

## WOO HOO, I GRADUATED! ... BUT, NOW WHAT?

For a total of almost 16 years, students tirelessly and tenaciously press towards this infamous end goal of holding a college degree. Lower School tends to be fun and a breeze, Middle School is hardly anyone's favorite, and then, "All I have to do is graduate and get into college." Done; check. Four years and who knows how many dollars later, you're receiving your second piece of paper and ready to take on the world!

But where in the world can one make valid use of their college degree, be financially stable, actually enjoy the adventure that is "adulthood," explore their personal interests, set themselves up for a successful career, and grow as both a person and a professional?

The right answers are endless. And because there are so many directions to potentially go in, making the "right" move comes down to making some decisions. Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself:

- **+WHAT'S ON MY TO-DO LIST?** You might want to attend Graduate School, start your own business, move to a different city, travel abroad for a year, work for a company you've always wanted to work for, or anything else. But if you don't set out your goals, there won't be any criteria for you to measure your progress against.
- **+WHAT DO I WANT TO DO FIRST?** It is so easy to feel as if you won't be able to accomplish something unless you do so right now. But when you think about how long a lifetime really is, you recognize that what makes going on with life worth it are the items still waiting to be checked off. Prioritization allows you to give your 100% towards something versus giving only 20% to five different tasks at one time.
- **+DO I WANT TO WORK FOR MYSELF OR FOR SOMEONE ELSE?** The reality is that the majority of us will, at least at first, have to work for someone else. But if you see yourself one day being over your own brand, company, or business, you don't necessarily have to wait 10+ years to jumpstart things. I talk below about my own experience with freelancing as well as some of the pros and cons.
- **+WHERE DO I SEE MYSELF IN FIVE-EIGHT YEARS, AND HOW CAN I START HEADING IN THAT DIRECTION NOW?** If there is something you would like to do, especially if it's apart from what you are currently doing, making the time and allotting the energy to tap into it on the side now can be valuable (even

if not in profit). It is an investment in yourself and in your craft, and side activities can provide balance to your full-time position.

- **+AM I HAPPY WITH MY PLAN?** This question, in particular, should be asked on a continuous basis because life will change, and you will change. It is important to have a plan, but it's even more important to be flexible with it, if need be. Check in with yourself, be real with yourself, and give yourself some credit; if you feel good about where you are and what you're doing, and if you're doing it for you, then you're doing alright.

## AS FAR AS FREELANCING GOES

I, just as anyone else out here, am still figuring out this whole “adulting” thing. I graduated six months ago, practically went right into working full-time for a Public Relations firm, recognized that the work I was doing was not doing too much for me, had a couple of years before I planned to attend Graduate School, and was pretty set on my dreams and wanting to work towards them at all times. So, I ended up creating and launching my own, personal brand through which I could further the skills I am most passionate about.

A professor of mine had once mentioned to me that she could see me doing some sort of freelance work. But it wasn't until I recognized how rare it was to come out of college and get paid to do something you absolutely love to do that I realized something:

Just because someone isn't paying you to hold your dream position right now does not mean you can't still do the work and hold the title. No one can tell you that you aren't what you want to be.

I knew that I wanted to be a Creative Director, and I knew that no one was going to stop me. So, now I'm a Creative Director, and a Strategic Planner, and a Graphic Designer, and a Writer, and whatever else I choose to be--“Creative Strategist,” for short. Under my brand, MLM Creative, I help my clients to activate the phenomenon that is creativity. By coordinating ideation with strategy, MLM Creative creates stories worth telling.

Freelancing is freeing, but as with anything else, there are both pros and cons. The pros? Because it's my business, I'm able to work under my own terms and on my own time; the work I produce is released under my name versus a company name; and I am

gaining experience in what I care about while enhancing the related skills. The cons? Freelance work does not come with a salary, so for now, it's something that I have to do on the side of a more "official" job; projects are often not consistent; and clients can be a hit, or a miss, or anything in between. But all in all, I'm very happy with my decision to freelance and with my brand.

Freelance work certainly does not work for everyone, but thus far, it has worked nicely for me. And I look forward to seeing where all I am able to take it! Feel free to visit my website (<https://www.miahlm.com/>) to learn more about my brand and view a selection of my work!