

OPINION

‘Embrace positivity and hope in negotiating career crossroads’: Lessons for the Grade 12s of 2023

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The Grade 12 results have been announced, and important decisions are needed regarding the career journey ahead for high school graduates (and their families) – decisions that will have an important effect on your future career-life. This article aims to provide a guideline to help you negotiate your career crossroads by embracing positivity and hope as your constant companions.

1. Coping with inadequate performance in Grade 12 examinations

Congratulations are due to students who achieved the necessary marks for admission to their chosen institutions and study fields. But for those who have not (*yet*) attained your desired marks: Relax. There are still many reasons to remain positive and optimistic about the future.

Before we proceed: Please discard the term 'fail' from your vocabulary. Instead, use the phrase 'insufficient achievement'. Students' current marks may influence their acceptance into their preferred field of study, but they certainly do not determine your overall success in life or limit your career prospects.

While it is disappointing when exam results fall short of your own and others' expectations, it is essential to step back and consider the results calmly. In life, we all experience successes and setbacks. This is entirely normal. If your results were below expectations, consider this a challenge you can overcome – an opportunity to grow as a person and to show resilience in rapidly changing and uncertain times.

Do not fixate on a particular tertiary institution, whether a university, university of technology, college or private training institution. Yes, it is true that people with degrees often find employment more easily and earn higher salaries, but a university is certainly not the only path to success. Non-university study has its own value, and each study discipline and tertiary training institution should be evaluated on how it best suits you.

2. Practical guidance: Dealing with a Grade 12 pass that falls short of securing tertiary admission

Students with a Grade 12 pass that does not secure admission to tertiary studies have several options. You could, for example, request a re-evaluation of your exam papers, opt to write supplementary exams, or opt to repeat grades or specific subjects. Of course, any of these options will require diligence and dedication. Most importantly you need to convert your intentions and aspirations into *actions*. You could also apply to do similar courses at other institutions or at a different training level. Consulting with a career counsellor first is essential. If the decision is to reapply in the upcoming year, you as the affected student should consider taking a gap year first (but only after consulting with a career counsellor and/or students who have previously taken a gap year). You could do part-time work or other constructive activities. Speak to people who have successfully navigated similar situations, and to those who have not.

But remember: *you* understand *yourself* better than anyone else; you are the ultimate authority on your own being. Only you can advise yourself. Others can offer valuable insights, but they can never ‘advise’ you on the most appropriate career for you.

Remember: Becoming employable and leading a purposeful and meaningful life is entirely possible regardless of exam results.

3. Tips for coping with sadness, disappointment, anxiety and/or depression

Remember that *this is just one exam*, one of many career-life transitions you will have to contend with in the course of your life. There is always hope. Many people who experience challenges in Grade 12 exams go on to achieve success in later life. Understand that you may not have attained the marks you had been hoping for, but you have not ‘failed’ anything. While your current marks may influence your acceptance into your preferred field of study, they do not determine your overall success in life. Avoid negative talk and recriminations.

Do not blame yourself or others. Disappointing exam results do not define you as a ‘bad’ or less valuable person, nor do they make you a so-called ‘failure’. If destructive thoughts or thoughts of suicide arise, please speak immediately with your parents and seek the help of a qualified professional such as an educational or clinical psychologist, a registered counsellor or another suitable individual.

4. Discovering a sense of meaning and purpose in your career-life journey

Cultivate a true sense of meaning, hope, and purpose in your career-life – get a clear understanding of your life's purpose, why you are studying, and what your ‘guiding star’ is. While it is important to choose a field of study that offers financial stability, students should also consult with trained professionals, such as career psychologists, to uncover and enact what is really important to you (your central life theme or themes), beyond your ‘job goals’.

5. Find someone to help you identify your key life themes

Once students identify their key life themes, they can then articulate their career-life purpose and address existential questions such as "Why do I live?", "Where am I headed?", "Why am I on this planet?" and "Is life worth living?" Answers to these questions will place you on a sound footing for the future.

See “Malcolm’s” (pseudonym) story for an example of what a key life theme is, and its role in helping you live a meaning- and purpose-filled career-life:

"I want to become an electrician to realise my 'natural' mechanical potential [his mission statement]. When I finish my studies, I aim to return to the extremely poor community where I grew up. Many people there cannot afford the fees charged by electricians, and I want to find a way to assist them. Additionally, I aspire to secure funding for and initiate a soccer club to provide opportunities for jobless youngsters and keep them off the streets. My own brother died from drug abuse, and nothing would bring me more pleasure than to help others facing similar circumstances [a key life theme and his vision statement]."

A common thread weaving through people’s career-life stories is the transformative power of turning personal pain, hurt or suffering into triumph and social contributions. In essence, this is about converting passive suffering into active mastery. By helping others overcome similar challenges, individuals can actively confront the pain they themselves may have experienced. And every time they help others heal, they also heal themselves.

6. URLs of a few useful websites

Here are the URLs for additional websites where you can find information about universities, universities of technology, TVET colleges and private higher education institutions:

Examples of diploma qualifications and minimum entry requirements for degree courses:

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/certificate-vs-degree-vs-diploma#:~:text=The%20degree%20program%20typically%20includes,the%20form%20of%20an%20apprenticeship>

All about TVET Colleges:

<https://www.news24.com/You/Archive/everything-you-need-to-know-about-sas-tvet-colleges-20170728-2>

SAQA - The SA Qualifications Framework:

<https://www.saqa.org.za/>

What is the difference between a certificate, diploma, and degree?

<https://www.skillsacademy.co.za/differences-between-a-degree-certificate-and-a-diploma/>

For information on bursaries, study techniques, relaxation methods and more, visit www.kobusmaree.org

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