

Moving Forward: Advice and Guidance for the New Graduate



By Dr. Chance T. Eaton

It is graduation season, and I've been fortunate to attend several celebrations this year. I find graduations – whether high school or higher education – fun to observe as the new graduates reflect on their successes and relationships and imagine what the future holds for them. Included in these events are a variety of people providing advice and guidance, sharing their personal mistakes and successes and hoping to create positive momentum for the next generation.

Even though this abundance of guidance may be annoying – or even sound cheesy when it comes from an uncle who feels the need to say something like “the world is your oyster” – it is still important. So I can't help myself and would like to contribute to the thousands of others offering advice and guidance to our next generation at this time of celebration.

Practice responsibility. One of the most amazing things about our species is our ability to choose. Between every stimulus and our response is a gap, and this gap is where free will exists. We have the power to choose from moment to moment. When we fail to choose and don't take responsibility for our actions, we become victims to our situation, our past and other people.

Whether you care or not, this life is designed by you through the choices you make. No one can articulate this concept as well as Dr. Viktor Frankl, who was a prisoner in the concentration camps. Despite having lost his loved ones and having been contained within the hell of the camps, he said, “Everything can be taken from man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances – to choose one's own way.”

Practice intentionality. Life contains a natural chaos and randomness. Especially in this day and age, we are faced with increasing uncertainty, volatility, complexity and ambiguity. The one ingredient that will help you simplify the noise is to have a purposeful vision in your life. Humans have the ability to look forward in time and set the intention for how they want to live. This means having a goal-oriented mind and considering where we want to be and how we want to get there. Whether it be work, health, relationships or self-worth, we are responsible for setting the direction of our lives. When we fail to have an intention, we collapse back into the chaos of life and replay the same habits over and over again, wondering why nothing gets better. To break the cycle and drive a wedge into the field of chaos, set your intention for who you want to become.

Practice strength-based follow-through. Responsibility and intentionality sound good in theory, but one's ability to drive forward with motivation is key. The amazing thing about motivation is that every person has been gifted with unique talents, and when they are activated, we feel stronger to drive forward. You know you are intrinsically motivated toward something when the following occur: (1) Before – you are eager and naturally attracted to something, (2) During – you experience a state of flow and glimpse of excellence, and (3) After – you feel rejuvenated and stronger. Learn to identify what these activities are because they are signs to your natural intrinsic motivation. Recognizing that you, and you alone, are responsible for the choices you make, learn to make your intentions reality by flexing into your strength zones.

Practice trust. Practicing responsibility, intentionality and strength-based follow-through will aid you in becoming a more effective person. But another unique aspect of being human is that we are a social species; we do better together than alone. We seek out friends, life partners, mentors, teams and communities. The reason we do better together than alone is because of our social DNA; it has helped us survive for 200,000 years and continues to provide a sense of partnership, comradery and belonging. To build not just a good life but a great life, we need people around us who help make our lives better. Good relationships all begin with trust – the belief in another person's character and competence. Examples of trust behaviors include inclusion, keeping your promises, being courteous and kind, speaking your thoughts and feelings, forgiving the past and practicing empathy and perspective.

Practice communication. Quality communication is trust in action. When trust exists, communication is easy; even when you disagree with someone, the other person gets your meaning. To picture what good communication looks like, visualize dialogue as a form of catch between two or more people. Just like playing real catch, we have to learn to be mindful in how we deliver and participate in the process. Learn to have a healthy back-and-forth exchange, throw with targeted clarity, throw with the right amount of force and be sure that everyone who is part of the dialogue transaction is included in playing catch. Finally, learn the art of full presence during communication: (1) eyes – be present with eye contact when you are with another person, (2) ears – listen for understanding before being understood, and (3) mouth – speak to another person in the right “language” (the way they want to be spoken to).

Practice self-care. My last piece of advice is that you need to take care of yourself. Status-quo living doesn't take much energy, but if you want great living, it takes tremendous energy to be responsible, be intentional in your direction, follow through with intrinsic motivation, build trust with others and communicate with clarity. To keep your energy and build resilience, you have to care for yourself. This includes taking care of your physical self: eating right, getting rest, exercising and relaxing. It also requires that you take care of your spiritual self: committing to your value systems, exploring your philosophy for meaning and connecting to your source. Take care of your mental-emotional self: Learn and grow through reading, writing, meditation, reflection and personal challenge. Finally, take care of your social self: Invest in your relationships with your spouse, parents, children, colleagues and dear friends.

Most people live in the past, stuck in their old habits of living that are stored in their subconscious mind. They live the safe life, one of predictability and normalcy. But life has the potential to be purposeful, invigorating and BIG! Like all good things in life, we must exert effort. In the case of great living, we must exert (1) responsibility, (2) intentionality, (3) intrinsically motivated follow-through, (4) trust in others, (5) healthy communication, and (6) self-care. Leave yesterday in the past and build “your” life on purpose – starting today.

Dr. Chance Eaton has over a decade's worth of experience working in the field of learning and organizational development. Due to his unique educational and work experiences in finance, psychology, leadership and management, education, noetic sciences and agriculture, Dr. Eaton provides his clients with relevant business solutions grounded in theory and research. To learn more about Dr. Eaton's services, visit HCSInter.com.