

“How Optimism Has Paved My Road to Success”

Word Count: 767

I have never known what I wanted to “be.” I have always dreaded having to come up with an answer when someone asks me what I want to do when I’m older. It’s a question I remember hearing as early as elementary school, and even then, I found the concept of picking just one thing to be a little strange. While other kids said they wanted to be teachers, firefighters, or even professional athletes, I never seemed to know how to respond. As I grew older and conversations about my future became more and more real, I was left feeling progressively more lost.

The first time I remember being asked to seriously consider my future plans was in 8th grade. It seemed so soon to think about this sort of thing. I was just 13 after all; what did I know about being an adult? I was told that this was okay, that I had plenty of time to make some decisions. So, I spent the next couple years focused on the things I loved - school, sports, music, friends, and more - while continuing to explore my other interests however I could. But those sentiments that I had “plenty of time” soon began to change. Once my junior year rolled around I was told that I needed to “figure it out.” When my senior year arrived and I was still unsure of what I wanted to do, I felt hopelessly behind. This sense of uncertainty began to consume me, made worse as I watched my peers begin to announce, one after another, their own plans for after high school. I realized I was sabotaging myself with comparisons and negative thinking - two lurking thieves of joy.

It’s an inherently human trait to fear the unknown. It’s only natural to be wary of something you are unfamiliar with, and it is often a good thing to be cautious. This becomes a problem however, when one becomes paralyzed by an irrational fear of failure, disappointment, or otherwise standing out. While I’m not suggesting a complete abandonment of practicality, it is interesting to consider why uncertainty tends to be met with such pessimism. Why is it that

people are so often reluctant to greet uncharted waters with curiosity and enthusiasm? Why isn't it more common to lead a life of positivity and vigor, ready to take on the challenges each day presents? I realized that if these weren't going to be the norms, then maybe it was time to be the exception. Learning to greet the unknown with optimism, as so many are unwilling to do, has allowed me to reach previously unimaginable levels of success, a word I believe to be synonymous with happiness.

Shifting this mindset was not an easy process. It took time, dedication, and mental strain, but I soon began to see progress. Even in the most stressful period in my life, I found that I was feeling more motivated than I had in a long time. I dedicated myself to working on college and scholarships applications, which yielded great results. I began to once again attack my studies with the vigor I had when I was younger, and I felt more confident in school as a result. I was having fun learning again, and I felt happier than I had in a long time. I didn't realize the successes I was depriving myself from while spending so much time focused on the wrong things. While the stresses of this period in my life still leave me feeling down at times, I am more excited for the future than I have ever been.

So, you might be wondering, what do I want to be when I grow up? To be completely honest, I still don't know. And I'm okay with that. While many of my peers seem certain of where they want to go and what they want to do, my post-high school picture is still very much unclear. There was a time where this would have bothered me, tremendously. Now however, I find that I have not only come to accept this notion, but also appreciate it. While I am facing my greatest uncertainty thus far, I have a lifetime ahead of me to figure it out. Isn't that a beautiful thing? As the great John Lennon once said, "It will all be okay in the end, and if it's not okay, it's not the end." So what if you don't know where you're headed? If my journey is any testament, all it takes is a dash of optimism to find success in the face of uncertainty.