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Looking Back as an Adult on My Parents' Advice

By Nicole Wills
UCF Forum columnist
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I imagine I was like most kids growing up when it came to my parents' advice: dismissive at best. As a typical angsty pre-teen, I was convinced that I was always right.

I was not rebellious, but I also thought I knew better than my parents when it came to just about everything (besides taxes, insurance and other "grown-up" things).

I was determined to carve out my own identity, even if that meant making plenty of ill-advised choices along the way.

That all changed when I began planning for college and, by extension, for my future career. I spent much of high school stressed about how I would apply my passions—namely, writing and journalism—to a professional world that didn't seem to place a lot of value on those interests. The prevalence of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) was emphasized throughout my high school years, and I began to worry that I would be forced to neglect my own interests for the sake of my future financial security.

I went to my parents for advice, and as always they were there for me with plenty to offer—except this time, I listened.

We reviewed the UCF catalog and weighed the pros and cons of each program that interested me. At first, I thought I'd try information technology. I had some experience with web design, and I'd used a computer my entire life, so it seemed like a good fit. But after taking an introductory programming course, I decided that it wasn't for me. I didn't find it fulfilling, and I began to feel the familiar stress of uncertainty about the future.

"You're always going to make mistakes," my dad told me at the time. "But don't be afraid of them—learn from them."

"You're always going to make mistakes," my dad told me at the time. "But don't be afraid of them—learn from them."

It was good advice, to be sure. But although it made me feel a bit better, I still couldn't shake the anxiety that stemmed from lacking a defined career path. I felt like I'd wasted an entire semester and made no progress toward figuring out what I was actually meant to do.

Then came my mom's advice that changed my future.

She graduated with a degree in marketing, and it was her suggestion that I take Principles of Advertising to see if majoring in advertising/public relations would be a good fit for me. I asked her if she thought that program would lead to a financially secure career, and her answer has stuck with me:

"Most people are successful at things that they really enjoy doing. If you don't like what you're doing in life, a higher starting salary isn't going to make you feel better."

Advertising/public relations ended up being the perfect match for my interests and I fell in love with the field. It had everything I could ask for: I could write creatively, explore political campaigning (a potential marriage of my two greatest interests), and even dabble in the realms of publishing and journalism that had always fascinated me. Best of all, the skills I learned were directly applicable to my side gig as a blogger and my work as the editor-in-chief of *Her Campus at UCF*, an online magazine.

My dad's advice helped me feel better during one of the most stressful times of my college career. And if it weren't for my mom's advice, I don't know if I ever would have

found the right career path for me. At the very least, it would have taken me a lot more trial and error to do so.

I also think my parents' advice can be applied to so much in life.

Passion is the ultimate catalyst for success. If you aren't passionate about something, whether it's your career, relationship or any other aspect of your life, you most likely won't be successful. And even if you are, can you really consider it success if you aren't enjoying yourself along the way?

In the same vein, chasing your passion is going to involve taking risks—and inevitably making some mistakes. But instead of letting those mistakes discourage you, treat them as life lessons. Keep them in mind and take comfort in the fact that if nothing else, you learned something.

I'm determined to follow my passions now more than ever. I'll graduate in a year, and although the idea of becoming an adult with adult responsibilities used to fill me with dread, I feel excitement now. I know that I'll find success if I chase what inspires me, no matter the obstacles I might face—and for that, I have my parents to thank.

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