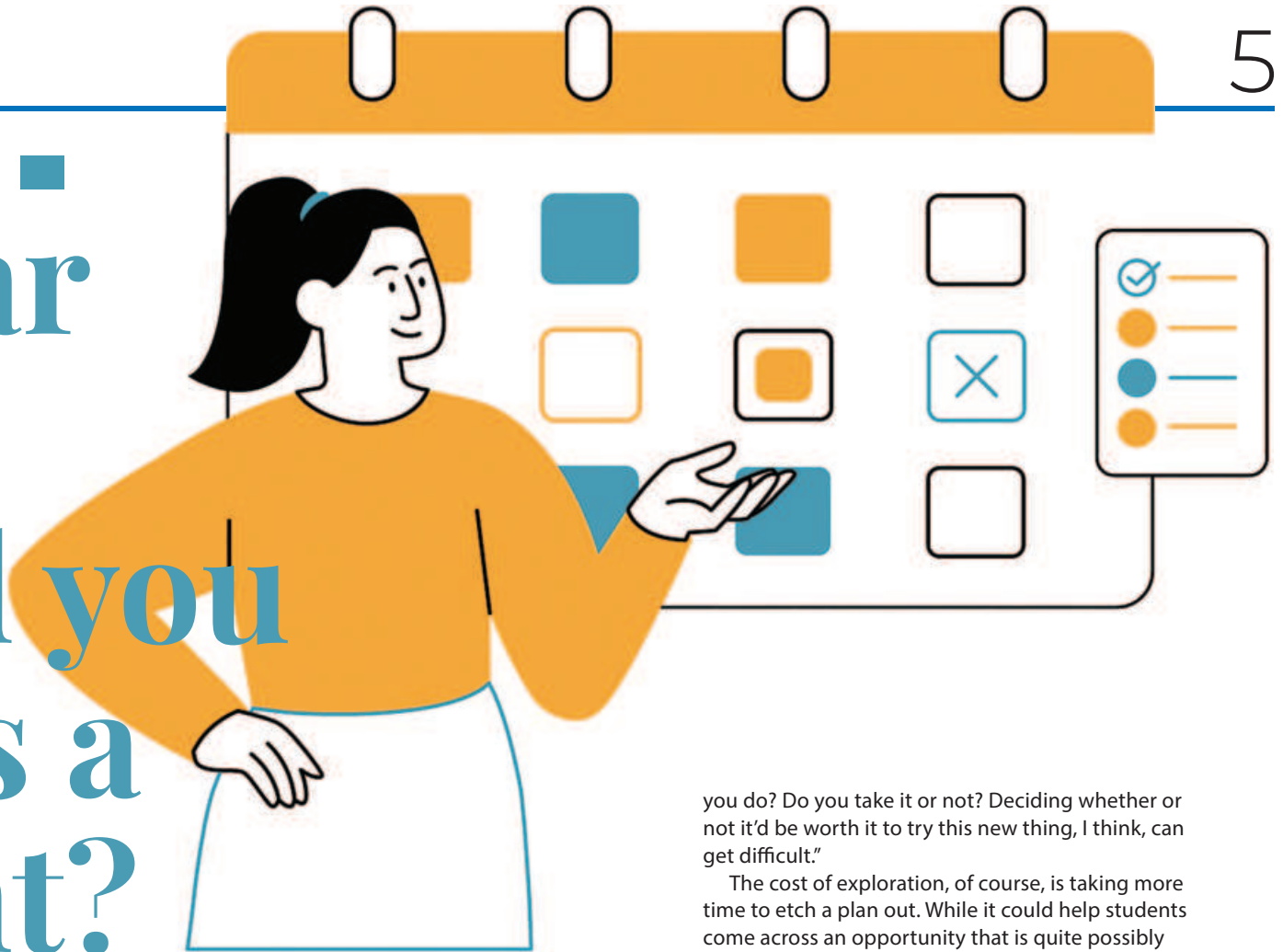


■ PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ■

How far ahead should you plan as a student?



ABIR HOSSAIN

Growing up, we've all been asked what it is we want to do with our lives, and most of us had an answer for it. However, as the years have passed, the wide majority of us have veered away from the map we plotted for ourselves. Regardless of wherever we are headed, it is said that exciting opportunities lie ahead. All we have to do is take our pick. Yet, some of us are merely floating along, letting the wind carry us, oblivious of the destination.

More often than not, I am overwhelmed by all the options that have been laid out in front of me. While there is liberation in knowing that I can shape my future however I want, the lack of direction is terrifying. On the other end of the spectrum are people with a laser-sharp vision of their future. So, what separates the two and which approach works best?

Meticulously planning ahead will prepare one for whatever is thrown at them. It also helps break down goals into small manageable chunks and make gradual strides towards one's objective.

Tashdid Mostafiz Taj, 21, a first-year student at Bangladesh Medical College, shares how he pursued his childhood goal, "My ambition of pursuing a career in medicine started very early. With my father being a doctor as well as developing a keen interest in the sciences, I knew this was it for me."

When asked to what extent planning long-term helped him, he said, "I shifted from a Bangla medium school to an English medium one after class five. In hindsight, it made preparing for the admission tests more challenging. I had to study material from the HSC syllabus while preparing for my A levels. But because I knew that this was what I wanted to pursue I could plan accordingly."

Even though long-term planning provides a safety net, what must be accounted for is if it prepares a student for the possibility of failure. Simply fleshing out each and every detail of the future doesn't yield a productive outcome. And when things just don't pan out how one envisioned, it will have an impact on the student.

"Despite working very hard, I couldn't get into a public medical college. This was a big blow. Naturally, I wallowed for a while but I just couldn't afford to let it

crumble me. This is something I had to come to terms with and it was made easier by my support system," said Tashdid.

But should the mere prospect of being unable to attain one's goal hold them back? Of course not. It isn't always the fear of falling short that people are afraid of which prevents them from planning ahead. Rather, it is the fear of making the wrong decision. In the process of planning, they simply do not know how to take the first step. And thus, they cannot even begin to map out what needs to be done. This can leave a young person feeling lost and overwhelmed, especially at a time, when it feels like everyone else is racing forward.

Nuzhat Tizan, 21, a second-year student of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering at BRAC University discusses what has prevented her from planning for the future, "I think the main reason has to be my major. It is a very vast field of study and I don't have a particular plan for what I want to do in the long run. I also lack the drive to actively research to find out what I want to do in this field."

"I also have a hard time making decisions for myself which might be because of the fact that most decisions I've made before haven't worked out in my favour," she added.

For Nuzhat, she was forced to give up a scholarship at the university of her choice in Canada due to family pressure. And there are plenty more like her who have been forced to pivot away and settle. However, in a country like ours, where both opportunities and resources are limited, it is difficult not only to realise one's true potential, but also to pursue it. Even the next best available alternative is very far removed from what they really want. With no respite for such individuals, they pursue an undergrad simply for the sake of it.

A lack of a long-term plan does, however, allow room for a lot of exploration and help one find out more about themselves. Letting new experiences mould a person can be very exciting and allow students to find an unlikely calling.

Fariha Haque*, a software engineer at a US-based company, talks about the need to be retrospective even when planning for the long run. She says, "If you plan too far ahead, and an interesting or lucrative opportunity comes in between those plans, what do

you do? Do you take it or not? Deciding whether or not it'd be worth it to try this new thing, I think, can get difficult."

The cost of exploration, of course, is taking more time to etch a plan out. While it could help students come across an opportunity that is quite possibly more fulfilling, the looming fear of uncertainty will continue to prevail.

"I knew what I wanted and it has helped me avoid uncertainty, something many students and graduates have to deal with," said Fariha. "I planned multiple routes in terms of both academics and career that I could take once I was done with my undergrad. I didn't plan very far though, but I always tried to stick to most of the plans I had. Of course, the most important thing I had to do to make my plans work was to study hard and develop my skills."

Even with all its upsides, there is no doubt planning

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things out isn't for everyone. Some people simply need more time to figure things out and that is okay. It is completely normal to not immediately have all the answers. After all, the limits are endless, especially as a student. The path for each individual is different, what matters most is that each of us keeps going forward.

**Names have been changed upon request.*

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