

8 Alternatives to College

Written by James Altucher

Friday, 01 December 2017 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 26 March 2018 10:42

When I was 19, I won some money in a chess tournament. Instead of putting that money toward my college tuition, I decided to drop out of college and buy a car.

I bought a used 1982 Honda Accord. I drove it around for a few hours since they let me drive it right out of the lot. But when I saw my girlfriend and everyone else taking their classes, I got a little jealous. I returned the car and canceled the check and entered my sophomore year of college. I regret it now.

PARADIGM SHIFT

8

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Whenever I suggest, "Don't send your kids to college," a lot of my smart people inevitably respond, "Well, what else should they do?" This assumes me. It puts it's really hard to figure out what people age 18-22 should do during the most vibrant, healthy years of their lives, while they grow from being a child to an adult.

So I figure I will help people out by coming up with a list, and try to handle the criticisms before they arise. I can do this because I have a college degree, so I've learned how to think and engage in debates with other intelligent people.

1) START A BUSINESS.

There are many businesses a kid can start, particularly with the internet. If you always focus on the main, "they love and will buy," you'll start to generate ideas.

Many people say, "But everyone can be an entrepreneur." It's amusing to me, also, how many times I've accused this generation of writing and yet people will say the same thing. First off, there's no law against being an entrepreneur. In fact, most people can be an entrepreneur. What they really mean is, "Not everyone can be a successful entrepreneur." And as it turns out, there's no law against failure, either.

When someone loses a tennis match or a chess game, how do they improve? They study their loss. As a person who has maintained my field in life, knowing your losses is infinitely more valuable than studying your wins.

I failed at my first three attempts at being an entrepreneur before I even learned how to spell the word, but eventually I had a success (a company with profits that I was then able to sell).

Failure is a part of life. Better to learn that at all than at 22 or older, when you've been conditioned by every blue chip and hyperinflated into thinking success was yours for the taking. Get inspired in the time of failure as a youth so you can leverage in entrepreneurial blessings as an adult.

Here's what you learn when you start a business when you're young, regardless of success or failure:

- You learn how to come up with ideas that will be accepted by other people.
- You begin to build your U.S. detector (something that definitely does not happen in college).
- You learn how to sell your idea.
- You learn how to build and execute on an idea.
- You meet and socialize with other people in your space. They might not all be the same age but, let's face it, that's life as an adult. You just spend 4 years with kids your age. Grow up!
- You might learn how to delegate and manage people.
- You learn how to eat what you kill, a skill also not learned by college grads.

2) TRAVEL THE WORLD.

Here's a basic assignment. Take 100,000 and get yourself to India. Check out a world completely different from our own. Do it for a year.

You will meet other foreigners traveling. You will learn what poverty is. You will learn the value of time to a much a dollar. You will often be in situations where you need to be a lone to survive, despite the odds being against you.

If you're going to travel up, you might as well do it from diversity than from drinking too much at a frat party. You will learn a little bit more about Eastern religions, compared with the Western religions you grew up with. You will learn you aren't the center of the universe. Teach yourself that.

3) CREATE ART.

Spend a year learning how to play. Or how to play a musical instrument. Or write five novels. Learn to discipline yourself to create. Creation doesn't happen from inspiration. It happens from persistence, discipline, and passion.

Creativity doesn't come from God. It's a muscle that you need to learn to build. Why not build it while your brain is still creating new neurons at a breathtaking rate.

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So I figure I will help people out by coming up with a list, and try to handle the criticisms before they arise. I can do this because I have a college degree, so I’ve learned how to think and engage in repartee with other intelligent people.

1) Start a business.

There are many businesses a kid can start, particularly with the Internet. If you always focus on the maxim, “Buy low and sell high,” you’ll start to generate ideas.

Many people say, “Not everyone can be an entrepreneur.” It’s amazing to me, also, how many times I’ve answered this question in writing and yet people still say the same thing. First off, there’s no law against being an entrepreneur. In fact, everyone can be an entrepreneur. What they really mean is, “Not everyone can be a successful entrepreneur.” As far as I know, there’s no law against failure, either.

When someone loses a tennis match or a chess game, how do they improve? They study their loss. As anyone who has mastered any field in life knows, studying your losses is infinitely more valuable than studying your wins.

I failed at my first three attempts at being an entrepreneur before I even learned how to spell the word, but eventually I had a success (a company with profits that I was then able to sell).

Failure is a part of life. Better to learn that at 18 than at 23 or older, when you’ve been coddled by ivory blankets and hypnotized into thinking success was yours for the taking. Get baptized in the river of failure as a youth so you can blossom in entrepreneurial blessings as an adult.

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2) Travel the world.

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Here's a basic assignment. Take \$10,000 and get yourself to India. Check out a world completely different from our own. Do it for a year.

You will meet other foreigners traveling. You will learn what poverty is. You will learn the value of how to stretch a dollar. You will often be in situations where you need to learn how to survive, despite the odds being against you.

If you're going to throw up, you might as well do it from dysentery than from drinking too much at a frat party. You will learn a little bit more about Eastern religions, compared with the Western religions you grew up with. You will learn you aren't the center of the universe. Knock yourself out.

3) Create art.

Spend a year learning how to paint. Or how to play a musical instrument. Or write five novels. Learn to discipline yourself to create. Creation doesn't happen from inspiration. It happens from perspiration, discipline, and passion.

Creativity doesn't come from God. It's a muscle that you need to learn to build. Why not build it while your brain is still creating new neurons at a breathtaking rate, rather than learning it when you are older (which, for many people, is too late).

4) Make people laugh.

This is the hardest thing of all. Spend a year learning how to do standup comedy in front of people. This will teach you how to write, how to communicate, and how to sell yourself. It will teach you how to deal with people who hate you, and how to deal with the psychology of failure on a daily basis. And, of course, how to make people laugh.

These skills will help you later in life much more than Philosophy 101 will. And, by the way, you might even get paid along the way.

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5) Write a book.

Believe me, whatever book you write at the age of 18 is probably going to be no good. But do it anyway.

Write a novel about what you are doing instead of going to college. You'll learn how to observe people. Writing is a meditation on life. You'll live each day, interpret it, and write it. What a great education!

6) Work in a charity.

Plenty of charities do not require you to have a college degree. Which is going to serve you better in life: Taking French Literature 101 or spending a year delivering meals to senior citizens with Alzheimer's, or curing malaria in Africa?

I have an answer to this. You might have a different one. Which is why I'm listing eight alternatives here instead of just this one. And, by the way, if you do any of these items for a year, two years, or maybe 10, you can still go to college afterward. Why not? It's your life.

7) Master a game.

What's your favorite game? Ping pong? Chess? Poker? Learning how to master a game is incredibly hard. Let's start with the basics:

Study the history of the game.

Study current experts on the game, videos, books, magazines, etc. Replay, or try to imitate in some way, the current masters of the game.

Play a lot: with friends, in tournaments, at local clubs, etc. Take lessons from someone who has

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already mastered the game. This helps you to avoid bad habits and gets someone to immediately criticize your current skills.

Mastering a game builds discipline, lets you socialize with other people of all ages and backgrounds but who have similar passions, and helps you to develop the instincts of a killer without having to kill anyone. Nice!

8. Master a sport.

Mastering a sport is probably even better than mastering a game, because it has the same benefits listed above, but you also get in shape.

We only have the life we have lived. And I always sit and daydream, “What if...?”, “What if...?” It’s the easiest and most dangerous meditation to do: What if? Because that wish is like a wisp of smoke that can twist and turn until we disappear along with it.

As I write this article I look at these alternatives with longing and I know that when I’m done, I’m going to sit here quietly while the sun goes down, wondering only about “what if.”

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