

Don't Forget to Dream

I'm a dreamer, that's what I do and who I am. But I am a doer as well. And I think there is almost nothing better than being able to act upon and succeed at a once upon thought of dream. I know not everyone has the same dreams and passions to travel the world and try new things, but I know each person in this world has dreams. And as I dream, I wonder what would happen if we were all brave enough to do the things that we actually wanted to do in life. What if we didn't follow the ordered norm of such a scheduled life and truly did all of those bucket list items that we have always wanted to do? I am a fond believer in getting out of your comfort zone, and for me travel has been my main form of doing that.

It's easy to get stuck on the clichés of traveling or the big questions centered on the finances of it all, but there is truly nothing more powerful than the ability to be able to venture by oneself. People always ask me how I did it. How I took the jump and made it happen to take a semester off from school and do what I had always dreamed of doing. I had always envisioned playing with the kids in Uganda and experiencing the culture of Thailand, exploring the beauty that each place holds and discovering what the hype of traveling was all about. After being miserably lost my first semester of college, I decided to take the leap and finally take that gap year, or in this case semester; which I had always wanted to do, but I didn't because I felt too pressured to go straight into college after high school. But I finally said no to letting fear get in the way of the things I wanted to do and starting saying yes to reflecting on my own happiness and making my dreams become a reality.

A counselor at the Career Center at Colorado State University, Leanna Biddle, gives insight to students about their academic paths and how to get into something that truly makes them happy. "Self reflection is such a beautiful thing in the way of stepping aside and looking at what you really enjoy," she says. Leanna mentions that it's often really difficult to take a step back and look at what you really want, but that it's incredibly important to do so.

There are dreams and passions that many people have, but are often too afraid to work for or chase after. The fears of the “what-ifs”, the “how-to’s” and the pressures of others trying to persuade us as individuals to go one-way or the other that gets in the way of those dreams. But it’s far beyond those fears where growth happens and getting out of our comfort zones is where it all begins.

Alexa Kinsinger, a senior Civil Engineer major at Colorado State University, took a year off after high school, before coming to college, to live with a host family in Argentina and increase her fluency in Spanish. “I had no idea what I wanted to study in college and I didn’t want to waste money trying to figure it out and get stuck into something that didn’t seem right,” she says.

In other countries like England and Australia, it is very common to take time off after high school to explore the world, but surprisingly it is not as common among Americans. According to an online resource GoOverseas.com, only 36 percent of Americans had a valid passport in 2012, compared to 71 percent of the population in the UK. I found this shocking, but it made perfect sense. A lot of people dream of their crazy travel fantasies, but rarely make all of them come true and often let fear get in the way. Granted, there are a lot of constraints such as money and time, but dreams don’t work unless you do. Right?

There is a time for everything, and those times come at different moments for everyone. Leanna advises that it’s most important to “take time to reflect on who you are as an individual.” It might not be the right path for one person to take time off, where it might be something incredibly vital for someone else. The key is to learn what works best for you and what is going to fuel your own happiness, and then go do it.

I knew it was the time for me to take time off from school and go to Uganda and Thailand to volunteer for three months and get off the grid for a little bit. I wasn’t happy with who I was or where I was in life my freshman year, and taking a semester off to truly get to know myself through traveling was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.

Alexa reflects on how she thinks everyone should take a gap year after high school, and even if it’s not for travel purposes then it would be to work or to find

yourself more. “The thing I found most beneficial was the maturity level for one thing, and then how I already knew how to live away from my parents when I came to college,” she says. Alexa noticed that a lot of freshman struggled with homesickness, and this was alleviated for her by being able to travel solo. “Being in another country really forced me to grow up and adjust to a different culture, especially not having anyone I knew around me.”

Being able to travel completely around the globe and meet people with different backgrounds and stories that you’ve never heard, trying whatever food someone places in front of you, seeing kids light up from looking at themselves on your camera screen, and discovering the satisfaction that true simplicity can bring. There’s just nothing quite like those experiences, and ones that you will never get from sitting at a desk in front of a computer all day.

Our world can always use people who are inspired to grow and be brave enough to live out their dreams. We each have a story, a passion, and something to give to the world, and taking time off from school or from the mundane in our lives is something that people should consider more, because the benefits far outweigh any fears that get in the way.

I was terrified to take time off in college and as I plan taking time off again after I graduate college, I wonder whether or not those prospect jobs are still going to be there when I’m done venturing off into the world. But Leanna says she advises students and people in general to have your tool kit ready to go. “Connect with the necessary individuals and don’t lose touch,” she says. “And if you’re going to fall off the grid for a little while, let someone know so they understand where you’re at and where your focus is.”

As we grow up, we are told to chase our dreams, to do what has not been done yet, and to continue to strive to be better than the person next to us. We are also told to follow the status quo and the mundane to get through life. If we do things the right way, than maybe we’ll have a shot at being great and successful. We are told that if we graduate high school, go straight to college, get a job, get married, and have a family – maybe we will live a normal and abundant life, and live happily ever after. But what if we did life differently? Different in the sense of challenging

each other in ways that instead of making the most money, having the best car or always trying to give attention to looking our best, we would become the most worldly and most well-rounded people possible. Learning from our mistakes and growing to be good people, that is what we should be striving for – all the while, never losing sight of our dreams.