

Intelligence is Worth Little Without Wisdom

As I went for my usual afternoon walk on my old campus at Notre Dame – recalling the class I had in that building, the conversation I had over there, the quiet moments reading on that bench there – I became aware of the creeping feeling of regret, as happens every so often. You see, five years ago I had been admitted to a master's program at Notre Dame after spending a year learning Latin and Greek, even teaching myself beginning Latin poolside over the course of one summer. I had every intention of using this degree to launch myself into a doctoral program and a fancy career as a Christian historian.

My prior degrees were at more humble institutions, and having earned acceptance into one of the top programs in the country was quite the achievement, I felt.

Fast forward five years later, and here I am – a wife, mother, and pre-nursing student. What went wrong?

Well, nothing, actually – but also a lot.

Leaving academia and abandoning my pursuit of a Ph.D. in Christian history was not a mistake, as I am occasionally tempted to think. I considered the possibility that my wrong turn was switching from pre-medicine to history at a mediocre university, or maybe it was in attending the mediocre university, to begin with. In truth, my error was in not putting forth any effort when it came to planning my future.

But even if I had tried, I didn't at that time possess the wisdom to guide me, and neither did anyone else around me.

I imagine that many young people, thanks in no small part to their parents, are trained to grossly overestimate their own intelligence and talents. Meanwhile, they haven't been trained to cultivate a true awareness of personal strengths

and limitations, and the ability to make wise decisions in light of present circumstances. Intelligence, many are led to believe, is a resource which must be exploited by acquiring advanced degrees at prestigious universities followed by lucrative careers. The jobs and the income are, of course, only enigmatic predictions of what lay ahead for the college graduate, especially for one with a degree in the humanities.

Intelligence is indeed a valuable resource, but it isn't everything. It can be squandered on a useless degree or other poor decisions. It can be exploited through an education and a career that leaves you miserable, overworked, and lonely. Wisdom is required to know how you should apply your intelligence to obtain the life that is most satisfying for you.

Because you see, success and failure are subjective concepts. Regardless of what society tells you are the hallmarks of success – an ivy league education, a large paycheck, luxurious vacations, marriage, children, whatever – [none of it means anything](#) if it doesn't play a role in your own flourishing.

Young adults aren't taught to realistically evaluate their own skills in light of the job market and make wiser, more pragmatic – if less ego-gratifying – choices. This is why they rack up many thousands of dollars in student loan debt to pursue degrees in gender studies or English or, in my case, history and theology. It isn't that these degrees can't turn into academic careers for a select few, but the [odds are slim](#) and growing slimmer, especially for tenure-track positions in the humanities. You might be better off sinking that small fortune in a slot machine than using it to waste four to ten years of your life obtaining [degrees with little to no market value](#).

For me, I had to accept that despite all the effort and time and money I had put into a career in history and theology, it

wasn't satisfying to me. My misery was exacerbated by having to confront my own personal limitations, and it became evident that I was struggling to force myself into a mold in which I'd never fit. Even if I were to manage to obtain a Ph.D., my own limitations coupled with the low demand for Christian historians and theologians and female pastors would ensure my unemployment.

Admittedly, I excelled in many ways and several professors seemed to believe I possessed the skills to succeed at a career in academia, but I still wasn't playing to my strengths or pursuing a fulfilling career. For me, personally, I think better in concrete terms, and not so well in the abstract.

Similarly, I have to see tangible ways that what I am doing is beneficial to the world around me. A career that entailed being ensconced in a library studying esoteric texts and being pressured to write articles that [only five people would ever read](#) no longer made any sense to me. As it turns out, most Christians don't care in the slightest about what Christian historians and theologians are doing, and I discovered that I could not be content with a pursuit that seemed to make little meaningful difference in the lives of most people. And I'm [not alone](#).

My advice for you, if you are attending college or considering attending or if you're contemplating any sort of career change, is to truly know yourself. It took me several years and two master's degrees until I was finally able to understand my weaknesses along with my strengths. Hopefully, it won't take you as long as it took me, but you will only be able to learn what your strengths and weaknesses are through experience and listening to feedback from teachers, employers, and friends. It's better to admit a wrong turn and a poor fit and to find a pursuit that capitalizes on your strengths than to struggle unnecessarily. We're not all cut out for management positions, public speaking, or even college degrees.

My second piece of advice is to pursue the passion that possesses the most potential to be both personally fulfilling and marketable, in addition to being the pursuit that best capitalizes on your strengths. Having a passion is great, but if no one wants to pay you to pursue it, you'll have a hard time earning a living.

It's important that you identify the type of life you really want for yourself, and not pursue a career that won't help you to obtain it. If you value having time to spend on your hobbies and with your family, then pursuing a career that would require a fifty to sixty-hour work week wouldn't be the best choice for you, even if you think that the increase in income will make up for being miserable. Remember that only you can define what success and failure mean for you. You can only achieve success if you take the time to define it for yourself and disregard the pressure to meet the standards of others.

To combat my unemployment (I'm yet to find any employers interested in a woman with two useless master's degrees), I took into account multiple factors: my desire to be economically self-sufficient, my requirement to have a career in which I can see daily, tangible proof that it makes a difference, my strength in the natural sciences, the job market, the requisite education and its costs, and my preference for having a life outside of work. I acquired education and training in the medical field, and I plan to begin nursing school next year. For a brief moment, my ego nearly ruined me again when I "decided" that I may as well just go to medical school rather than "settle for less."

Fortunately, I remembered the kind of life that I wanted for myself and my family, and that intelligence is worth little without the wisdom to guide it.

—

This article was republished with permission from FEE.org.

Read the original article [here](#).

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Wikimedia Commons – Michael Fernandes, CC BY-SA 3.0