After Grad: Work of College?

Life after high school

Choosing a path to pursue after graduation can leave you feeling directionless-. Here are some factors to consider, whether you're thinking of hitting the books or the job market after graduating.

Comparing options

Choosing between work and college (or balancing a combination of both) is more than an economic comparison. It affects your entire lifestyle and can determine where you live and how you spend your time.

Work vs. college

Expenses

- **Work:** Working after high school means you start making money right away
- **College:** When you factor in tuition, student loans and interest, getting a degree can be a major debt decision

Savings goals

- **Work:** Without tuition or student loans to pay, your money can go toward other experiences and savings goals like a car, a house or a trip
- **College:** It's difficult to save money while in school—paying off student loans may put your larger savings goals on hold

Time investment

- **Work:** Depending on the job and on the industry, it may take months or years to work your way up in your career
- **College:** Depending on your field, your time investment can range from a few months of classes to 8+ years of academic study

Lifestyle

- **Work:** Time outside of your work schedule is yours to do with as you please—generally, this means more time and flexibility to pursue interests
- **College:** Time outside of your class schedule is often eaten up by assignments and exam prep—generally, this means less time to pursue outside interests

Learning

- **Work:** Learning on the job is often fast-paced—the experience helps you develop practical skills that are difficult to simulate in the classroom
- **College:** Learning in school is often more comprehensive than learning on the job—your knowledge base may grow beyond the requirements of a single job

Networking

- **Work:** Work can lead to meeting peers, friends, mentors and colleagues
- **College:** School can lead to meeting peers, friends, mentors and colleagues

Career opportunities

- **Work:** Work experience looks great on a resumé and can lead to future employment opportunities—however, you may get to a point where certification or formal training is needed in order to advance any further
- **College:** Generally, further education provides access to higher-paying jobs—a degree can enhance both your resumé and your reputation with a prospective employer

Common obstacles

- **Fear of failure:** Just the thought of making the wrong choice may paralyze your decision-making process. Remember that no matter what you choose, it will be a learning experience.
- **Lack of direction:** How can you make a big decision if you don't even know what you want? If you're feeling lost, give yourself permission to explore your interests and to create time for self-reflection.
- **External expectations:** It's easy for our decisions to be swayed by what our family and friends want for us. Remember that you are shaping your future and your experience—do what is best for yourself.
- **Financial stress:** Financial stress can make some options seem out of reach, but don't write them off completely. How can you make it work? What are you willing to take on (or give up)? What resources are available to you?

Making your way

- **Get to know yourself:** What are your strengths and limitations? What do you want out of life? What sort of environment do you thrive in? Journaling and career quizzes are a couple of ways to get you thinking about your future.

- **Feed your curiosity:** What careers are you interested in? How can you start exploring your areas of interest? Do some research to see if there are conferences, lectures, meet-ups or presentations that match your interests. Reach out to those already in the industry with any questions you may have. Keep an eye out for relevant volunteer opportunities.
- **Design your own path:** Grab a paper and pencil and map out a couple of different paths you could take after high school. Which option excites you most? Which option provides the most stability? Which option allows you to adapt if and when your interests change? Design a path that gives you the flexibility to adapt to change and the opportunity to explore.

Seeking guidance: A school counselor or career coach can help you design a path that meets your goals. They may also recommend additional career tools and resources available to you.

Sources: Investopedia, Brandman University