



Wants and Needs and Kids and Us

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It is always worthwhile to talk about wants versus needs, how to tell the difference, and when the difference matters. It is always worthwhile to talk about our kids.

Most kids want a little quiet in their day, but some kids need significant periods without noise or movement or visual stimulation. Their sensory systems are easily overwhelmed. In the same way, most kids want activity, but some kids are lost without almost constant, whole-body movement.

Many kids want thick fantasy books with flowing prose to fill their time, but some kids need books with fewer words, shorter sentences, and concrete ideas. They need books about things that are directly and clearly related to the lives they lead and the lives they want to lead.

Most kids want the enrichment provided through art, but some kids need music. It's the only language they understand. Some kids need to feel and manipulate objects to learn. Shop and sculpture classes are the only places where the world makes sense. Some kids need to play with images and colors to interpret their world.

Kids like structure in their lives, but some kids fall apart without rigid routine. The smallest variation can throw their entire being into chaos. When these kids are provided with a stable platform and secure rules to anchor their lives, growth can occur. Requiring these kids to always say hello and always shake hands when greeting others can powerfully decrease social isolation. In a similar way, math's rigorous structure gives some kids a safe world that connects to reality. Attempting to "soften" math steals these kid's lifeline while destroying math's integrity.

Despite social pressure to conform, most kids want uncommon moments. Some kids need a consistently weird environment where their social and intellectual quirks are tolerated

and ignored. Kids that are too eccentric for normal society will find their crowd, either in a theater or other activity group, or away from school in an unsafe context.

Most kids go with the flow and find little difficulty with normal school activities, but some kids need the relevance, satisfaction and, yes, money from a job. Starting at age twelve or so, these kids need an appropriate place to plant, nurture, harvest and market the fruit of their labor. In most parts of the US, giving these kids a job is against the law and completely unaffordable. We need to get back to where every contractor has a kid riding shotgun.

Businesses want workers to perform daily tasks. Businesses need problem solvers with uncommon skills and eccentric viewpoints to create and maintain a competitive advantage.

Society wants citizens. Society needs disruptive visionaries to keep our culture vibrant and fresh.

I just attended a talk by Temple Grandin ([The Autistic Brain](#)). She pointed out that she visits high-tech companies and she visits adult group homes. Often, she sees the same people in both facilities. When the unusual kids are treated well and brought into society, they become productive and even exemplary citizens. When the outliers are sidelined, their gifts go unused.

We want our kids to be happy. We need our kids to find their place in the world.

Phil Rink is a [Professional Engineer and Inventor](#), and he writes [Jimi & Isaac Books](#) for Kids