

The College Toolkit

Things to Know to Ensure a Successful College Experience.

College is much more than which school you're going to attend, the admission process, writing essays, and the uncertainty. It's about becoming a *start-up adult* where you'll learn more about yourself than you may want to know, like sometimes feeling as if you're taking ten steps forward, and then when you least expect it, five steps back. Yet, it can be the most rewarding, memorable, and glorious time of your life. ***So how prepared are you for the trip?***

Know Yourself.

How can you lead or manage what you can't see? Whenever you're making a *BIG life decision – like selecting a college and major –* you need to know yourself: your strengths, weaknesses, what's working in your life, and what's not. Do a personal life diagnosis just as a car mechanic would on a car. "What makes you tick" is not something found inside a fortune cookie. The answers lie within YOU! The QUIZZES on this site may help you with this.

Here are a few other questions for consideration:

Who am I? Why am I here? What's important to me? What difference can I make?

How easily can you answer these questions? If you say, "not easily", don't lose hope. Most young people can't (nor, for that matter, can many adults). We don't live in a culture that actively promotes personal improvement. Sure, we talk about it, but I haven't seen a Life 101 Course offered in our schools. We need to start asking these questions in elementary school. Of course, the answers will change over the years, yet the "seed" once planted, will germinate over time.

ACTION STEP: *Take assessments and go buy a journal!*

Perhaps your school offers assessments and an aptitude test that would be right for you. Assessments are the foundation of Invent Your Life programs because otherwise we're really just "guessing" as to someone's abilities, interests, and personality. The Gallup Organization offers a strengths assessment, which can be purchased at strengthsquest.com. You won't get interpretive data or an in-person feedback, yet it's a good first step. And go buy a journal (or set up a journal file on your computer) to record your answers to the above questions. It's a great place to write down goals

and from time to time, reread them. Who knows, this could be the beginning of your "life story". Do the thinking, and let your fingers do the talking!

Know the Big Picture.

How far into the future can you visualize? Our students take a self-inquiry assessment called Career and Life Preference Questionnaire that asks questions such as, "Do you prefer to live where you are now or would you prefer to move far away?" "Do you prefer to live in a large urban area or small city?" "Do you like hot weather or cold weather?" "Do you want to make lots of money or is money not a motivator for you?" "Do you want to be the boss or do you want to be an employee?" "Do you need lots of creative expression or is routine, repetitive work more desirable?"

Just because you are young doesn't mean that you can't have strong preferences and act on them. I'm working with Devin, who's 26, on choosing a career path. He prefers to stay close to home, as he's a real family man. His girlfriend's mom owns an investment company in Texas and they are seriously discussing Devin joining the firm, which means he (they) would relocate to Texas. He spent a week shadowing his potential mother-in-law and admittedly was excited about the business and opportunity. But even though he was not enamored about moving to Texas, he felt he *should* consider taking the position, just in case nothing else came through locally (and so far, nothing has.) He's now living with his parent's and even though they have a great relationship, Devin is very ready to move on.

I inquired, "But why would you move to Texas when you really don't want to?" His answer was, "Well, what if nothing else comes through. I'm stuck living at home and not bringing in a paycheck?" A good point.

Bottom line? Fast forward a few years and look at a likely scenario. Once Devin establishes his contact base in Texas, gets married and begins a family, his options to move back home are likely to diminish. He would have built a strong contact base in the wealth management business, which could be tough to leave. (By the way, Devin's assessment profile indicated he is VERY motivated by money). Every time he goes "back home" he notices how much he misses his folks, but his family – his wife and children – are with him in Texas.

ACTION STEP: Study your career and life preferences NOW and make a list of "non-negotiable" wants, and stick to it.

You would be amazed at what happens in life when you're TRUE TO YOURSELF. Making choices isn't easy, but undue fear can mess up your decision process and cloud your thinking! Just do it!

Know The Importance of Selecting a College Major.

So you're definitely going to major in Psychology. Either that or Chemistry. Or maybe Cinematography?

Sound familiar? But no big deal as the first two years are spent on core classes anyway. Hmmm...

Okay, don't get me started... I am AMAZED at how little planning goes into one of the most life-changing decisions a student can make – choosing a college and college

major. According to a study by the United States Department of Labor, we as Americans, make seven major decisions in our lifetime, five of which are begun in college: Vocation, lifestyle preferences, relationships, religion, and location. The two not made then are investments and retirement.

I recently looked at a student's high school College Handbook and was amazed to find just a few lines dedicated to the topic of selecting a college major – out of many pages dedicated to lots of valuable information on the college process, PSAT, SAT, ACT and so on. Yet to find so little guidance on what you're going to study *when you get there* seems off-balance, although not surprising. The cart seems to be before the horse.

Many young people I've worked with have shown abilities, interests, and passion in several specific areas – areas that can influence their choice of college. Take my son for example, who is a junior in high school. The assessment process uncovered a very strong design, engineering, and architecture profile, plus strong musical abilities. His love for music could influence where he attends school; for example, Georgia Tech offers a graduate program in Music Technology, a degree he may have never considered without concrete knowledge of the blending of his abilities.

On the other hand, he may choose to teach drafting at a high school. What matters is that he finds out his innate talents, interests, and passion and pursues them in a field that he's passionate about.

Bottom line? Take time to learn about your talents.

Kids are so busy these days with studying (they are under enormous pressure to make good grades), extracurricular activities, sports, and community involvement – all necessary activities to get into the top colleges – yet, we seem to be overlooking the importance of making time for introspection, the process of finding out who we are – our abilities, personality, interests, and passions. Playing Pin-the-tail-on-the-major doesn't work!

ACTION STEPS:

- Learn more about yourself: discover how your abilities, personality, interests and passion can influence your choice of majors. Think about it...
- Study college course catalogs to get an idea of what's offered and what piques your interest. Think about it...
- Talk to college graduates and ask why they chose their major, whether or not it helped in getting their first job out of college, and if they were pleased with their choice of major. Think about what they say...
- Conduct informational interviews with people in your community that are in professions you find interesting. Think about what they say...

Remember: It's harder to win the race if you don't get off to a good start.

End of story!