



YOUNG ADULT GUIDE

When You Don't Have a Clean Answer

There is a question people start asking sometime after high school that seems simple enough.

"So, what are you doing now?"

Most people don't ask it because they're trying to put you on the spot. They're making conversation. They want to know how you've been. The problem is that when you're still trying to figure your life out, that question can feel much bigger than they realize.

I remember thinking there would come a point when I'd finally have a clear answer. I thought adulthood worked that way. You'd make a decision, settle into it, and everything would gradually make sense. Instead, I found myself answering that question differently almost every time someone asked it because the truth was that I was still figuring it out.

Sometimes the answer was school. Sometimes it was work. Sometimes it was whatever plan I happened to be excited about that month. None of those answers were dishonest, but they rarely felt complete. There was always another part of the story that was harder to explain. I wasn't just trying to decide what I wanted to do. I was trying to figure out who I wanted to become.

Looking back, I think that's one of the biggest surprises about this season of life. When we're younger, there's usually another step waiting for us. We finish one grade and move to the next. We graduate from high school and everyone asks where we're going afterward. For years, life follows a path that has already been laid out by someone else. Then, almost without warning, that path disappears.

Nobody tells you which job to take. Nobody knows whether you should stay where you are or move somewhere new. Nobody can tell you if the degree you're pursuing is the one you'll still care about ten years from now. For the first time, many of the decisions become yours.

That freedom is exciting, but it can also feel surprisingly heavy. I think that's because most of us assume everyone else is handling it better than we are. We look around and see friends getting promotions, moving into apartments, getting engaged, traveling, or talking confidently about their future. It's easy to conclude they've figured something out that somehow you missed.

The longer I've lived, the less I believe that's true. I think most people are carrying far more questions than they're willing to admit. The difference is that we're usually comparing our uncertainty to everyone else's highlights.

When Everyone Seems Ahead

I don't think comparison has ever been easier than it is right now. Years ago, you mostly knew what was happening in the lives of the people you saw every day. Now, before you've even gotten out of bed, you can see classmates getting engaged, friends announcing new jobs, someone buying their first house, and another person moving across the country to start what looks like the perfect career. It's remarkable how quickly that can change the way you see your own life.

You can begin the day feeling perfectly content with where you are and, ten minutes later, find yourself questioning almost every decision you've made. The job that felt like a good opportunity yesterday suddenly doesn't seem impressive enough.

The apartment you're grateful to have starts feeling like evidence that you're behind. Living at home while you're saving money can begin to feel like something you should be embarrassed about, even if it makes complete financial sense.

I remember wondering why everyone else seemed so certain about where they were headed while I was still trying to figure out where I belonged. It wasn't that I wanted someone else's career or someone else's life. I simply wanted to feel like I was making progress toward my own. Looking back, I don't think that feeling came from watching other people succeed. I think it came from quietly believing there was a timeline I was supposed to be following and that everyone else had somehow received a copy except me.

The longer I've lived, the more I've realized how many of those assumptions were built on things I couldn't actually see. The people I thought had everything figured out were often carrying questions that looked remarkably similar to my own. Some were wondering whether they'd chosen the right career. Others felt trapped by decisions they thought they were supposed to want. Some looked successful on the outside while privately wondering why success didn't feel the way they imagined it would. None of that was visible in the conversations we had or the pictures they shared, which made it easy to assume certainty wherever I couldn't see uncertainty.

One of the surprising things about becoming an adult is realizing that life rarely unfolds in the straight lines we expected when we were younger. Plans change. Interests change. Opportunities appear that we couldn't have predicted, and doors we thought would always be open sometimes close without much warning. Those moments can feel unsettling while they're happening, but they also have a way of teaching us things we probably couldn't have learned by following the original plan. Looking back, many of the decisions that seemed like detours at the time became the experiences that helped me understand myself much better than the path I'd originally imagined.

The Weight of Freedom

When I was younger, I couldn't wait for the day when nobody could tell me what to do.

I looked forward to making my own decisions, setting my own schedule, and living life on my own terms. I think that's true for most of us. Freedom sounds exciting when we've spent years living inside a structure that someone else created. School determines where we need to be each day. Parents establish rules and expectations. Coaches decide playing time. Teachers assign deadlines. Even when we don't always enjoy those things, they give life a rhythm that we rarely stop to notice.

What surprised me was realizing that becoming an adult doesn't eliminate structure nearly as much as it changes where that structure comes from. Instead of existing around you, it gradually has to come from within you.

Nobody reminds you to go to bed at a reasonable hour when you have to be at work the next morning. Nobody makes sure you keep your apartment clean, stay on top of your finances, schedule your doctor's appointments, or remember to call your grandparents. The responsibilities themselves aren't always difficult. It's remembering that they're all yours now that can feel overwhelming.

I don't think anyone ever sits you down and explains that part. We spend years looking forward to independence without realizing that independence and responsibility arrive together. You don't get one without the other.

I also remember believing there would be a day when I'd finally feel like an adult. I assumed there would be some moment where everything suddenly clicked and I would naturally know what I was doing. The older I've gotten, the more I've realized that most adults are simply people who have learned to make decisions while still carrying uncertainty. They don't always know they're making the right choice. They've just become more comfortable accepting that waiting for complete certainty usually means waiting forever.

That realization changed the way I thought about confidence. For a long time, I believed confident people made decisions because they knew they would work out. Looking back, I think the opposite is often true. Most people become more confident because they've made enough decisions, experienced enough setbacks, and recovered enough times to realize they can handle whatever comes next.

I think that's one of the reasons this season of life feels so uncomfortable. You're building evidence that you can trust yourself, but you don't have much evidence yet. Every decision feels important because there haven't been enough of them to remind you that making one imperfect choice doesn't determine the rest of your life. That perspective usually comes later, after you've had enough experiences to look back and realize that some of the decisions you worried about the most eventually became little more than chapters in a much bigger story.

If there's one thing I wish someone had told me during those years, it's that asking for guidance doesn't make you less independent. Some of the strongest people I've ever met still ask questions, seek advice, and learn from people who have walked ahead of them. The difference is that they don't expect someone else to live their life for them. They listen, they learn, and then they accept that the decision is ultimately theirs to make.

The Version of You That No Longer Fits

One of the things nobody really prepares you for is how strange it feels when the version of yourself you've known for years begins to change.

For a long time, it's easy to describe yourself by the role you play. You're the athlete. The engineering student. The musician. The oldest sibling. The dependable one. The person who always has a plan. Those roles become familiar because they've been part of your life for so long that you stop noticing where the role ends and where you begin. After enough time, it's easy to believe they are the same thing.

Then life starts changing in ways you didn't expect. Maybe you graduate and the sport you've played since you were eight years old is suddenly over. Maybe you finally earn the degree you've been working toward, only to realize the career you've imagined for years doesn't excite you the way you thought it would. Maybe you land the job you always wanted and quietly discover that success doesn't feel quite the way you pictured it. Those moments can be unsettling because they don't just change what you're doing. They change the way you see yourself.

I remember believing there was something wrong with me whenever those feelings showed up. If I started questioning a plan, reconsidering a career, or wondering whether I was still moving in the right direction, I assumed it meant I hadn't thought things through well enough in the first place. Looking back, I don't think I lacked commitment. I think I was learning more about myself than I ever had before. It makes sense that the things you wanted at eighteen won't necessarily be the same things you want at twenty-five. Experiences change us. Success changes us. Failure changes us. The people we meet and the seasons we live through gradually reshape what matters to us, and there is nothing unusual about that.

What made that season difficult wasn't simply changing my mind. It was feeling like I had to explain those changes to everyone else. The people around us usually know the version of us they've always known. If you've always been the athlete, they naturally assume you'll keep chasing sports. If you've always talked about becoming a teacher, an accountant, or an engineer, they don't immediately understand why you're suddenly asking different questions. They aren't trying to hold you back. They're simply responding to the version of you they've known the longest.

That can leave you feeling like you're living between two different identities. Everyone else is still speaking to the person you've been, while you're trying to understand the person you're becoming. It's easy to mistake that tension for failure, especially when the people around you seem so certain about the direction of their own lives. Looking back, I think that uncertainty was actually evidence that something healthy was happening. I wasn't losing myself. I was beginning to separate my identity from the roles I'd been carrying for years.

I've also come to appreciate that there's an important difference between walking away from something because you're afraid of it and walking away because you've grown beyond it. From the outside those decisions can look almost identical, but they come from very different places. One is driven by fear. The other is driven by honesty. Sometimes the most courageous decision you can make isn't holding on a little longer. Sometimes it's admitting that something which once fit your life no longer does.

One of the freedoms that comes with adulthood is realizing you don't have to become the same person you imagined when you were younger. You're allowed to discover new interests. You're allowed to pursue different opportunities. You're allowed to admit that your experiences have changed you. None of that erases the value of the road that brought you here. More often, it's because of that road that you're finally beginning to understand who you really are.

Learning to Trust Yourself Again

There is a kind of tired that comes from being busy, and then there's the kind that comes from repeatedly disappointing yourself. The second one is much harder to recognize because, from the outside, life can look perfectly normal. You go to work, show up to class, spend time with friends, and keep moving through your routine. Underneath all of that, though, you begin carrying a quiet conversation with yourself that nobody else can hear.

It usually starts with good intentions. You tell yourself you're finally going to start working out consistently. You're going to apply for that job, save more money, stop putting things off, or have the conversation you've been avoiding. For a day or

two, maybe even a week, everything feels different. Then life gets busy, something unexpected happens, or motivation fades, and before long you're telling yourself you'll start again next Monday.

None of those moments feel especially important by themselves. The problem is what happens after enough of them begin to pile up. Eventually, you stop questioning whether you can accomplish the goal and start questioning whether you'll actually follow through this time. The conversation quietly shifts from, "Can I do this?" to, "Will I actually stick with it?" That's a much heavier question because it isn't really about the goal anymore. It's about whether you believe your own promises.

I remember going through seasons where I was much more frustrated with myself than anyone else ever could have been. From the outside, people probably thought I was doing fine. I had work, responsibilities, and things that kept me busy. What they couldn't see were all the quiet promises I'd made to myself that I'd slowly stopped believing. Every time I said I'd start tomorrow, I believed it a little less. Eventually, I realized I wasn't struggling because I lacked ability. I was struggling because I'd collected so much evidence that I couldn't trust myself to follow through.

Looking back, I think that's why so many people stop talking about the things they want. It's easier to keep a dream private than to admit, once again, that you never started. We joke about procrastination. We laugh about never having our lives together. We become really good at making it sound like we don't care that much because pretending something doesn't matter hurts less than admitting it matters a great deal.

What changed for me wasn't one dramatic decision or one perfect week where everything suddenly came together. It was realizing that trust is built the same way it's built in every other relationship. It comes from consistency. Not perfection, just consistency. A promise that's kept today becomes evidence that tomorrow's promise might be worth believing too. One workout doesn't change your life, but it changes the conversation you have with yourself. One difficult phone call doesn't solve every problem, but it reminds you that avoiding it wasn't the only option. Those moments seem small while they're happening, yet they have a way of accumulating until you eventually notice that you're becoming someone you believe again.

I still have days where I don't feel particularly motivated. I still have days where things don't go according to plan. The difference is that I've stopped expecting confidence to arrive before I take action. More often than not, confidence shows up afterward. It grows from keeping the promises you make to yourself, even when they're small enough that nobody else would ever notice. Over time, those small decisions begin changing something much more important than your circumstances. They begin changing the relationship you have with yourself.

Forward Is Enough

By now, I hope you understand something that took me much longer to learn than it should have. Very few people have life figured out as early as they appear to. Most of us are simply making the best decisions we can with the information we have at the time, learning from the ones that don't work, and continuing to move anyway. Looking back, I spent far too much time believing there was one perfect path that I had to discover before I could really begin my life. I worried that one wrong decision might somehow close every door that mattered. What I eventually discovered was that life is much more forgiving than that. Some of the decisions I agonized over became little more than stories I told years later, while some of the smallest decisions I almost overlooked quietly changed the direction of my life in ways I never could have predicted.

Those changes rarely happened because I suddenly felt ready. They happened because I took a step before I felt completely prepared. Sometimes it was a difficult conversation I'd been avoiding. Sometimes it was applying for an opportunity I wasn't sure I deserved. Sometimes it was making a decision that frightened me because I knew it meant leaving behind a version of my life that no longer fit. None of those moments felt extraordinary while they were happening. They felt uncertain, uncomfortable, and occasionally terrifying. Looking back, though, I can see that each one became part of a much larger story. Every decision taught me something the previous version of myself couldn't have known, and every step revealed enough of the road to make the next one possible.

That's one of the reasons we built True North Momentum around movement instead of perfection. The phrase *Forward is Enough* didn't come from lowering the standard or encouraging people to settle for less than they were capable of becoming. It came from realizing that I had spent years waiting for confidence, clarity, certainty, and the perfect moment before allowing myself to move. The longer I've lived, the more convinced I've become that those things rarely arrive first. Confidence usually follows action. Clarity grows through experience. Certainty is often something we recognize only after we've already started moving. Waiting for all of them before taking the next step usually means waiting much longer than we need to.

Whatever your next step is, I hope you don't spend another year believing your life begins after you become more confident, more certain, or more prepared. The version of you you're hoping to become isn't waiting somewhere in the

future before your life can finally begin. That person is being built by the decisions you make today, especially the ones that feel uncomfortable enough to matter.

Looking back now, I can see that I wasn't really waiting for confidence. I was waiting for permission. I thought if I could become a little more prepared, a little more certain, or a little more capable, then I'd finally be the person who was ready to begin. What I didn't understand was that the person I was waiting to become could only be built by doing the very things I kept postponing. The people I admire most aren't the ones who somehow knew exactly where they were going. They're the ones who accepted they couldn't know, took the best step they could with what they had, learned from it, and kept moving. Every meaningful life is built that way, one decision at a time, long before anyone realizes those ordinary decisions were quietly changing everything.

Years from now, I don't think you'll remember this season because every question finally had an answer. I think you'll remember it because, somewhere along the way, you made a decision that didn't feel particularly extraordinary at the time. It was just one conversation, one opportunity, one application, one difficult choice, or one moment when standing still no longer felt like the better option. While you were living it, it probably felt like an ordinary day. Only much later would you realize that so much of the life you eventually built could be traced back to a decision that almost didn't happen because you didn't think you were ready.

Time has a way of changing the way we see those moments. The fears that once felt overwhelming become stories. The uncertainty that once seemed impossible to overcome becomes part of the reason you're grateful you kept going. The questions that convinced you to wait slowly lose their grip as new experiences replace them. What stays with you isn't the moment you finally become confident, because that moment probably never arrived the way you imagined it would. What stays with you is the realization that your life began changing long before you felt ready for it. It began changing the day you stopped believing you had to become someone else before you deserved to start becoming yourself. Every decision after that became another step, every step became another piece of the person you were growing into, and one day you realized the life you'd been waiting for had never been waiting somewhere out in front of you. It had been quietly built by every ordinary day you chose not to stand still.