# **Starting to Figure It Out**

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Hello there!

The post-college life transition is freaking hard.

My college friends have a tradition of having an annual recap call. We suck at staying in touch, so once a year we get on a video call and present slideshows recapping the year, our lessons learned, milestones achieved, and our future goals. Talking to them this year reminded me that our lives have all had ups and downs. For the last couple of years, I have been so immersed in my own downs that it felt like everyone in my life was doing better than I was. This year, though, I was more aware of the glimmers of stability that each of my friends are finding, just as I am. Now, 2.5 years out of undergrad, we are finally starting to figure it out.



artist unknown

I will not lie, 2.5 years was way longer than I expected it to take for me to get my feet under me in the real world. When I graduated from college, I thought that as soon as I got my first job and first apartment, I would magically become a full-fledged adult who understood income taxes. That assumption wasn’t completely wrong. Some of my friends did have that stuff figured out by the time they graduated from college. While I was daunted by establishing a wifi bill or getting the water turned on in my house, I had friends who could confidently change a tire or explain jury duty or pay for their own dentistry. I still cannot do those things. Well, I just got my own dental insurance, so I am on my way, but my point stands. I am only starting to figure this out.

The things that I thought would magically transport me to adulthood, namely, a salary and a place that I pay rent on, actually ended up being the things that showed me just how much I still had to learn.

When I graduated college, I was the friend that everyone was eyeing because I had an internship-turned-job-offer that would start the June after my May graduation. It was in the sector that I wanted to be in, let me live where I wanted to live, had me doing good for the world, and paid me more than I had expected to make straight out of college. A year later, I quit that job for a number of reasons including severe burnout and challenging workplace relationships.

I did so many things in that first year that I would never do now — I also started some of my best habits there. I got (too) close with my team and the cliquiness ended up working against me. I got good about not responding to emails over the weekend. I let myself get swept up in unnecessary stress and drama. I learned how to establish genuine friendships in a fully remote and professional environment. I left that job with my confidence absolutely destroyed and spent the next six months searching for any job that would take me.

That next job would teach me a lot. There I was, a year and a half out of college, and already burnout. But fear not, I was going to do so much better at this new job than I did at my last. I was willing to learn and I was willing to look dumb while I did it. Here, I learned how to navigate a totally different professional setting than my last job had trained me for. This organization was larger than my last and with scale comes bureaucracy, which I had to learn. I had to learn how to work across a more varied generational terrain, and navigate what it meant to be the youngest person in a room where that was a point against you, not for you. I lasted six months in that job.

Before I keep going on with my (astoundingly short yet dramatic) professional biography, I want to pause. Throughout those years I felt like every time I figured one thing out in my life, another thing would rear its head up to challenge me. It was a game of Wack-A-Mole from hell. Just this past weekend, I texted those college friends and said “my life is quite messy at the moment. I fear it has been messy since we graduated, but alas”. The Wack-A-Mole continues. I am only *starting* to figure it out.

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I want to be clear that my friends are freaking impressive people. They are the overachiever and the driven type. They are the ones you want in an emergency and the ones you want to tell about your darkest fears. They are wicked smart and incredibly resilient. All that, and it is still taking *years* for us to figure this life stuff out.

I have no idea where each of you are on your journeys. Heck, some of you own your homes or have children, while others are looking down the barrel of their last semester of undergrad. I hope, however, that each of you can allow yourself to breathe and acknowledge that figuring this whole life thing out is freaking hard.

Maybe you have figured it out and you can look back at those years of struggle fondly. Maybe you are deep in the trenches and nothing seems close to being good. Maybe you are about to step into the trenches and are simultaneously excited and petrified of what the future might hold for you.

I would love to tell you not to compare your journey to others. If I thought that was at all feasible, I would tell you that. Also, I hear that nirvana is great. But if you do succumb to the human urge to compare yourself to your classmates, know that this whole period of your life is hard for everyone. No one knows what they are doing — even when they fully believe that they do.

I guess the best advice that I can give is to just keep trudging through the trenches. I hear there is light at the other end of the tunnel.

All my best,

Zoe