

Choose Action

By Dr Justin Coulson

After a talk to a Year 12 group about life after high school, a young woman stopped me with a question I wasn't expecting.

"What matters more," she asked, "having your direction dialled in, or taking action? Am I supposed to know where I'm going and then start walking? Or am I supposed to just start walking, even if it's the wrong way?"

I've been thinking about that question ever since — because it's not just a question for eighteen-year-olds standing at the edge of adulthood. It's the question parents face almost every day.

We feel stuck. Raising kids stretches us, binds us, frustrates us. Whether it's a little one who won't eat or sleep, an older child glued to a screen, or a teenager who's stopped talking to you — we find ourselves frozen, unsure which direction to take, which approach is right, or simply how to get through today.

Here's my answer to her, and to you: start walking.

Not blindly. Not recklessly. But movement — even imperfect movement — beats paralysis every time. You can't steer a parked car.

When we say we're stuck, what we usually mean is: *I don't know the right answer, but I know that staying here isn't working.* That's actually enough information to begin. The rest reveals itself through action.

Take something as raw and common as losing your temper. You raise your voice. Your child complies. That's data — but so is everything else that follows. The sick feeling afterward. The chill in the room. The child who fights back or shuts down. You moved, and the movement told you something important: that particular road leads somewhere you don't want to go.

So now you take a different action. You go to your child.

"I just yelled. That felt horrible for both of us, and I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"

As you repair the rupture, something shifts. The new action feels better, so you keep going.

"Can we figure this out together — so we don't end up here again?"

If they say yes, you explore what's underneath the conflict. You explain what matters to you. Together, you find a way forward that neither of you could have mapped out in advance — because it required the first move to make it visible.

This is what action gives you that planning alone never can: real information, from real moments, with real people. The direction doesn't come before the walking. It comes *from* the walking — provided you stay curious, stay honest with yourself, and stay willing to adjust.

The student who asked me that question was hoping, I think, for permission to move before she felt ready. So here it is, for her and for you: you don't need to know the destination. You need to take a step, pay attention to what it tells you, and take the next one.

As long as it's moving, a car pointed slightly the wrong way is still a car you can steer.



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