



TAKING THE PLUNGE

*Higher education or job after graduation? **Jay Rege** sizes the situation*

"FINAL year, huh? What are your plans after graduation?" Every student is repetitively shot this question by family, friends, teachers and most of all by oneself. Most students ride the horns of dilemma on whether to pursue higher education or take up a job after graduation. With a huge choice of jobs available these days and postgraduate programmes increasing rapidly as well, drawing a decision becomes a daunting task. Under such circumstances, peer influence and parental pressure often drive the student's decision.

After his BA, Sumit Kumar immediately joined an MBA in finance from a fairly reputed institute as his classmates convinced him that finance is the most 'happening' career'. "At the time, I had no idea what an MBA (finance) was, nor was I aware of its job prospects. Only upon joining the course, I realised that it was not my cup of tea," claims Kumar. Post-MBA, he worked as a financial analyst in a multinational bank in Mumbai. "I should have worked for a few years before I studied further. It would have given me an insight into the real world and I could have made a more informed decision. I always had an inclination towards the media industry and a course in media management or mass communication would have been a better choice. I am now thinking of shifting careers."

Kumar's is not an isolated case. There are many who pursue their master's either in the same field or a totally different one from their bachelor's only to realise they made a mistake. However, not everybody pursues higher studies immediately upon graduation. Some like Priya Desai adopt a different strategy. "I worked for two years to get industry exposure and then quit to upgrade my skills and hike up the corporate ladder. On the job, I learned through observation and interaction with

others but a formal education was necessary to expedite the learning process. Money saved from my job helped pay for my postgraduation," she smiles. Not everybody is as fortunate as Priya to go back to college. Neeraj Goyal took up a job after graduation and wants to go back for his master's degree. However, Goyal says, "I have been so busy at work that I don't find time to study for the entrance exams and work on my applications. Quitting my job at this point would adversely impact my financial situation. I should have finished my further studies immediately after graduation. Now I think I am too old for college. I am currently evaluating the option of a part time or correspondence course."

Higher education, at any point in life, definitely adds to one's perspective and enhances career prospects. Although the percentage of students who pursue their master's degree is increasing every year, the culture prevalent in India is to finish one's education before starting a career. Due to this, the Indian education system is designed for a comparatively younger audience. Most students in college, even those at the master's level are in their early twenties. The only exceptions are professionals who want to go abroad for their further studies.

How does the industry view such students? "Individuals who go for advanced degrees immediately after the completion of their bachelor's programme, although more competent in some advanced techniques and analysis, are not noticeably superior to those employees who have basic degrees and a couple of years of work experience. Those who went on to obtain advanced degrees after some work experience seemed to be able to integrate the requirements of work much better," opines a senior manager who has hired professionals of all levels for several years.

Does this mean that one should gain work experience before pursuing their post-graduation? Well not always. Those who plan to pursue higher education in the same field as their bachelor's degree should try to do so immediately as they are still in touch with the subject. On the other hand, if one plans to change their field of study, factors like financial ability, aptitude, attitude, short term and long term career goals should be taken into consideration. Talking to experienced faculty and industry experts can also help. Colleges should appoint career counselors to advise students in this regard. Think before you take the next step. The choice one makes at the graduate level plays a major role in shaping one's career. Keep in mind that going back to school is always an option that can be explored.

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