

So, You Graduated. Now What?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – May 21, 2018



School is predictable. You have some choices, but mostly once you make a choice such as which diploma track you would like to pursue, the rest of the plan is pretty much mapped out. Even though you might know what your next steps will be: college, job, trade school, or the military, after graduation there won't be a nice map to follow. After graduation,

you will have to map out your future and the task can be daunting. Below, I have included a few kernels of advice to 2018 graduates.

Pursue your dreams.

This one can be tough for some of you. In *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes, there is a character named Diondra who is a talented artist, but her dad wants her to pursue basketball. She has to decide whether she is going to do what she loves or do what her dad wants her to do. Some parents will even refuse to support you financially if you choose a path they don't like. Remember, this is your life and you are the one that will have to study that major or go to that job day in and day out, not your parents. Would you rather do what you love or be miserable, but make your parents happy? One reality of being an adult is realizing your choices might not always make your parents happy, but it might be the best choice for your life.

Create an organizational system.

Regardless of your next step in life, you will need to be organized and take responsibility for meeting deadlines. Your teachers won't be around to remind you five times to complete a task. You will have to find a way that works best for you. That might be post-it notes, calendar reminders, mapping out a plan in a journal and reviewing it regularly. An organizational system that might work for your friend, might not work for you. Explore a few options before settling in on one.

Take advantage of opportunities, even if they scare you.

My one regret, when I was younger, was not taking advantage of two opportunities to travel and study abroad. I was afraid to go to another country and I didn't have much support from my inner circle. Now, I am over this fear, but this isn't feasible in my life at the moment. I missed out on an opportunity to learn about other cultures and become a global citizen. After graduation, you will be in the prime of your life. You will have opportunities that will enrich your life and shape who you are, but only if you take advantage of them. Don't let fear or friends or family members hold your back from opportunities.

Make smart financial decisions.

I have lived in Indiana all of my life and my parents were strict when I was growing up. I had made up my mind that I was getting out of this state for college. Then my father, informed me he had earned the Purple Heart during the Vietnam War which meant my college tuition would be paid for if I went to school in the state where he was a resident. My dad told me he would support my decision to stay in Indiana or to leave. Although I was 17 when I started college, this is one of the first real adult decisions I made. I decided to attend Purdue so I would not be in a financial hole. You don't want to begin your career with a mountain of debt, although some debt may be unavoidable regardless of what path you pursue after high school. What is avoidable is frivolous spending or signing up for credit cards you don't need. If you can't pay for it, you probably don't need it.

Persevere through challenges.

Even if high school was a breeze for you, life after high school could be different. I graduated from high school with an academic honors diploma, but I struggled with my GPA during my first couple of years in college. I had to advocate for myself during my freshman and sophomore year. I had to ask for help. I had to find a mentor. I wanted to give up, but I didn't. Whatever your course is, speak up for yourself when you are struggling and find a person or people who can support you as you persevere.

Practice self care.

Being a grown up is hard. What falls through the cracks many times is taking care of yourself. You have to take care of yourself physically and mentally. You won't be able to pursue and accomplish your dreams if your health is failing or if you are not mentally well. Build in time in your schedule to relax and enjoy your next stage in life.

This is not an exhaustive list, but hopefully these tips will give you the confidence to believe you can be successful after high school as you enter the world of adulthood.