

# Finding Your Way

One of the challenges facing quite a few people in the early to mid 20's is an uncomfortableness of not knowing what to do with their lives, combined with a feeling that they should know. The feeling of being a bit lost and directionless can be hard to bear sometimes. But add to this a belief that there is something wrong with you for being in this situation, and life can be very difficult.

Navigating out of this situation takes a two pronged strategy. Part one is to normalise the situation. There is nothing wrong with you for feeling unsure about what to do with your life. Some people take longer than others to find their thing. There is no right and wrong. Being gentle and accepting of yourself is a good start in terms of moving forward.

The second part of the process is to recognise that the answer to the question, "What should I do with my life?" will be found through a form of trial and error, rather than by sitting and thinking. Adults learn through reflecting on experiences, identifying the lessons that emerge from this reflection process, putting these insights into practice, and then reflecting on what comes out of this new experience. This is called the Experiential Learning Cycle, or Kolb Cycle (named after David Kolb, who first wrote about this process).

Each of these steps are important in the learning process.

Firstly you need to be doing something in order to create opportunities to discover what you like, what you are good at, what you don't like, and ultimately what sorts of work (and work environments) you would and would not like to do in your next job. If you don't do something (anything) then you won't have any experiences (data) to reflect on, and this makes progress very difficult. Also, doing nothing can lead to social isolation, and to feeling bad about yourself. The sadness that can result from this can add another layer of hardship to an already difficult situation.

Acting, however, is not sufficient. You need to take time to reflect on this experience. Some people reflect best by keeping a diary or journal. Others find talking a good way to reflect. The goal is to recall experiences – what do you like about your current job or study (and what are you good at – these are often the same thing), and what do you not like. Try to be specific. For example, focus on what aspects of a task might be most enjoyable, rather than simply naming the whole job as something you liked or didn't like.

Step three is to identify the lessons that emerge from this reflection process. This involves noticing recurring themes or patterns that might help you identifying deeper truths about yourself. For example, if you notice through your reflections that the aspect of past jobs that you have enjoyed the most are the contacts with people, then this insight (that you get energy and pleasure from regular people contact) can help you when choosing your next job.

Lastly, act on these insights. Can you identify some paid or voluntary work (or perhaps an internship of some sort), a hobby, or a course of study that gives you more of the things you like and are good at, and less of the things that you don't like? The key with this stage is not to see this as a search for the perfect answer (your "thing"). Rather, the goal is to take another step – ideally a step to a role that is more closely aligned to your skills, interests, abilities and passion.

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