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Hitting quarter-life crisis

Twentysomethings question career path

You finish university and wonder, "What now?" For some graduates, meaningful work in their field is the next step. For others, a quarter-life crisis shows them another path towards career bliss.

That's what Lindsay Stephenson found working in the marketing department of a retail store when she questioned her career path. "I love working at night, and a nine-to-five job isn't conducive for that lifestyle," she says. The 26-year-old Torontonian, who majored in cultural studies at Trent University, admits she was "scared of the unknown" when she decided to leave the office job and begin a home business centred on customized stationery. "But I had to take a chance," Stephenson says of her move into entrepreneurship last year.

Going through that career turnaround at 25 gave her insight into how to spend the rest of her life. For several years, Stephenson had wanted to employ her graphic-design skills to a home business, so her quarter-life crisis — when indecision prompted action — finally gave her resolve to start Penny People (www.pennypeople.com), a web-based business that creates custom invitations, cards and stationery adorned with characters that resemble her clients. Hits on her website grew from five daily last year to more than 200 daily today.

"I took baby steps and learned how to run a business through trial and error," Stephenson says.

But isn't it important to take post-secondary education into the workforce? "What they teach you in school is how to think, problem solve, and engage in the world and explore it as global citizen," says Catherine Mossop, a career mentor and president of Sage Mentors.

Unless you're studying a trade, she adds, university or college education doesn't need to apply to a sudden career change.

A quarter-life crisis has been called "emerging adulthood" and even the "age of possibilities," which Mossop sees as a chance for a graduate to shift focus.

"It doesn't matter what you study," Mossop says, "because the marketplace is full of so many options. It's also important to choose a job you have fun doing."

Logic dictates that if career shifters like Stephenson happily live through a quarter-life crisis, they would avoid a mid-life crisis. After all, the insecurity that led middle-aged employees to question their choices won't haunt the twentysomethings who took time to survey all their options.

Stephenson laughs. "Yeah, I can see myself skipping a mid-life crisis because I'm loving every choice I'm making now," she says.

For more information on Mossop, go to www.sagementors.com.

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