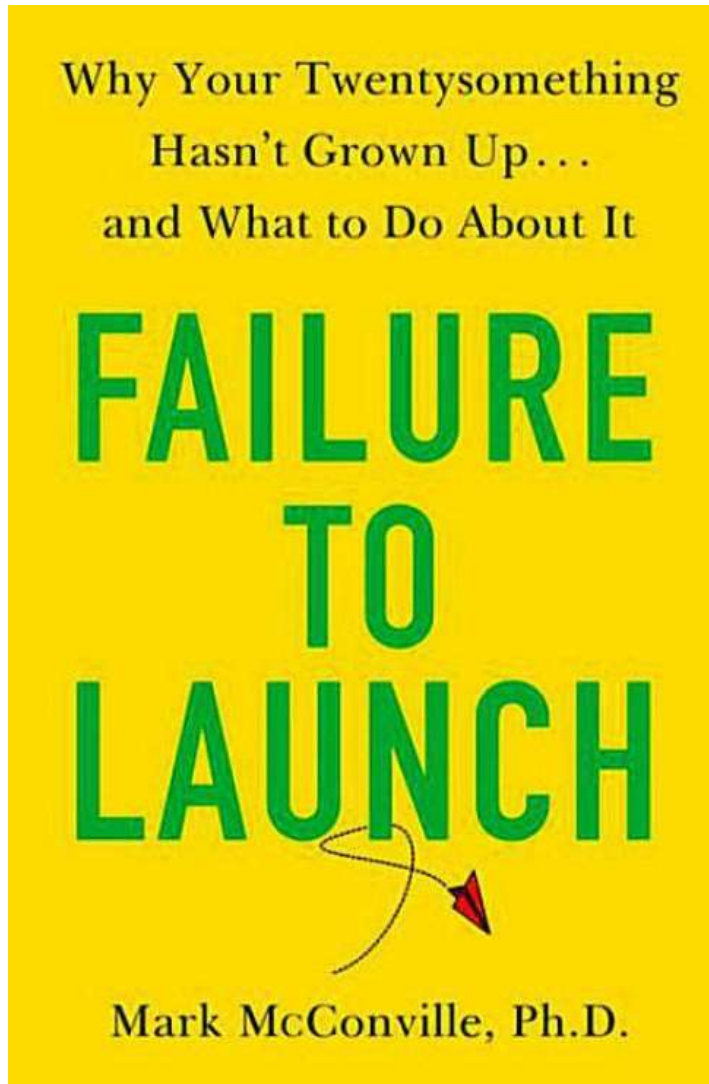


## Author helps answer ‘What went wrong?’

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*“Failure to Launch: Why Your Twentysomething Hasn’t Grown Up ... and What to Do About It” by Mark McConville. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2020. 320 pages, \$27 (hardcover).*



“As a moderately successful high school student in an affluent inner-ring suburb, Nick once seemed like he had a preordained path in life,” Mark McConville writes near the beginning of “Failure to Launch: Why Your Twentysomething Hasn’t Grown Up ... and What to Do About It,” his new treatise on a phenomenon that is all too familiar to many American families these days. “High school to college to job, just like his parents. And Nick had tried college. But once he got there, his promising trajectory stalled, turning into a nine-month binge of partying and missed classes. After two semesters, he was placed on academic probation and required to take a leave of absence from university.”

“Like many young people in similar circumstances, Nick moved back in with his parents, setting up an ‘apartment’ for himself in the basement of their suburban home, ostensibly to ensure his privacy and simulate independence,” McConville continues. “His parents, initially frustrated and angry with Nick for his college flameout, resigned themselves to his change in status and committed to helping him get his new life on track.”

If this scenario seems even vaguely familiar to you, this is a book you need to read. McConville does an exemplary job of describing how many individuals and their families got to this particular moment in their evolution. Similarly, he lays out, in excruciating detail, what it is like to be in a perpetual stage of extended adolescence and arrested development. Honestly, as I was reading through the first half of the narrative, I simply found myself nodding in agreement on virtually every page. It was only when the author finally arrived at his proposed solutions to the problem that he truly did pique my interest.

In essence, McConville provides a roadmap for finding a way out of the self-defeating behaviors that have a way of becoming deeply entrenched in the psyche when an adolescent fails to transition effectively to adulthood. He draws extensively from his professional practice to formulate specific strategies and techniques that can help both the “transitioner” as well as their parents or the other adults in their life to successfully negotiate this critical metamorphosis. It becomes readily apparent after the first few pages that McConville knows what he is talking about. Consider the following

from “Skill 3: Becoming Relevant: Emerging Adults Must Find a Sense of Direction,” the sixth chapter and one of the most instructive:

“In addition to holding environments, a second factor influencing a transitioner’s sense of direction (or lack thereof) is the modeling of adulthood that the transitioner experienced earlier in life. As I’ve said previously, every child, for the most part unconsciously, develops a ‘theory’ of what adulthood is like. This theory is inferred from living with adults, watching them go about their daily lives, and drawing implicit conclusions concerning what it all means – and what it would be like to be one of them. Do adults have fun? Do they seem to worry all the time? Do they seem to like what they do, even if what they do in the eyes of a child is rather mysterious? Do they have friends? Do they play? Do they seem to love each other?”

Structurally, the manuscript consists of 12 chapters arranged in three major sections: “Part I: Where are the Adults? Why Growing Up Isn’t What It Used to Be,” “Part II: How to Adult: The Developmental Skills Needed in Emerging Adulthood” and “Part III: How Parents Can Help: What You Can (and Can’t) Do for Your Kid.” McConville also includes an Appendix, “Getting Professional Help,” which describes the options available for those who need more thorough help in coming to terms with their individual situations.

Most parents who read “Failure to Launch” will no doubt find the last half of the book to be the most enlightening and useful – especially if they find themselves scratching their heads and wondering “What went wrong?” Here McConville outlines the steps they can take to assist their struggling progeny to find a way out of the self-imposed prison in which they find themselves. This roadmap begins with acquiring a more cogent understanding of the “inner world” of someone who is in the process of “growing up,” and concludes with developing a working set of guidelines and principles that will help them make the critical parenting decisions that will provide their transitioner with the correct balance of challenge and support.

A senior faculty member at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, McConville is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Cleveland, Ohio; he specializes in adult, adolescent, emerging adult and family therapy. Moreover, he serves as a consulting psychologist to Hathaway Brown School and University School. He has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Duquesne University and is widely recognized as an authority in his discipline. This is his second book; his first being “Adolescence: Psychotherapy and the Emergent Self,” which won the Nevis Award for Original Contribution to Gestalt Theory in 1995.

One of the many features of this book that impressed me was the sense that McConville truly understands what it can be like to have a child whose development seems to stall before reaching the potential they know is present. This comes through at various points within the text – and most profoundly near the conclusion:

“I’m not naïve. I know it’s difficult to commit yourself to a warm, playful, engaging moment of interaction when your transitioner is in the middle of flunking out of school or sleeping past noon or getting fired from another job. I also know full well that struggling transitioners often don’t accept their parents’ gestures of love and acceptance graciously. Frequently they are feeling so disappointed and angry with themselves that they can’t imagine that you are feeling anything different. And to mitigate their presumption that you are rejecting them, they sometimes reject you first. My message is simple: Don’t give up. Whatever else you do, don’t give up.”

Good advice that many readers know is easier said than done. If you can relate on any level to the subject matter at hand, you really need to rush to your local bookstore (virtual or online) and pick up a copy of “Failure to Launch.” It just might change the way you think. Highly recommended.

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