

The Importance of Being Lost

Not a lot of people get told to “get lost” ... besides door-to-door salesmen. If you haven’t, I want to be the first to tell you: get lost.

Take a moment to be honest with yourself. When someone asks you “Oh you’re studying [major]? What do you want to do?” you likely have a stock answer — one to keep the grandparents at bay for at least another couple minutes. But when you give that answer, do you feel a slight pang of doubt flicker across your mind? Are you sure of yourself? If you’re not: get lost.

What I mean is: liberate yourself from your stock answer. Accept yourself; accept that you don’t know where the course of your life will take you. You can be lost, and benefit, with the right attitude.

So how does one get lost?

This first step of acceptance is difficult, but even dabbling with accepting this fact, we have to address the obvious stigmas associated with being “lost.” Perhaps this acceptance wouldn’t be so hard if we understood more clearly what we were accepting.

In an atmosphere of high expectations, to admit that you are lost is an admission of weakness. “Lost?” our world seems to say, “do you need help?” How can you “move forward” without a clear path on which to evaluate your own progress? Being lost is just one slippery step from destitution.

This is simply not true. You can also be lost when there are *too many* good things to choose from. Too many good books, too many good classes, too many good majors. As aspiring undergraduates, we are privileged to have this “problem.” How could we be expected to choose?

Instead of choosing, opt to be lost.

Lost, you are free to love any and all of the things around you, not just what falls on the path to a career or a major requirement (though it does not exclude them). Lost, you look around with searching eyes. Your interests become deeper, as each has the added meaning of revealing potential paths of wonder or study or vocation. The wanderer is not content to know that something merely lies on the path ahead, he must know more about it and the paths that lead to and from it; the navigator only glances up from his map to check that landmarks are passing as expected.

Lost, you must trust your intuition, as the wanderer's only compass is internal. Trusting your intuition means taking that class that has always sounded so cool. If you can't take it, sit in on it. If you can't sit in on it, go to the office hours and listen. It means you are responsible for supplementing your own education. Beyond your textbooks there are broader landscapes. This means checking out a book from the library on an interesting topic, or just browsing the stacks of knowledge within and feeling the invigoration that comes with it, or having that conversation with a curious friend instead of doing your problem set. Most importantly, it means giving your "supplemental" education — your Wikipedia odysseys and late-night chats — the time and mental space it deserves. You are not your stock answer, and your approach to learning should reflect that. Without a path, every road you explore is a vivid adventure. And when you choose to explore something, get lost in it.

Suddenly, lost doesn't sound so bad.

To what extent you stay lost will depend on you and your circumstances. Being lost is not an excuse for apathy or complacency, but don't rush your wandering: there will always be time to choose a path, or to change the one you are on. And, as they inevitably will during your journey, when two paths diverge in a yellow wood, bushwhack.