# GREAT ADVICE FOR GRADS

## SUMMER 2016

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When Inceptia first began publishing our ***Great Advice for Grads*** a few years ago, we wanted to help students feel financially empowered as they left school and began their next adventure. And certainly we've been able to do that, by partnering with financial experts from colleges, universities, financial planning groups, financial blogging sites and more to bring you the best advice from people who know a thing or two about money.

Now, as we enter the third year of our publication, we're able to begin tailoring our advice to what you, the student, wants to know about. Money and loans always makes the top of the list, sure, but you also want to hear about career strategies and how to live your best life. And because we at Inceptia believe that financial wellness is just one facet of holistic student success, we are happy to oblige and provide you with advice above and beyond the world of money.

This year's guide mixes words of wisdom about your finances, student loans, and personal and professional happiness. We hope this makes for an easy-to-read resource that you can come back to again and again as you begin your journey. Also, you'll notice that we've included some inspiring artwork from Stephanie Halligan, a finance-expert-slash-cartoonist who believes in using her drawings to spread positivity through her own life lessons. The end result is an e-guide that both informs and encourages – two essential tools as you make your way through this challenging post-graduation time.

Finally, I have used this intro message over the past few years to share some of my personal favorite advice with those preparing to graduate, and this year is no different. However, I feel like all the great advice in this guide speaks volumes, so I chose my message for its brevity and timeless wisdom (and also because I'm a huge *Star Wars* fangirl).

*"Do or do not. There is no try."*
\- **Yoda**, a galaxy far, far away

In my own words, it means don't overthink it, don't stress, don't doubt yourself – just go do it. It's the only way to know if you really can.

Best of luck, Class of 2016, and enjoy the journey, wherever it takes you.

Best,

Carissa Uhlman
Vice President of Student Success
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# THE GRADUATE'S GUIDE TO BECOMING FINANCIALLY READY FOR THE "REAL WORLD"

*By **Melanie Lockert**, Dear Debt*


When I graduated college, I felt excited about my future. I was so ready to be done with school and finally be an "adult." Being in school was the last vestige of being a kid and it was time for me to fly and soar into the "real world."

While I was more mature and had some work experience under my belt, I didn't really understand the steps I should take financially to prepare myself for the real world. All of a sudden I wasn't living with my parents and didn't have student loans to rely on to pay for everything.

It was a rude awakening, as I scrambled to get by, with little income and savings. So this advice is for new college graduates looking to getting started on their own two feet (and avoiding the mistakes many of us have made).

## START AN EMERGENCY FUND

As a young adult who's just starting out, it's crucial to have an emergency fund. Even if it's not a huge one, it's key to have at least one thousand dollars set aside only for emergencies.

I was smart enough to actually have some money saved up — and shortly after I moved out of my parents' house I got into a car accident and had to fork over nearly all of my savings. But I was glad I had the money in the bank to cover the expense.

***Emergencies will happen***. It's not a matter of if but when, so by saving now, you are helping yourself down the line. The key is to only use this money for emergencies.

## BEGIN INVESTING

When I was young I heard the standard advice: **start investing now**. But I made every excuse in the book not to start. I thought excuses like, "I didn't know how," or, "I didn't make enough money," were legitimate.

My current job didn't provide an employer match either, so I let myself believe I could wait to start investing. In my head, I thought I was young and had forever to start investing. Now at 30 years old, I really wish I had listened to that standard advice.

***Compound interest is your best friend***. You have the luxury of time to really set yourself up for success — and maybe even an early retirement.

Start by seeing if your employer provides a 401(k) match. If they do, then sign up right away, lest you throw away perfectly good money. If you don't have a job yet, or if you are not eligible for a 401(k), consider

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investing in a Roth IRA. You will pay taxes on it up front, but this means you can withdraw funds at retirement age without paying any taxes, and keep any money you've earned over the years.

### CHECK YOUR CREDIT SCORE AND REPORT

Now that you are entering the real world, applying for jobs, apartments, and credit cards, there is one number that is going to rule your life: **your credit score**. Your credit score is essentially an average of your credit history.

You can check your credit score using CreditKarma.com or CreditSesame.com. To get a full history of your credit report, use AnnualCreditReport.com. All of these sites are completely free and will never request your credit card information.

It's key to know where you stand financially now, so you can continue to build your credit. In order to build credit effectively, keep your balances on your credit card low — your balance should be lower than 30 percent of your limit. So if your limit is $1,000, don't carry a balance over $300.

In addition to keeping your balances low, pay your bills on time, every time. Failing to do so is a great way to ruin your credit quickly.

### WATCH OUT FOR LIFESTYLE CREEP

You've graduated. You received your diploma and a spiffy new job. It's time to celebrate! While some lifestyle creep might be understandable — such as eating actual food and not just Ramen, be careful about taking on too much. It's easy to want to jump in and "play adult" before your finances are ready.

I thought I was so ready to be an adult that at 23 that I lived on my own in Los Angeles while paying back my loans. Looking back, I really should have had a roommate. I was making a nonprofit salary, living on my own and paying off debt.

I made it work, but I would be much further ahead financially if I lived like most of my friends and had a roommate. Don't take on too much, too soon. Learn how to budget for what you want, while also exercising some self-restraint.

### PAY MORE TOWARD DEBT

If you can afford to do so, **pay more than the minimum** on your debt. After graduation, I thought my student loan payments were just bills. It didn't even occur to me that I could or should pay more on my student loans.

For years I simply paid the minimum when I could have paid more. The sooner you get out of debt, the sooner you can fund your other goals. You will pay so much less in interest if you pay more than the minimum and get out of debt early.

### KNOW YOUR GOALS

Let's face it. When you graduate from college, you're still finding yourself in a lot of ways. You are searching for your career, your friend group, and what kind of life you want to lead on your own.

At this time, it's easy to be impressionable and give in to peer pressure, advertisements, etc. Figure out **what you want and know your goals**. This will help your spending priorities so that you can spend on your values and not waste money or time on things that don't matter to you.

Using these steps can help you avoid some of the mistakes I made time and time again, so you can set yourself up for success and a strong financial future.

*This post originally appeared on MoneyNing.com.*

***Melanie Lockert** is a personal finance writer and founder of the award-winning blog Dear Debt. Melanie has several years of experience writing in the personal finance space. Her work has appeared in the Huffington Post, Business Insider, Student Loan Hero, Credit Karma, GoGirl Finance and more. She paid off $81,000 in student loan debt and inspires others to get out of debt through coaching, writing, workshops and more.*

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# Dear Self, YOU'LL ALWAYS CARRY IT WITH YOU

There's a lot changing. There's a lot I'm leaving behind and a lot I've already left behind.

Sometimes I look back and wonder where it went: a feeling, a connection, a moment in time that's no longer there. Sometimes I look ahead and wonder what's going to disappear: the experiences, the people, parts of the person that I am right now that will shift and evolve.

But when I worried about losing something, I remind myself of all the things that haven't changed: all of the people and sensations and pieces of me that have always been there. Because even though things are changing, I can still carry what I want with me. I can still hold onto what I want to while moving forward.

No matter what happens, what changes or where you go, remember that you'll always carry it with you.

– Steph

Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa and her definition of *home, culture and border*.

*This post originally appeared on Art to Self.*

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# A PROFESSOR'S GUIDE TO WINNING WITH MONEY

*By **Joe Koss**, Financial Literacy Professor*

The key to managing your finances well really comes down to your relationship with money. Think about that statement and reflect on your financial relationship over the years - has it been good, bad, or complicated as you progressed through college and now move to the next stage of your life? Regardless of your answer, there's always something to be learned from the students who came before you. So before you decide to "swipe left", I wanted to share with the Class of 2016 some helpful tips and tricks learned throughout the years that have helped me and my students master finances.

## THE BUDGET

I know, I used "The B word" already, but it's your plan. It is your roadmap to financial success. You get to tell your money where to go and not feel guilty about it (within reason). I have found that when you take control of your money, the money works harder for you. With that said, you have to come up with a process that works for you. I am old school and like to write things out on paper each month; you may be different and prefer to use an app or other online program. Regardless of the method, you have to find the right mix of tools that will help you keep track of your money each month. After all, having a lot of budgeting tools to choose from means nothing unless you use them.

## PRE-BUDGET ACTIVITY

I know you are excited to start budgeting but before you jump into it head first, I want to challenge you to an activity: for one week, I want you to track your spending. This will give you a better sense of where you are spending money on a daily basis. And when I say spend money, that means **every** form of spending: cash, debit and credit card transactions, checks, and so on. Anytime you spend money, just write it down and add it up at the end of the week. What will you find out? Only time will tell, but this activity can often be an eye-opener in terms of what is truly being spent compared to what you think you may be spending. This activity can also help you explore different budgeting methods (pen & paper, apps, etc.) to discover one that works best for you.

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# CHAINS OF HABIT ARE TOO LIGHT TO BE FELT UNTIL THEY ARE TOO HEAVY TO BE BROKEN.

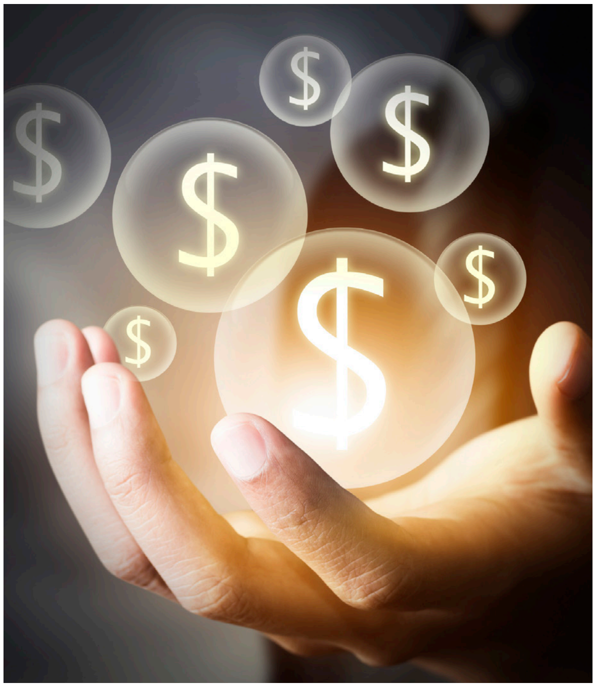
— Warren Buffett

## PUNCH YOUR DEBT IN THE FACE!

For those of you that have debt upon graduation, you need to be intentional about coming up with a plan to eliminate that debt. I left college with student loans of just over $50k and was not able to kick Sallie Mae out of my apartment for several years. It was not until I really buckled down on my budget and student loan payments that I was able to make progress and get rid of those loans for good. The key is hard work, discipline, and a true desire to be rid of the debt. For me, that meant using the debt snowball:

- I listed my debts from largest to smallest.
- I paid the minimum on everything except the smallest; I paid as much as I could on that until it was paid off.
- After paying off the smallest debt, I intentionally took my previous payment and applied it to the next smallest debt, and so on and so on until all the loans were gone.

By using this method of paying down debt, I was able to keep my momentum moving forward, pay down my loans one after another, and keep my overall monthly payments the same. Whether you choose this method or not, the key is to be intentional in eliminating your debt; that's the best way to stay focused on your goal of being debt free.



## FAMILY FEEDBACK

Your parents (or family members) can be a valuable financial resource as they have lived through many of the things you are about to experience. Their advice can help you learn from their past successes and failures. Also, if your parents are paying any of your expenses (e.g. car insurance, cell phone, rent, student loans, etc.), you really need to talk with them about what it actually costs to support yourself each month, especially if you may be responsible for some or all of these bills moving forward. These expenses need to be included in your new monthly budget.

## LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK

If you've been building your professional network while in school, now is the time to communicate with them regarding your post-graduation goals. Tell them what you want to do with your life and seek out those whose industries or occupations align with that. You can use social media to help you with this, most commonly by creating a professional online presence with a platform like LinkedIn (be mindful of what you are saying on other platforms and be consistent). Join groups and communities in which you are interested and see where you can add value. If there is a thought leader you want to contact, see if you have common connections to facilitate an introduction. Use the platforms these thought leaders use and be active in the discussion. Comment, share, tweet, and like things that these people are writing about; you never know where those professional conversations will lead.

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## BE INTENTIONAL WITH YOUR MONEY AND CREATE A PLAN FOR SUCCESS THAT EXTENDS BEYOND YOUR FINANCES.

### CONTINUE LEARNING

Just because you graduated does not mean you are done learning. You can take an online class or listen to different podcasts to help broaden your knowledge base. Your local library can also be a wonderful resource for expanding your learning, both in and outside your industry. I have found that leaders are readers.

### TELL YOUR FINANCIAL STORY

We all have a story to tell and personal finance can be an out-loud topic. I want you to think of your favorite movie- what makes it so good? Why do you watch it over and over again? I'm willing to bet it's probably because you can relate to the story and the character(s). You may see a lot of yourself in them; that's the same kind of connection that happens when we share our financial stories. Students all over the country are winning with money and are eager to help others. Hearing these stories on different blogs, podcasts, and social media can inspire you. Search these stories out, use what you can to build your own financial story, and pay it forward by sharing your story with others.

One final piece of advice: you've got this. You can win with money. It all starts with being intentional with your money and creating a plan for success that extends beyond your finances. Hopefully these tips that I've shared can help you do just that.

Congratulations to the Class of 2016 - what will you do today to win with money?

***Joe Koss** practices what he teaches in financial literacy at several colleges and universities as an adjunct professor. Joe is passionate about all aspects of financial education, but it all starts with being mindful of your relationship with money and letting students know this can be an out loud topic. Joe shares his story of getting out of debt along with other goals he is working toward to create an accountability partnership with his class to get them to share their own financial goals they plan to work on during the class as well as keeping those systems in place when the class end.*

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# THE THREE THINGS EVERY COLLEGE GRADUATE SHOULD KNOW

*By **Dr. Ben Michaelis**, clinical psychologist*

At this time of year, as many people exchange their well-worn student IDs for brand new alumni discount cards, they are being bombarded with information — from credit card offers, to (hopefully) job offers, to advice from authority figures — irrespective of the giver's actual authority or right to dispense worldly wisdom.

Some of the counsel you will receive is worth its weight in gold — from Steve Job's Stanford commencement speech, to the ever-present wisdom in Dr. Seuss' *Oh the Places You'll Go*, to the seemingly eternally viral and oft-misattributed "Wear Sunscreen" advice by Mary Schmich in the *Chicago Tribune*. As a clinical psychologist, I often bear witness to the struggle that people encounter during these transitional periods. As a couple of my patients are nearing graduation, I have begun to consider the indispensable lessons that are worth sharing with recent grads, or actually anyone who is in transition.

Regardless of whether you have the rest of your life planned or you are as clueless as Homer Simpson was when he was about to graduate —

> *Counselor: Do you have any plans for after graduation?*
> *Homer: Me!? I'm going to drink a lot of beer and stay out all night!*

— you will, undoubtedly, eventually bump up against that pesky seven-letter word that gets in the way of living: reality. And so, if you lend me your mind's eye for a moment, I will share with you the three things that every college graduate should know:

## THE POWER OF FAILURE, THE POWER OF WORDS, AND THE POWER OF KINDNESS

**1. The Power of Failure** — One of the things that they don't teach you in school is that regardless of how much success you have had up until this point, in life, you will, with any luck, fail. I hope that you fail early and often. In contrast to what you may have been led to believe by overbearing parents or overreaching teachers, failure is good for you. When you truly fail, it means that you actually did something. Or at least you tried. You put forth the effort and you took action,

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## “AS I GROW OLDER, I PAY LESS ATTENTION TO WHAT MEN SAY. I WATCH WHAT THEY DO.”

— Andrew Carnegie

but you didn’t get the result you wanted. When failure comes a knockin’ and you get that twisty feeling in the pit of your stomach or you experience the heat of shame that rises through your gullet, don’t suppress it. Use it. Your emotions are a gift, and when properly directed, they will fuel your rise. This is a part of what I call intelligent failure. Pay attention to why you failed, take copious notes, re-tool, and try again. The only thing that matters when you fail is *what you do next*. Regroup and attack with more vigor and intelligence. Remember that everyone who has ever done anything worth doing has failed. You can join this crew if you craft your response to failure intelligently.

**2. The Power of Words** — School is an absurdly verbal place filled to the brim with words. When you are in school, words have power and meaning. However, when you graduate, that changes. Words are no longer powerful. People will say things that they don’t mean, usually out of laziness, but occasionally out of malice. Don’t be seduced by words. There is only one thing that counts: what people do. If you are spending time with someone — a friend, family member, co-worker, boss, or lover — who tells you lots of things but then doesn’t follow them up with action, it’s probably time to re-evaluate the relationship (or job). When I graduated college and was in the dating world, my friend JP used to say, “When your date is nice to you but rude to the waiter, your date is not a nice person. It’s time to move on.”

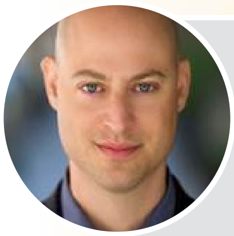
On the flip side, some people do more than they need to. Those people are kind souls, and guess what: they are out there, too. It just takes a little bit of work to find them.

**3. The Power of Kindness** — If you do things out of genuine kindness for others and are generous with your time and effort, it will come back to you. This is not about karma per se, but simply about kindness. Doing things simply because of what they will get you leads to a transactional mentality in the world; this is appropriate and necessary sometimes, but having a giving mentality is far greater and, in the long run, better for you and the world. When you are a nice person people are more likely to want to help.

I wish you well on your journey. I’m aware that these are just words on a screen, and but I do mean them and genuinely hope that they are useful to you. If you only remember one of these things, let it be the bit about intelligent failure — Lord knows, I’ve had my share of those. And with any luck, you and I will have a lot more.

Congratulations to you — and welcome to the rest of your life.

*This post appears on DrBenMichaelis.com.*



***Dr. Ben Michaelis** is a clinical psychologist with an expertise in mental health and evolutionary psychology. He is a visiting scholar at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College. Dr. Michaelis has authored numerous popular and scholarly articles. His writing has appeared in* The Huffington Post, Psychology Today, O The Oprah Magazine*, and other well-known magazines and online outlets. Dr. Michaelis has been cited as a mental health expert in* Vanity Fair, Forbes, Redbook, Glamour, Fast Company, The New York Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution *and dozens of others. Dr. Michaelis is a frequent guest on nationally syndicated TV shows such as NBC’s* The Today Show, Fox News*, and MSNBC’s* Your Business*. He is the author of* Your Next Big Thing: 10 Small Steps to Get Moving and Get Happy.

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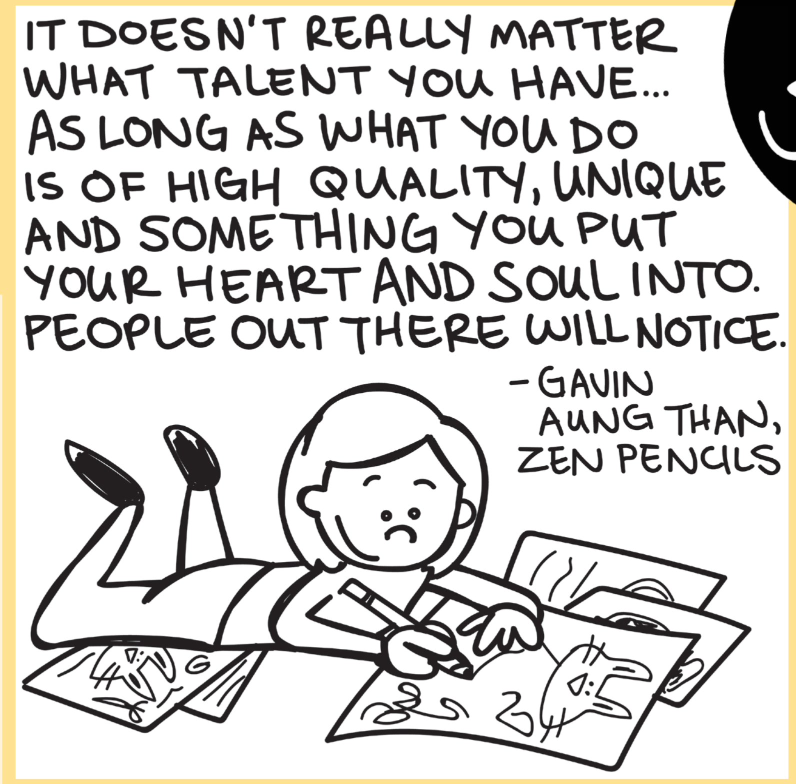


# Dear Self, YOU CAN GET ANYWHERE WITH ENOUGH HEART

There's an online cartoonist that I've admired for years, someone whose success, humbleness and desire to serve has inspired me to do the same through my art. Art to Self was partly inspired by his work… and I almost didn't launch Art to Self because of his work.

Gavin Aung Than of Zen Pencils has built an incredible following around his inspirational cartoon quotes. He creates intricate, colorful comics that – as a fellow cartoonist – are both inspiring and intimidating. As much as I wanted to be like Gavin, I felt like I could never produce anything as incredible as what he'd done. And seeing his work and his success was enough to make me believe that my own work would never go anywhere.

But it was this quote – from Gavin himself – that reminded me of what really matters in getting notice and feeling successful:

"It doesn't really matter what talent you have… as long as what you do is of high quality, unique and something you put your heart and soul into. People out there will notice."

It was a reminder that what mattered wasn't how talented I felt but what I put into the work itself. That I could do incredible things if I put quality, uniqueness and heart into what I do. That I would get noticed if I poured myself into the work. And even if I thought motivational cartoons were "already being done" by someone like Gavin, my work would be different because it was mine and celebrated because I was pouring my entire being into it.

So both because of and in spite of Gavin's work, I have a unique and celebrated art website of my own. And for that I am so grateful.

No matter what you're trying to do or where you're trying to go, just remember: you can get anywhere with enough heart.

– Steph

Inspired by my online cartoon hero, Gavin Aung Than of *Zen Pencils*.

*This post originally appeared on Art to Self.*

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# TOP FIVE THINGS TO DO ABOUT YOUR STUDENT LOANS AFTER GRADUATION

*By **Brianna McGurran**, NerdWallet*

Your student loans are easy to forget about when you're busy celebrating college graduation, looking for a job and perhaps preparing to move to a new city. But the summer after graduating is the perfect time to take charge of your loan payments and create your personal action plan to get out of debt.

"Whatever debt you have, don't treat it as a friend you have around," says Phil Schuman, director of financial literacy at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. "You should be mad at it. You should be doing everything you possibly can to get rid of it as fast as possible."

Follow this five-step plan to understand, streamline and attack your loans, starting now.

### 1. KNOW YOUR LOANS INSIDE AND OUT

Before you can manage your debt, you'll need to understand how much you have to repay. Log in to the National Student Loan Data System to review the federal student loans you've taken out. Create a Federal Student Aid ID to log in if you don't already have one.

There you'll see a list of your loans and what date they were disbursed, the amount to repay and the interest that's already accrued. Click on the number of each loan in the left-hand column to view each loan's interest rate and the name and phone number of its current servicer, the company that manages the loan on behalf of the federal government.

If you have private loans, the financial institution that made them (such as Discover, Wells Fargo or Citibank) keeps track of your loan information. Make sure the lender has your current email and snail-mail addresses on file so it can send you all the updates you'll need as repayment inches closer.

### 2. TALK TO YOUR LOAN SERVICER

Once you know what loans you'll have to pay off, learn about your repayment options the old-fashioned way: Call your servicer. That's the company that either lent you the money or that is now contracting with the federal government to manage your loans.

In many cases, your servicer will automatically place you on a 10-year standard repayment plan, which is one of the fastest ways to pay off your loans. If you have a lot of debt but not a lot of income, this could mean your payments are tough to make initially. For federal loans, you'll usually have a post-graduation grace period of about six months before repayment begins; for private loans, this period is sometimes less. Take time at the start of your grace period to build a comprehensive understanding of your loans before you start paying them off.

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Make a list of questions to ask your servicer so you understand the basics:

- When is my first payment due?
- Where do I send it?
- How much will I owe per month on my current repayment plan?
- What other repayment options do I qualify for?
- How do I switch repayment plans?
- Are discounts available if I sign up for automatic debit or take advantage of other repayment features?

Take detailed notes and keep them in a specific folder, either in Google Drive or in a physical place where you also store mail your loan servicer sends you. It'll be easier to keep track of your loan details if you stay organized and do your best not to get overwhelmed.

### 3. PICK THE RIGHT REPAYMENT PLAN FOR YOU

Now comes one of the most important parts of managing your loans: deciding how you'll pay them off. Federal loans have options beyond standard repayment, including income-driven plans that take into account how much you earn after graduation. There's also the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program for graduates who work in the public interest, which will make your remaining loan balance disappear after 120 on-time payments on your federal loans.

Plug in your loan and income information using the Federal Student Aid website's Repayment Estimator to see how much you'll pay per month on each plan. If your loans will be more manageable on a graduated, extended or income-driven repayment plan, call your servicer and ask for more information about your eligibility.

Private loans work differently. Private companies aren't required to offer specific alternative repayment options to borrowers like the government does, but various lenders may work with you to provide an interest rate reduction, extended repayment plan or a longer grace period if you foresee having trouble repaying your loans. Your best bet is to call your lender before any payments are due to discuss your options.

### 4. IF YOU CAN, START PAYING DURING YOUR GRACE PERIOD

With your long-term repayment plan squared away, consider ways to start bringing your debt down now, Schuman says.

"Don't let the lending company tell you when you should start paying back your loans," he says.

If you have the means during your grace period, you could make a one-time payment toward the interest that accrued on your loans while you were in school before it capitalizes, or is added to your loan balance. Another, more powerful option is to start making payments toward your principal as soon as you graduate, while you're technically in your grace period. If you ignore your student loans for six months after graduation, you'll get used to having more money in your checking account than you will once repayment begins, Schuman says.

"You're getting the opportunity to develop six months of bad habits," he says.

It's important to note that if you start paying off your loans during your grace period, you should ask your servicer to apply your additional payments directly to your principal instead of toward a future monthly payment. That will ensure that the extra you pay brings your balance down faster.

## 5. TREAT YOUR LOAN LIKE ANOTHER MONTHLY BILL

Repaying your loans isn't optional: It's absolutely necessary for your financial well-being. Missing payments or eventually going into default has serious consequences, so you should think of your loan payments as just one more monthly essential that you budget for.

Sign up for automatic debit so your payment comes directly out of your bank account, the way you may already pay your electricity or cellphone bill, Schuman says.

Once you're used to making regular payments, you can also start to be strategic about which loans you pay off. You can apply extra money to high-interest loans so you don't accrue big interest charges, which can make it seem like your loan balance hardly decreases. Or you can completely pay off smaller loans' balances when you're able to, which Schuman calls the "momentum method." That can feel rewarding psychologically, he says, encouraging you to keep making extra payments so more loans disappear. Make sure your servicer knows which loan you want to apply additional payments to.

No matter how you do it, repaying your loans should be a top priority when you graduate. Pay them off smartly and strategically, and soon they'll be off your plate and in your past.

*This article was written by Brianna McGurran at NerdWallet and was originally published at USA Today.*

***Brianna McGurran*** *writes about student loans and life after college for [NerdWallet](). She talks to experts about how 20-somethings can manage their money, pay off their student loans and find jobs they love. Before joining NerdWallet, Brianna was a reporter at the* New York Observer *and at the NPR member stations Oregon Public Broadcasting and WNYC. She is a graduate of the business and economics reporting program at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism.*

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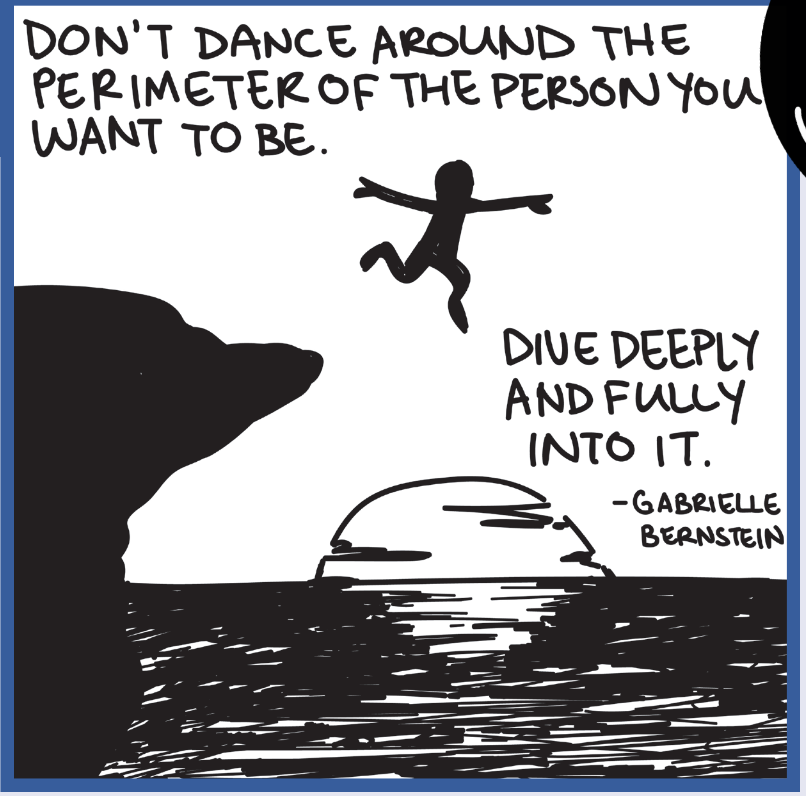


# Dear Self, DIVE IN ALL THE WAY

It's time to stop hesitating and dive in all the way.

There is a person that I'm waiting to become. I know exactly what I want to become and what the next chapter of my life holds. But yet here I am, holding myself back. Here I am peering over the edge, wondering when it will be safe and how I can ease myself into it.

I know I could climb slowly down to the water's edge and dip my toe in. I could spend my life finding the easiest way down and standing half-way in the water.

Or I could just dive in.

As Gabrielle Bernstein says, "Don't dance around the perimeter of the person you want to be. Dive deeply and fully into it."

It's time to stop living halfway between who I am and what I want to be.

It's time. Dive in all the way.

– Steph

Inspired by Gabrielle Berstein and her book on [diving into your purpose](#).

*This post originally appeared on [Art to Self](#).*

# VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY TIME IN CORPORATE AMERICA

*By* ***Roshell Rosemond Rinkins****, roshellrosemond.com*

I've been blessed to work for a few multi-national Fortune 100 companies including Procter & Gamble, Microsoft, and Goldman Sachs & Co. During my nearly ten years at some of the nation's most elite firms, I learned great lessons and insights about life, business, and everything in between. In my pursuit of success in corporate America, I found that the game-changers were well versed in a different code: one that was unwritten. I made it my business to glean the lessons along the way and found these invaluable few to be most essential in the proverbial rat race. Here are my top five corporate confessions revealed:

## 1. STRATEGICALLY TARGET COMPANIES/ ROLES BASED ON A PERSONAL ROI

I can't lie to you. After college, my goal was to land a job at a reputable company with the most competitive salary. Gaining needed skills and experiences to help me achieve my long-term career goals was the furthest thing from my mind. I didn't operate with a destination mindset. Yes, total compensation is definitely a factor when selecting the right employer, but challenge yourself to think beyond the now. Ask yourself, "Will this position or the next role help me develop a vital skill set and/or network?" Or, "How will my time investment in this industry yield a return that benefits my bigger personal plan?"

## 2. PROJECT P.I.E. (PERFORMANCE, IMAGE, AND EXPOSURE)

Immediately following my first promotion at my first full time job, I quickly realized that though results were important, your personal brand equity and exposure could carry more weight in determining career trajectory. Delivering exceptional business results is a baseline expectation after a certain point in your career. Physical appearance or image can also be a distinguishing factor for managers in differentiating equally talented high potential candidates. Additionally, I learned that exposure to key decision makers and influencers across the organization was imperative in the "natural selection" process. Without the right exposure, you could easily be overlooked for crucial roles, promotions, expatriate assignments, etc.

## 3. A TOAST TO THE SKY: TAKE FLIGHT

The extent of my travel prior to joining Corporate America was restricted to family trips to Haiti and a few

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U.S. domestic excursions. Because of my career, I've been able to travel to Switzerland, Germany, Mexico, and Colombia, just to name a few, all sponsored by my employers. Take advantage of every chance to experience something new. Balance the business with personal cultural experiences. If your employer wants you to travel, you have a unique opportunity to see the global community up close and personal - why miss out on a culturally enriching (expenses paid) experience? To be clear, a business need must exist to support your travel. However, if travel is important to you, be strategic in seeking out roles and opportunities that help scratch that itch.

### 4. BE A TALENT SCOUT

Seek out mentors & sponsors that not only help advance your professional career, but also have valuable insight and networks to help advance your personal mission. Be sure to target only those you can trust; a gentleman's handshake will not suffice. Everyone with whom I engage on a personal project must sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement. This sets the tone for future discussions, clearly articulates that all information shared is confidential, and expresses the legal repercussions for breach.

### 5. SINGLE LADIES/SINGLE MEN: GET A WORK HUSBAND OR WIFE

I was single (no serious relationships) the majority of my professional career. I consider myself an extrovert and can pretty much connect with all people regardless of sex, age, background, or ethnic group. Now, imagine my surprise when Suzie at the water cooler gave me the cold truth: I wasn't getting invited to the non-work/personal dinners with the tastemakers from the company because I was single. The truth hurts. However, since marriage was one area of my life that I couldn't control, I secured a work husband. A work husband or wife is someone who attends professional gatherings with you. There is no personal attraction between the two of you, and most importantly, he or she makes you look good. I was never dishonest about my relationship with my work husband and never introduced him as a boyfriend. However, the wives were more comfortable and no longer viewed me as a 'threat' and the invitations began rolling in for non-work related social gatherings.

I hope the advice shared above helps you through your career journey.

*Posted on RoshellRosemond.com.*

*Roshell Rosemond Rinkins is the Chief Content Creator at roshellrosemond.com, a destination blog hub for career, entrepreneurial, and wealth building advice. Roshell draws on her 10+ year experience in Corporate America and entrepreneurial interests to offer her readers fresh perspective on the in's and outs of entrepreneurship and money matters. Sign up for her newsletter by visiting http://bit.ly/inceptiaroshell.*

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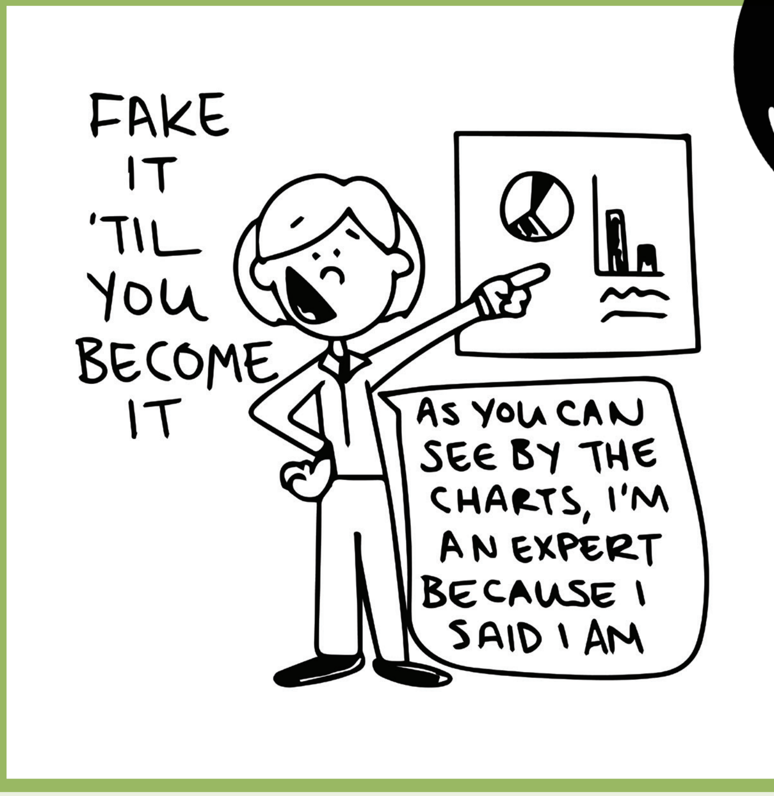


# Dear Self, FAKE IT 'TIL YOU BECOME IT

Here's a secret: I don't know what I'm doing. In fact, I'm making everything up as I go. The truth is, I've gotten very good at faking it.

I used to wait to take action until I knew exactly what I was doing. I used to wait for things to be perfect before moving forward. But I realized that was a lot of waiting. So I just started doing. I just started stumbling my way through things and declaring to the world what I wanted to be.

Some days I feel like a big imposter for faking it as I go. But then I look around and realize that everyone else is faking it too. And the people who are most successful are the people who decided to do something even when they didn't have it 100 percent figured out.

Everyone else is making it up as they go. You have permission to do the same.

– Steph

Inspired by Amy Cuddy's TED Talk on using body language to *fake it 'til you become it*.

*This post originally appeared on Art to Self.*

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# SHOULD I PAY DOWN STUDENT LOANS OR BUILD AN EMERGENCY FUND?

*By* ***Brianna McGurran****, NerdWallet*


Maybe you were lucky enough to score a high-paying job right out of college, or you worked hard enough to earn a raise. Deciding how to spend extra money can be tough, though, when you owe thousands in student loans. This leads a lot of grads to ask:

> *I finally have a little extra money in my bank account every month. Should I put it toward my student loans or save it in an emergency fund?*

**ANSWER:**

There are golden rules in the personal finance world, and this is one of them: An emergency fund is absolutely necessary, even if you have a big student loan payment (and even if you live in a city where cocktails cost $15). An emergency fund is handy in an infinite number of scenarios: sudden job loss, car repairs, unexpected dental bills … the list goes on.

In fact, when you have no savings, everything unexpected is an emergency. A dedicated bank account will let you pay for sudden expenses without putting them on a credit card, which could rack up 15% or more in interest over time.

I advise building an emergency fund before paying any extra toward your loans. Continue making your minimum loan payments to keep them in good standing.

The amount you're comfortable putting into your emergency fund is up to you. Here's a three-step plan to get your emergency fund going and keep your student loans on track.

### STEP 1: DECIDE ON AN EMERGENCY-FUND COMFORT LEVEL

First, take stock of your monthly expenses. Look back at your bank statement and credit card transactions for the previous month to see how much you spent on rent, food, bills, transportation and entertainment. Then decide how many months' worth of expenses you'd like to have as a cushion.

Say you spend $2,500 a month on average. Ideally, you'd keep at least three months of expenses, or $7,500, in your emergency fund. If you can count on support from other sources, such as your parents or spouse, that amount might be enough. If you're on your own, six months or more of expenses would be a better target.

But anything — even $500 or $1,000 — is better than nothing.

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## STEP 2: MAKE A PLAN TO BUILD UP YOUR EMERGENCY FUND

Once you know how much you want to save, make a plan to do it. Very few of us 20-somethings have an extra $7,500 or more lying around, so it's OK to take several months to sock away the money you want to keep in your emergency fund.

- Set up an automatic transfer from your checking account. I had to rebuild my savings account when I got my first full-time job out of grad school. I realized the only way I'd make it happen would be to automate the saving, so I linked my bank accounts and created a fund transfer from my checking to my savings account right after each payday. Now I barely miss the amount I contribute to my emergency fund, since I don't have the opportunity to spend it. I'll stop the transfer when I hit my goal.
- Put away big chunks when you get big chunks. Think of your emergency fund first when you get a bonus or a raise at work, you get your tax refund or you get cash back as a perk for using your credit card. It's no fun at first to put extra money toward savings, but when you need it you'll be glad you did.
- Consider your emergency fund untouchable once it's full. Only dip into it to pay for true emergencies, and replenish it as soon as you can if you use it. Create a separate savings account if you want to save for a vacation, a car or another big expense that doesn't qualify as an emergency.

## STEP 3: ONCE YOU HIT YOUR GOAL, PUT THE SAME AMOUNT TOWARD YOUR STUDENT LOANS

There's an added advantage to setting up an automatic transfer to your emergency fund: You'll get used to not having that amount to spend. Say you've been putting $500 a month toward savings. When your emergency fund is at a level you're happy with, start contributing that $500 toward your student loans instead.

You'll save the most money in the long run by directing the payment toward your highest-interest loans first. But if it would motivate you to first pay off your smaller loans completely, start with those.

Call your student loan servicer and ask the company what your options are for paying more than the minimum each month. Many servicers will let you set up a direct recurring payment from your checking account for a new total amount: $500 if your minimum payment is $300, for instance. Or you can manually pay extra on the servicer's website. If you want to pay off specific loans first, you might have to mail or email instructions to the company. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has a helpful sample letter you can use as a template.

It's exciting to have the flexibility to pay down your student loans faster; just make sure you have some savings to fall back on in case an emergency hits.

*This post originally appeared on NerdWallet.com.*

***Brianna McGurran*** *writes about student loans and life after college for NerdWallet. She talks to experts about how 20-somethings can manage their money, pay off their student loans and find jobs they love. Before joining NerdWallet, Brianna was a reporter at the* New York Observer *and at the NPR member stations Oregon Public Broadcasting and WNYC. She is a graduate of the business and economics reporting program at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism.*

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## Dear Self, CHOOSE THE ADVENTURE

I've been looking for a smooth, paved road to follow in life. There's a part of me that just wants to find an easy road, one that's marked and shows me what lies ahead.

But if there's one thing that I want more in life than ease right now, it's growth. And the best way for me to grow is by taking the unpaved road.

I grow by pushing myself beyond my comfort zone. I learn by trying something new. I expand when I step into the unknown and treat life like the adventurous, marvelous journey it is.

So as easy as that paved road looks, I know I will still choose the route of adventure. And I know I will grow and learn and flourish so much because of my brave choice to take the unpaved path.

Choose the adventure. And watch yourself grow in wonderful, wild ways.

– Steph

Inspired by the unpaved road I (accidentally) drove in Iceland

*This post originally appeared on Art to Self.*

*Steph Halligan is a motivational cartoonist and the author and artist behind Art to Self, a daily inspirational art newsletter. To get your daily dose of cartoon love and check out her book of cartoons, visit ArtToSelf.com.*

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# REALIZE THAT THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF YOUR EDUCATION, NOT THE END

## The Inception Of A Movement

Inceptia, a division of National Student Loan Program (NSLP), is a nonprofit organization providing premier expertise in higher education access, student loan repayment, analytics, default prevention, and financial education. Our mission is to support schools as they arm students with the knowledge needed to become financially responsible citizens. Since 1986, we have helped more than two million students achieve their higher education dreams at 5,500 schools nationwide. Annually, Inceptia helps more than 150,000 students borrow wisely, resolve their delinquency issues and successfully repay their student loan obligations. Inceptia educates students on how to pay for college, guides borrowers through loan repayment counseling, and provides default prevention strategies and services to schools.

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