

Wake Up to the Fact of Your Own Agency

“My goal is to obtain a job in the marketing department for a tech startup. I really hate college and it costs so much, but I’ve gotta finish my major to get the job.”

No you don’t. Here’s that exact job right here. It already pays more than average college grads make and you can start immediately.

“Oh wow, that is such a great opportunity. Unfortunately, I’ve got to finish four years of college and hope to get that same job then!”

The above is not an exaggeration. I can’t tell you how many times we’ve had variations on this conversation at Praxis with young people exploring their options.

It always reminds me of the scene at the end of *Dumb & Dumber*, where Lloyd and Harry are destitute and a busload of super models rolls up...

I don’t know about Lloyd and Harry, but I’ve come to a realization about what’s going on in the cases of young people.

They don’t want their stated goal.

Well, they do, but not as much as they want something else. All else equal, they’d like that job. But if getting the job meant owning their decisions and being held responsible for their success and failure, they’d rather pass. What they want above all is to maintain the illusion that they are not responsible for the outcomes in their life. They want to avoid the fact of their own agency.

The reality is, every individual has inescapable agency. But oh how hard we work to persist in the illusion that we don’t!

If you follow the dominant path, those around you will support the illusion that you’re not really responsible for your life. Stay in school, though you hate it and know it’s a waste. Get the degree. If you fail to find a job, those around you will say you did the right thing; indeed, you did all you could! Good for you sticking it out! But the economy or some other external force just happened to make things tough on you.

No one will judge your mediocrity or unhappiness harshly if you do the things everyone wants and expects of you.

But if you break the mold and go your own way, watch out. The illusion that you lack agency will be shattered. Those around you will hold you accountable for every outcome in

your life. "I told you that you never should have moved away/started a company/opted-out of school!" You won't be able to absolve yourself, or meld meaninglessly into the phony blob of collective responsibility. You will be fully aware that *you own you*.

Good.

The lie is poisonous.

The sooner you can strip away the things that make the illusion of lack of agency easy, the better.

It starts with self-honesty. "My parents won't let me do this, so I can't" is a lie. The truth may be something like, "I want to do this but I'm unwilling to unless my parents keep funding my life." The sooner you can admit to yourself what you're really going after, the better. Often, examination reveals that you're going after nothing deeper than prestige and external approval. You're likely to be (rightly) disgusted by this revelation. That's the beginning of finding something deeper to pursue and owning your decisions.

Don't choose the path that brings least scrutiny and maintains the illusion of external control. Choose the path that awakens you to the inescapable fact of your own agency.