Congratulations, graduates! If you are one of the millions of college students graduating this spring, you can finally kiss finals, all-nighters, and Ramen goodbye forever (or, at least until graduate school!). With your new degree in hand, you can conquer corporate jungles and blaze a trail for the younger generations to follow. You can handle anything, except maybe that one pesky question, “So…what are you going to do now?”

Um. Yeah. Let’s face it. Life as you know it is about to change. Drastically. If you are one of the hundreds of people out there with a secret case of college graduation jitters, this article is for you. While you are celebrating your accomplishments, try to take a few minutes during the next few weeks to think about these things:

1. **How do you feel about all of this?**
   It’s totally normal to feel excited about graduation one day and to feel anxious or even a bit depressed the next. Any time that something important “ends”, it’s a little bit sad. By recognizing your emotions and taking ownership of them, it’s easier to deal with the transition at hand and move forward.

2. **What’s going to happen to your personal relationships?**
   Just because college is coming to an end doesn’t mean that your college friendships have to end, too. The ones that are meant to last will grow and change with you. Perhaps you and some friends will end up living in the same city after you graduate, but if not, make plans to reconnect soon. Do you have a “significant other” in your life? Chances are that if you do, you’re stressed about what you “should” do with that relationship. Do any of these “shoulds” sound familiar?

   - Should we look for jobs in the same town?
   - Should I move away and hope they follow me?
   - Should we get engaged?
   - Should I follow them to a new city, even if I can’t find a job right away?
   - Should I just start graduate school so that I don’t have to move?

   Sometimes it helps if you take the word “should” out of the equation, and instead focus on what feels right, and what IS right for you. Everyone has personal and professional goals; it’s easier if your partner’s are similar or complementary to yours. If not, then you need to put your differences aside, and decide what’s right for you. If you feel like it’s right for you to start graduate school, start a career, or start a family, then that’s what you need to discuss with your partner. Find out if you are both going in the same direction. If not, can you honestly change your plans without feeling resentful of your partner? If so, then make plans together. If not, that’s ok, too. It’s easier to take action and feel good about it when you’re at an honest starting point.

3. **What ARE you going to do now?**
   If you managed to get through college without a career objective in mind, then it’s no wonder if you’re stressed out about job options now. With graduation right around the corner, the time to
get real is now. Where to start? If you haven’t visited your college’s career center yet, get in there this week. Be honest with your advisor and admit it if you’re truly clueless about what to do next. Hate your major? Guess what---it won’t be the first time your advisor has heard that, either. Just be honest about where you’re at, and then let him or her help you figure out what to do next.

If you know where you’d like to live after graduation, have your advisor help you figure out which companies are in that area. They might even be able to connect you to some alumni who also live there. Why alumni? They can be a great resource for discussing employment and housing options. They might even be willing to pass along your resume to people that they know who might be hiring.

If you truly don’t know where to start, though, just take this list with you:

a. What jobs am I qualified for?
b. What kinds of jobs might I enjoy?
c. Which companies / organizations might hire me?
d. Is my resume right for these kinds of jobs?
e. What are two things I should do this week?
f. When can I come in to see you for a follow-up appointment?
(Note: The follow-up appointment will help keep you accountable. Do it!).

4. What does it mean to be an adult, anyway?
For many people, leaving the fun, informal world of college behind and donning a business suit feels a bit fake! You might even feel like you’ve lost a piece of your identity. True, your new job and co-workers will require you to adopt a new set of norms if you want to become successful. But, being successful shouldn’t require you to be a sell-out, either. Resist the temptation to take the first job that comes along. Instead, take a hard look at the company’s culture. Make sure it is a place where you can naturally develop into a grown-up version of your old self. With the right employer and a decent boss, you have the best chances of thriving in your new environment. Remember high school? How much time did you put in to finding just the right college? This next step in your life takes some work and planning, too. So hang in there!

Some final thoughts as you contemplate your life after graduation:
• Talk about it. You’re not alone. Graduation jitters are much more common than you think.
• Figure out your best course of action, but make sure you have a Plan B.
• Remember the words of a popular proverb, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
• Don’t leave big decisions to fate. Take action. Today.

Good luck to you and congratulations! If you’d like to discuss your post-college plans, feel free to drop by our PostCollege Forum.