

Live Your Dreams Develop a Strategy for Your Studies

by Victor März

In my last article we've discussed what influences our happiness and how the transition from studying to working often ends up in a decreased level of happiness. Ideally, you finish your studies exactly the way you wanted and get exactly the great job you dreamt of.

There's several ways to find out the answer to the notorious question, "What am I going to do after I graduate?" The most convenient way to answer it is to let yourself be surprised and to react to whatever the future holds for you when you graduate. A more result-oriented way, usually associated with much higher benefits and personal satisfaction, is to shape your future pro-actively from the start of your studies. You can do this by formulating a vision statement and developing a strategy for your studies. This is hugely valuable and helps you answer the question on what you're going to do after your studies much more accurately. This way you can sleep well, enjoy the peace of mind and avoid becoming increasingly nervous towards the end of studies.

Let's talk about this vision statement for a second here. Your statement could be anything, for example, it could sound like "I want to become a Chief Financial Officer of a Dow Jones listed company." The vision statement should be long-term in nature and as challenging as you like it to be. You don't necessarily need a vision to formulate a strategy. Without a vision, though, you run the risk that the strategy for your studies will be ineffective, potentially leading you in a direction you will regret in the long-run. If you develop a strategy, for example, whose outcome is not aligned with your overall vision, you might end up developing the wrong skill set. When I started studying I envisioned myself to be a successful CEO of a mid-sized company. Every few months I sit down and revise that vision and the strategies I put in place to achieve the milestones I need to cover to become that man in my vision.

Having set the vision, it is now time to formulate a strategy. A strategy is

basically a formalised plan of action, encompassing a set of defined, tangible goals that you can track and measure over time. In my example, I decided that my major goals were to learn to speak Polish fluently, finish my Bachelor Degree on time, not to fail any subject and have an above average grade point average. Those were my personal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which I kept track of throughout my studies. On top of that I was assigned additional KPIs specified by my school, such as finishing Business English Level 3, doing 200 hours of practical work experience related to my course, etc.

About half-way through my degree and after a few hundred hours of working in a waste management company, a bank, a utility provider, and a consulting company, I revised my initial strategy and its KPIs, raising the bar significantly – I even added new measures, i.e. the number of months working in an international job, at least one completed post-graduate degree, etc. The main reason for change and modification was that my strategy and my short-term vision were not aligned anymore. I had changed and developed a sense on what I want to do in the future. I realised that my grade point average and overall job experience were not sufficient to compete with my peers for the same job.

So what can help you determine the right strategy for your studies? This is usually the question that students, who are starting to study, struggle with the most with. Without proper guidance and actual knowledge of what a certain type of work actually means, it is very hard to determine the most appropriate strategy. Here are some activities that, upon completion, will help you establish and refine your study strategy:

Complete a few Internships – work experience will give you real-life feeling regarding a specific job. Try to



get a holistic view on how companies operate by working in several different departments along the value chain of a company. This will enable you to form an accurate assessment of the work you like and dislike. If you finish your studies without having worked a single day, nobody is going to be able to tell you whether you want to work in a certain industry, position, country or not.

Choose one or more Role Models – A role model is probably the best way to determine a strategy. It's the simplest way of finding out what needs to be done and is based on our basic learning ability of imitation. Research your role model's skills, background, achievements and the chronological order of events that led him or her to where he or she is today.

Actively seek Guidance – Try to network as much as possible with people that do a job you're interested in. Seek advice from them, opinions about their jobs, their story and how they got the jobs, and/ or even opportunities of doing an internship with their company.

Compare yourself against Peers that Achieve – See how your peers, co-students, friends are coping with the preparation for 'what comes after you graduate'. You will notice that some are doing nothing about it, some will actively try, but fail, and then there is a group of achievers.

In the next issue of Ampersand we will specifically look at the issue of work experience. After all, it is one of the biggest contributors to your ability to successfully determine and adapt any study strategy you might have.