

## **Graduating with a Little Less Stress**

Graduation always seems to be associated with growth, progress, success, and achievement, but what about the stressful transition, relocating, and added challenges that follow? Whether you are graduating high school, community college, undergraduate or graduate university, this is a crucial time in your life. You may be asking yourself, "Where do I go from here?" or "How will I ever get to where I want to be," but graduating doesn't have to put you in a panic. There are ways to plan ahead and mentally prepare for the road ahead, which can make the walk across the stage much easier.

When making your plans for post-graduation, don't simply aim for the stars, it's time to connect the dots! It is easy when you are asked about your plans for the future to say, "I'm going to be a doctor," but knowing each step of the process, and planning accordingly, makes it easier to achieve your dream. For example, you can set out in high school to make good grades, so you can get into a good college, focus on the necessary classes, then move on to doctoral programs in your field. This concrete strategy helps prepare you for the costs, time dedication, and academic planning. Although many students continue directly from one school to the next, this isn't the only way to go.

Finances, application rejection, or sometimes just stress can prevent you from taking that next step in your academic or professional career. If stress from the prior academic level is weighing on you, take the summer to recover and redirect your focus in order to better succeed in that next step. The "in between" time is also a good opportunity to build up your résumé for future positions. Volunteering, interning, or simply applying yourself in the workplace can make the next phase much easier when applying. You can also develop useful skills for the future. Even temporary jobs such as waiting tables can be useful, particularly when paying off student loans.

Financial planning is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks after graduation. If you are a high school student applying to college, be sure to take advantage of the many local, state, and national scholarships offered. The internet is a great source for finding financial aid ranging from need-based to merit-based. When scholarships and family monetary support aren't enough, sometimes student loans are the best option. You should work with your parents when looking through possible loans to be sure you are getting the lowest interest rates possible before making the final decision. For those just leaving undergraduate school, looking for jobs to support impending student loans can be a trial. Understand that many early career positions will not offer your dream salary, but they will make a great addition to your work history and help pay off the loans in the process.

Even if you have planned everything, the change can be mentally exhausting and stressful. Remember to reach out to family and friends for support during this time. Sometimes, meeting with a life coach or therapist can help aid in this transition as well. These supports make graduating simpler and your life much happier, so when you turn your tassel, you will be fully prepared for the next exciting step in your career.