

Graduation Day 2012 American School of Grenoble

Dear Christine, dear Pau, dear Elenor, dear Ellen.

Today is your graduation. Congratulations.
I'm SO honoured to be here with you for such a great day in your life.

Carol really impressed me when she told me about some of the challenges you all faced along your paths to get here today. Those paths have been bumpy and sinuous. There have been hard times: maybe you lost faith in yourself or sight of the finish line. But look at you today: you've made it! We are all gathered here to celebrate your achievement.

There is a long life ahead of you and again, a path - this time for you to choose. What door will you open? To go where?

Please remember that no choice is permanent. Maybe you will be willing to terrify your parents later by leaving a stable engineering job to start your company, with no business plan and no experience in sales... like I did.

The point I want to make today is this: whatever you choose, whatever you do, it has to come from your gut, not from somebody else's brain.

When I left France, my handsome boyfriend Hugo, and a nice job offer in Paris - to move to England on my own, I had no real justification. I was unable to say more than "I KNOW this is what I want to do." I had never spent more than a week in London as a tourist. And I got a job in the North of the country, in Leeds. I knew nobody, and couldn't even tell where it was on a map. BUT I felt it was right. I knew this is what I wanted to do. And I had a great time.

Then, 2 years later, my gut woke me up again. With this message "This is not enough, now is the time to start your own business. To be the pilot of your own plane." So when the feeling was so strong I could not ignore it anymore, I resigned. I left a sexy stable job in a big company and moved back to France. Please note that I had NO idea what business I should start then. It took me more than a year to figure it out. A year of personal struggle. A year of questions. A year of failures. And Comme une Française officially took flight in April 2012.

So PLEASE, whatever path you choose, the choice has to come from your gut. You will breathe it, dream about it, feel it deeply. And don't misunderstand me, I'm not talking of wishful thinking. I'm talking about 24/7 constant action towards this choice. Read everything you can about it, talk to every person you meet about it, question the status quo... No less. Let your gut - your instinct - talk. Your brain will come later. To help you get out of bed in the winter mornings, to guide you in smart moves and to pass inevitable exams.

And once on this path, aim to fly as high as the moon. We are women, so we are lucky, we can be anything we want. Make your goals as awesome as you already are! I'm 27 so this might sound like the advice of an old woman to you. But I was in your place just a few years ago, and I had no idea then where I would be today.

Whatever you choose, whatever goals you have for your life, do NOT ever settle for average. Be different, be awesome. More than that: be exceptional. Stand out from the crowd. Engage for something. Make the world think and open their eyes.

As the Canadian traveler Chris Guillebeau says:
"Stand for something. Come join the living world. The rest of us are waiting."

Have a great life. Thanks.

Géraldine Lepère
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