it down

Where your student wrote no or unsure, what would have to change for that answer to become yes? Write the next conversation you need to have, and with whom.

For you: the Return Audit

If you are a parent, a guardian, an aunt, an uncle, a mentor, or a friend reading this book to support a young person in your life, this exercise is for you. Answer in writing.

1. Name the credential, degree, certification, or personal educational goal that you set aside. Write it down. Be specific. Say it out loud once you have written it.
2. Why did you stop? Be honest. Family. Money. Work. Health. Burnout. A path that turned out to be wrong. The wrong school. The wrong moment. Whatever the reason, name it without judgment.
3. Is that reason still operating in your life today, in the same form it had then? Almost always, the answer is no. Some part of the original reason has changed. Notice the change.
4. What would it actually cost you, in dollars and in time, to come back? Look it up. Do not estimate from twenty years of cultural messaging. Most programs cost less than people expect.
5. Who in your life would help you come back if you decided to start? Name them. Send one of them a text this week and tell them you are thinking about it. Just the conversation begins the work.

And then tell them

> Some of the most powerful conversations a parent can have with a high school senior begin with the parent telling their own unfinished story. Not as a cautionary tale. As a real story. Tell your child about the road you left. Tell them why you stopped. Tell them what you have wondered about ever since.
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> If you do decide to come back, even partially, your child will see something they will carry for the rest of their life.

Your next step

- Take the free EQ Quick Check with your student
- Take the free DISC Quick Check
- Read Persist: Your Destiny Awaits
- Plan the next step with Dr. Thurman, OTD

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