Dilemma

When I got accepted to Mines my grandfather offered to pay for my college tuition. He said an engineering degree is a worthwhile investment. He doesn't think a marine biology degree is a worthwhile investment, though, so he's not paying for my brother's college tuition. The bad news is that I've decided I want to change my major. To physics.

Is it unethical not to tell him? Is there anything wrong with letting him see for himself on graduation day? Maybe he won't come to graduation and he'll never have to know. Or maybe I'm obligated to keep studying what he offered to pay for because life isn't supposed to fun anyway or something like that.

--Physics Rebellion

Responses

I'd say go ahead and study physics if that's what you want. Here at Mines, we don't actually have a B.S. in physics. It's a B.S. in engineering physics, and it's accredited by ABET, the board that is responsible for accrediting engineering programs in the US. It's meaningfully different from a traditional physics degree (while having all the fun stuff from a traditional physics degree), and I think if your grandfather called you on it you'd be able to make a good case. Alternately, you could consider one of the combined programs that give you a B.S. in engineering physics and an M.S. in a specific type of engineering in five years.

--Dr. Patrick Kohl, CSM Department of Physics

In life I believe you should strive for whatever makes you happiest. If getting a physics degree and exploring that line of work will make you happier than getting an engineering degree, you should go for the physics. Life won't always be fun, but you should at least enjoy your time as much as you can while alive. So, don't do engineering because that is what your grandfather wants, but I think you should let him know where his money is going. Maybe he will think physics is another worthwhile investment and still pay for it, or maybe he will stop paying and you will have a difficult next few years paying for school. In my opinion though, a couple of tough years doing what you love is better than a couple of easy years followed by a job that makes you miserable.

--Ryan

First of all, if you want to major in physics, I say you should go for it. It is important to major in something that you enjoy because you will be spending the rest of your life working in that field of study. Majoring in engineering when you would rather major in physics may cause you a lifetime of unhappiness, at least professionally. Also, if you decide to just stick it out with engineering, in a few years you may end up hating it so much that you will want to change your major. This would be worse than changing your major right now because you will have wasted a lot of time, energy, and money on something you are not even benefitting from.

Second of all, the ethical thing to do would be to tell your grandfather about changing your major. College is a huge investment, and if he is putting out that much money, he has the right to know what it is going towards. If you choose not to say anything, it is likely that he will find out on his own, and he will probably be more upset with you than if you told it to him straight. Plus, if you can come up with a convincing argument as to why majoring in physics is a worthwhile investment, he might still pay for your schooling.

--Jessica Ho

It is completely unethical to switch majors without telling your grandfather because that would be taking advantage of him when he's doing you a huge favor. Before you talk to him though, you should make sure you are certain that you prefer physics to engineering. If you switch majors right now, and decide later that physics is not for you, then it would probably be difficult to convince your grandpa to continue funding your education. If you are absolutely set on physics, then your only option is to find another way to pay for it, such as getting a job.

--Honesty, Though It May Cost You

I think this decision depends on how much you hate your engineering classes. If the classes make you more miserable than the thought of paying for your own education, then you should tell your grandfather that you're serious about switching majors, and thank him sincerely for the financial support he's given you so far. But if your engineering classes just don't interest you as much as your physics classes, consider double majoring. I imagine your grandfather would be willing to pay for all of the classes since physics is a great supplement to an engineering education. In either case, you must inform your grandfather since he is currently providing you with an opportunity that most students are not afforded.

--Weigh Your Misery

For most scholars, choosing a major is the most difficult decision they will have to make. Fortunately, there are people in our lives who are wiser than we are. If we are lucky they will guide us in the right direction. My first Bachelors degree was paid for by my Grandparents who were just happy to send me to school. It didn't really matter what I studied, as long as I was happy. I learned a lot, and had a great time. However, I have a double major in what most
people consider a worthless degree. Today I am at Mines doing it all over again, out of my own pocket. Tell your Grandfather what you are doing and let him
guide you. There is little difference between lying, and not telling the truth. If he does pull your funding, keep with the physics and see where it takes you.
Some lessons are harder to learn than others, and life is really the best teacher.
--Starting Over With No Regrets.

I think that your grandfather deserves to know. If he is investing his money into your schooling, and thus future career, he should know that he is getting his
money's worth out of it. By not telling your grandfather, you are not being honest with him and respecting his decision to invest his money in you. And if he
finds out through your graduation, then you will break his trust in you and the relationship that you have with your grandfather will be gone. He might be
upset that you have decided to change your major but he would be more upset if you lied to him and used him, and his money. Trust is a hard thing to earn
but, an easy thing to lose. While he might not like your decision to switch majors, he will respect you for being honest with him. College is expensive and it is
nice to not have to worry about paying for it but, a good relationship with your grandfather, and his trust, is more important.
--Trust Matters

Next Week’s Dilemma

I had just received an email stating that tuition would be due in just a few short days and that I needed to check my account on Trailhead. I proceeded to see
what my balance was, and to my astonishment, I had a negative balance. At first I had thought that my parents had already paid it, so I called my dad to
confirm the payment. He told me that nothing was paid for yet and that he still needed to write a check. I went back to Trailhead to see the details of how my
schooling was being paid, for and I realized that I had a full tuition four year scholarship. I did not apply for the scholarship and I am not sure where the
money is coming from. Am I taking a scholarship from someone who deserves it? Or is it fate for me to have this scholarship to help pay for school and
lighten the load for my family?
-Concerned, but Happy