



A message to my younger self

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If I knew then what I know now - well wouldn't that be a marvellous thing?

I'm the kind of person that has to learn the hard way - always have. As a youngster - still doesn't seem that long ago to me - I was always a bit of a rebel. Didn't take well to authority and didn't see the point in planning anything and I certainly didn't care about my education. I would say I was probably quite a selfish individual too in my later teens.

I was always seen as 'The Leader' at school and quite influential. I had this knack of somehow being able to persuade everyone else that what I did was the right thing to do, that they should want whatever I had and they should follow and copy what I did!!

I was wrong. I believed I didn't need good grades at school. I was wrong. I believed I could 'Make It' without qualifications, and the more people that told me I was wrong, the more I dug my heels in - I was determined to prove that I knew better than them. After all what did teachers know? What did 'Old People' know, they were stuck in time, they didn't see things the way I did. I was wrong!!!

I did leave school with the grades I had set out to achieve;

English (B) Maths (C) Science x 2 (C) I didn't see what the point of languages were so didn't even try in the exams. I was always told I could do well if I would just try, but I didn't want to - then!! Schools and education weren't what they are now. Teachers weren't as equipped to deal with students like me that had underlying issues.

I wish I could have my time again, I would tell myself that those talents and skills I had in being able to influence others would be very useful in the future. To be able to lead and inspire people, to encourage and even teach others myself is what the world evolves around.

My advice:

If you are struggling, speak up. If you need help with personal issues, speak up. If you know someone else who is struggling, speak up. Be kind, be generous, be supportive but be you. Don't pretend to be something for someone else, and don't make everything personal. Anyone who offers to help, genuinely wants to.

I have worked in all manner of positions since I left school. I was lucky to get an Engineering Apprenticeship in Leeds when I first left school, and I thought that was it. I thought I was on the path to greatness. As soon as I'd finished my apprenticeship, I knew that career was not for me and I headed down a career path working for a company owned by my stepfather. I learned a lot in this time but we didn't get on, on a personal level, so a working relationship was extremely strained. This was my first venture into business really and stood me in good stead for my future.

Skip forward other jobs and changes in personal circumstances over the years and eventually I settled down in The Humber Region with a new wife and two wonderful daughters. I decided that I was ready to put everything I had learned into practice and start my own business, but still I didn't want to listen to advice, I knew best. Surely not all successful business people have loads of qualifications?? But this was to be just another learning curve for me. To some degree, the business was a great success. I was very proud of everything I achieved in a short time, I self-taught myself everything I needed to know, but it wasn't to be what would truly define me. I eventually went back to work for my stepfather and we put our differences aside as a result of which, I have worked with and developed excellent relationships with some of the world's leading biological scientists in insect pest management – but this was not due to my expertise or qualifications, it was me putting my skills I've learned over the years to good practice.

When I look back now, and try to describe what it is that sets me apart, I tend to think of myself as being good at being able to relate to people. I can empathise with what's important, I can converse confidently with people at all levels and I show compassion and respect to everyone I meet.

Am I a leader? I consider myself to be a person of influence, I have always had this skill – I just didn't know how to use it properly. I believe I can lead those who want to be led, but I avoid conflict at all times. I arrive at decisions based on facts and the opinions of others and I decipher the truth from myth through personal research.

So what do I do now?

I work for a local hospice called St. Andrew's in Grimsby as a fundraiser and events co-ordinator. Why? well the position is all about relationships, empathy and passion, and I believe all the skills I have learned over the years can be put to good use to benefit the hospice and everyone it serves. I do not claim to be the best at anything, but I will always try to be the best I can be at anything I attempt, either for myself or for others.

What skills do I believe are important for the next generation of leaders?

The number one skill which will take us into the future is the skill of being able to listen. To learn, to utilise what you learn and to apply the knowledge to your advantage. Innovation skills and entrepreneurial spirit are skills which are developed but seldom taught. Entrepreneurs recognise opportunities from being able to listen to the problems the world faces. Some have expertise some are more focused towards collating others with expertise and pooling resources, but ultimately they listen, and learn. They adopt, adapt and improve.

Do not waste time doing something you don't enjoy. Your life only really begins when you leave your education. Find what it is you are passionate about, follow your dreams and learn from your mentors. You may not have even thought about what you could be potentially brilliant at, but always be adaptable and open to change. Opportunities present themselves at the least expected times. The skill is having the ability to be able to recognise the opportunity and make the most of it.