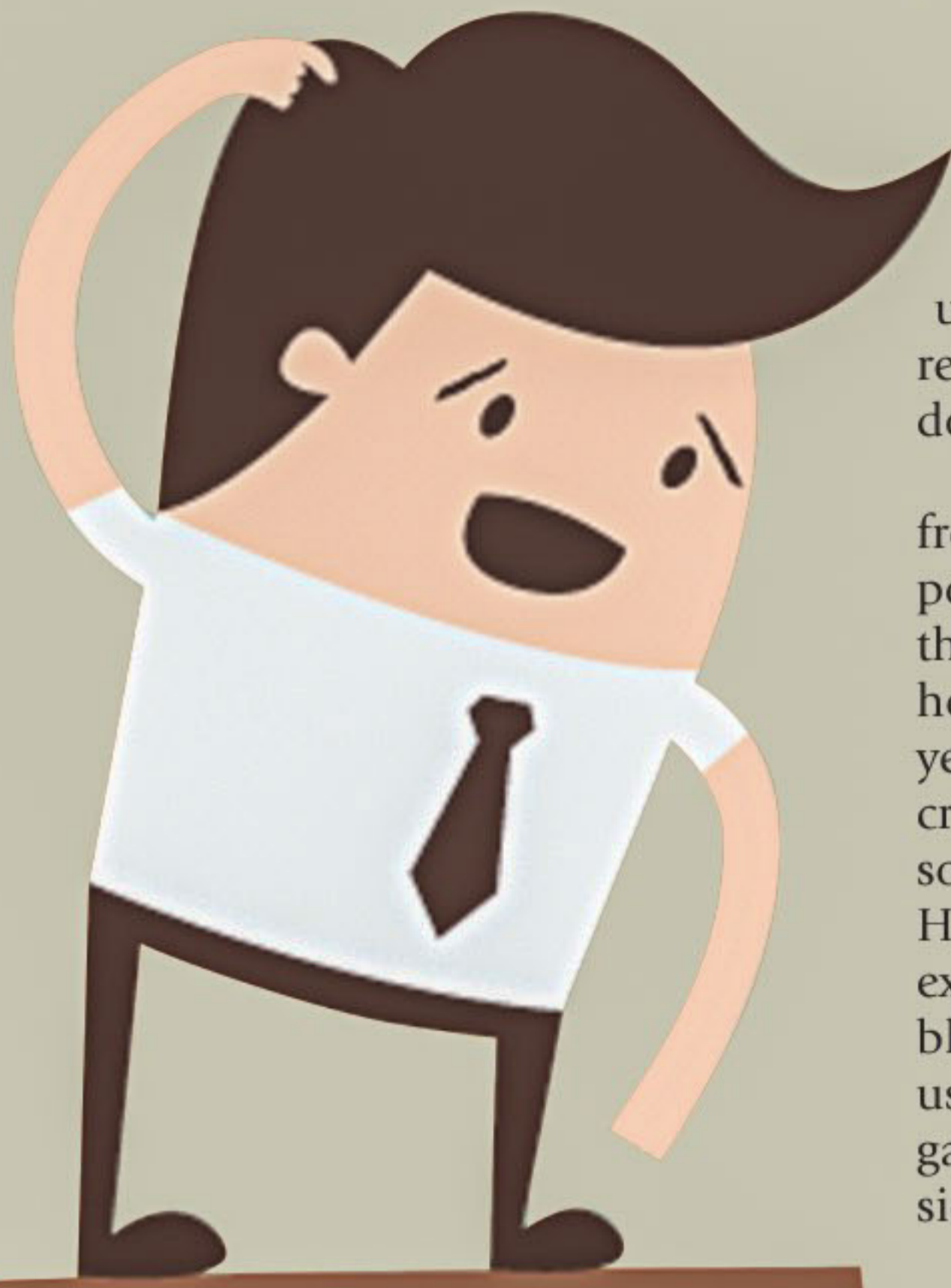


SHOULD YOU TAKE A GAP YEAR?

ADIT HASAN



Finishing high school is a major turning point in our lives. We find ourselves at a crossroads, having to make hard decisions that may end up having far-reaching consequences regardless of whether we are ready. Or do we?

Taking a year off after graduating from school has been an increasingly popular choice in the West and recently the idea seems to be gaining traction here as well. The prospect of taking a year-long vacation after the soul-crushing ordeal that is high school does sound appealing. After the battering the H.S.C, A Levels or their equivalent exams delivered on our self-confidence, blood-pressure and hairline, many of us deserve some R&R, but is taking a gap year worth the possible repercussions?

There are several benefits to taking a gap year, aside from the obvious: respite from the pressure of studying. It gives those of us who haven't yet found our calling, time to explore and contemplate our options. There may also be financial issues to work through and an extra year to resolve them would be welcome. In fact, most universities overseas encourage their potential applicants to take gap years since they

believe it enriches their life experience and broadens their horizons. They encourage them to pursue their interests and this gives them a chance to beef up their ECA record and bring it up to par for their dream universities.

However, it is worth noting that unless you do something worthwhile with your time, a gap year will cause more harm than good. Admissions committees look for direction and determination and they require you to demonstrate that during the year. Travelling, writing, or learning Swahili are all fruitful pursuits, while binge-watching all seasons of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* is not, so it is prudent to do something productive with your time.

Many people lose focus during a drawn-out vacation. They descend into a pit of sloth and procrastination that is all but impossible to crawl out of. The key to success in university is solid work ethics and time-management and many find themselves ill-equipped for the predicament. Bad habits are formed and good ones are lost. They spend too much time clearing the cob-webs and orienting themselves to the overwhelming work-load while others who are better

prepared pass them by.

For those planning to sit for admission tests in public universities, it is important to remember that most public institutions allow gap years but that may change in the near future. There is currently a proposal under review which if passed, would require students planning to sit for the Dhaka University or medical college admission tests during the same session as when they sat for their final high-school exams (H.S.C and A Levels). If the proposal is implemented, applicants would not be allowed to take gap years or re-take exams. For public engineering schools however, the rule already exists and no gap years or re-takes are allowed.

So should you take a gap year? That would depend on what you hope to accomplish during that time and whether the caveats involved pose a problem.

Ways in Which University Changes You

SARAH ANJUM BARI

The importance of university life is usually drilled into us from an early age – all that talk about how it shapes you, changes you, and reinvents you. Over the years, Hollywood has blessed us with enough movies driving home the Magical Powers of Colleges that it's turned into somewhat of a cliché – one we don't realise the depth of until we experience it for ourselves. At the beginning of my 4th (and hopefully last) year of college life, I'm able to look back on the Old Me (Pre-College) and the New Me (Post-College) and summarise some of the standard ways that university life changes most people.

Honing your social skills

You've just gotten out of school and you've possibly left your childhood friends behind. It may be in the dormitory or the classroom, but you're thrown into rooms full of people who are complete strangers. Sticking it out on your own only works for so long – trust me, I've tried. It may come in the form of a group assignment that requires you to choose team-mates or a crisis that needs help from others, but sooner or later you're going to have to approach new people. It may lead to beautiful new friendships and even a few train-wreck relationships. In the case of my best friend, it was a rat in her dorm room that sent her screaming into the room next door and into the lives of her soon-to-be closest friends ever. Soon, you'll realise you've honed your social skills and are much more comfortable with interacting with new people.

Lowering your sleep requirements

Unless you're a rare gem who manages

to shrug off the evils of procrastination, you will come to appreciate the superpowers of caffeine and marvel at how little sleep the human brain can function on when given the right incentive (the promise of satisfactory grades).

Making you open-minded

This actually translates into a variety of things. Firstly, the number of people you meet from such a wide variety of backgrounds opens your mind to new ideas and information. You learn as much inside the classroom as you do outside of it and you find yourself open to ideas and opinions that you might formerly have disapproved of or been unaware of. Secondly – and you will not believe how much this is true – it will heighten the threshold of your patience. The number of times a team-mate will let you down in a group project or a new friend will intrude into your personal life when you're cranky will make you more tolerant than you could ever have imagined.

Making you optimistic and confident

As you survive bad midterms, failed finals, nasty all-nighters and the stupidest of fights with friends and love interests, you realise that you're perfectly fine after every bad episode. You realise that you've come out unscathed, possibly even stronger and better. Finding that out about yourself makes you optimistic and confident about most things that you may have to face from that point forth, and it's the most empowering feeling in the world.

They say university not only broadens your skill-set but also your mind-set. Whether you excel academically or not, you definitely come out of it with a brand new thought process and renewed zest for life.

