When I Grow Up, I Want to Be...

Irina Oana Niculescu

No four-year-old ever said, ‘When I grow up I want to be a learning technologist’, and only a handful of generation Y students know exactly what they want to do after graduation. This piece is for you, the soon-to-be-graduate.

I am a Learning Technologist at the University within the Department of Technology Enhanced Learning (DTEL). My team and I focus on researching and innovating pedagogy within the University and support the use of educational technology across all faculties. In my role, I am starting to experience the benefits of the clichéd ‘get out of your comfort zone’ motto and to understand a truth I ignored as a student: that uncertainty can be my best friend.

Had I not said yes to a STARS\(^1\) workshop when I was extremely stressed because of my final year dissertation, I would not have been in the position of landing my first job in education, the field where I want to make a change. At the STARS workshop I met the head of DTEL, my current manager, who invited me for an interview. I had a short internship and organised participatory research workshops with students. I wrote a sub-chapter for a conference paper on Digital Badging. A week before my graduation (BA Sociology and Film), I had an interview for a permanent position within the department. I have now been working there for almost two months. Never would I have believed that achieving this would be easy – success is something I do not take for granted.

Attending a state school in a post-communist environment, my working class background, the need to challenge gender stereotypes, and the fact that I was the first person in my family who had the chance to attend university full-time were all factors which inhibited hope and amplified pressure. I realised that working diligently towards something without focusing on instant gratification could create considerable discomfort but could also lead to success, be that personal or professional.

Many students are hoping to understand how to best shape their working persona, as if the answer is set in stone, waiting to be revealed. In fact, the answer, ‘success’, is a living organism which can be nourished by unforeseen circumstances. I have realised that I can always choose

\(^1\) Surrey Top Achievers Recognised and Supported.
how I react to uncomfortable situations. In this way, I am always creating space for something new to happen in my life, something which can help me to become a more complete person. This space can be used for whatever I wish. I want to remember that the rigid way I approached life while being at university, when I focussed on my progress within activities which were directly related to my discipline, acted as a blindfold. Now every working day is witness to my recent discovery, namely that my comfort zone is ever-changing.

How attached are you to your comfort zone? Let us continue to challenge it with the curiosity and creativity of four-year-olds.

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