

post written by: Marc Chernoff

18 Things I Wish Someone Told Me When I Was 18

This morning I was reading [a book](#) at my favorite beach-side coffee shop when an 18-year-old kid sat down next to me and said, “That’s a great read, ain’t it?” So we started chatting.



He told me he was getting ready to graduate from high school in a couple of weeks and then immediately starting his college career in the fall. “But I have no clue what I want to do with my life,” he said. “Right now I’m just going with the flow.”

And then, with eager, honest eyes, he began asking me one question after the next:

- “What do you do for a living?”
- “When and how did you decide what you wanted to do?”
- “Why did you do this? Why didn’t you do that?”
- “Is there anything you wish you had done differently?”
- Etc, etc, etc...

I answered his questions as best as I could, and tried to give decent advice with the time I had. And after a half-hour conversation, he thanked me and we parted ways.

But on the walk home I realized the conversation I had with him was actually quite nostalgic for me. He reminded me of me ten years ago. So I started thinking about his questions again, and I began imagining all of the things I wish someone had told me when I was 18.

Then I took it a step further and thought about all the things I would love to tell myself if I could travel back in time to give my 18-year-old self some advice about life.

So after a few cups of coffee and a couple hours of deliberation, here are 18 things I wish someone told me when I was 18:

1. **Commit yourself to making lots of mistakes.** – Mistakes teach you [important lessons](#). The biggest mistake you can make is doing nothing because you’re too scared to make a mistake. So don’t hesitate – don’t doubt yourself. In life, it’s rarely about getting a chance; it’s about taking a chance. You’ll never be 100% sure it will work, but you can always be 100% sure doing nothing won’t work. Most of the time you just have to go for it! And no matter how it turns out, it always ends up just the way it should be. [Either you succeed or you learn something](#). Win-Win. Remember, if you never act, you will never know for sure, and you will be left standing in the same spot forever.

1. **Find hard work you love doing.** – If I could offer my 18-year-old self some real career advice, I'd tell myself not to base my career choice on other people's ideas, goals and recommendations. I'd tell myself not to pick a major because it's popular, or statistically creates graduates who make the most money. I'd tell myself that the right career choice is based on one key point: Finding hard work you love doing. As long as you remain true to yourself, and follow your own interests and values, you can find success through passion. Perhaps more importantly, you won't wake up several years later working in a career field you despise, wondering "How the heck am I going to do this for the next 30 years?" So if you catch yourself working hard and loving every minute of it, don't stop. You're on to something big. Because hard work ain't hard when you concentrate on your passions.
2. **Invest time, energy and money in yourself every day.** – When you invest in yourself, you can never lose, and over time you will change the trajectory of your life. You are simply the product of what you know. The more time, energy and money you spend acquiring pertinent knowledge, the more control you have over your life.
3. **Explore new ideas and opportunities often.** – Your natural human fears of failure and embarrassment will sometimes stop you from trying new things. But you must rise above these fears, for your life's story is simply the culmination many small, unique experiences. And the more unique experiences you have, the more interesting your story gets. So seek as many new life experiences as possible and be sure to share them with the people you care about. Not doing so is not living.
4. **When sharpening your career skills, focus more on less.** – Think in terms of Karate: A black belt seems far more impressive than a brown belt. But does a brown belt really seem any more impressive than a red belt? Probably not to most people. Remember that society elevates experts high onto a pedestal. Hard work matters, but not if it's scattered in diverse directions. So narrow your focus on learning fewer career related skills and master them all.
5. **People are not mind readers. Tell them what you're thinking.** – People will never know how you feel unless you tell them. Your boss? Yeah, he doesn't know you're hoping for a promotion because you haven't told him yet. That cute girl you haven't talked to because you're too shy? Yeah, you guessed it; she hasn't given you the time of day simply because you haven't given her the time of day either. In life, you have to communicate with others. And often, you have to open your vocal cords and speak the first words. You have to tell people what you're thinking. It's as simple as that.
6. **Make swift decisions and take immediate action.** – Either you're going to [take action and seize new opportunities](#), or someone else will first. You can't change anything or make any sort of progress by sitting back and thinking about it. Remember, there's a huge difference between knowing how to do something and actually doing it. Knowledge is basically useless without action.
7. **Accept and embrace change.** – However good or bad a situation is now, it will change. That's the one thing you can count on. So embrace change, and realize that [change happens for a reason](#). It won't always be easy or obvious at first, but in the end it will be worth it.
8. **Don't worry too much about what other people think about you.** – For the most part, [what other people think and say about you doesn't matter](#). When I was 18, I let the opinions of my high school and early college peers influence my decisions. And, at times, they steered me away from ideas and goals I strongly believed in. I realize now, ten years later, that this was a foolish way to live, especially when I consider that nearly all of these people whose opinions I cared so much about are no longer a

part of my life. Unless you're trying to make a great first impression (job interview, first date, etc.), don't let the opinions of others stand in your way. What they think and say about you isn't important. What is important is how you feel about yourself.

9. **Always be honest with yourself and others.** – Living a life of honesty creates peace of mind, and peace of mind is priceless. Period.
10. **Talk to lots of people in college and early on in your career.** – Bosses. Colleagues. Professors. Classmates. Social club members. Other students outside of your major or social circle. Teaching assistants. Career advisors. College deans. Friends of friends. Everyone! Why? Professional networking. I have worked for three employers since I graduated from college (I left my first two employers by choice on good terms), but I only interviewed with the first employer. The other two employers offered me a job before I even had a formal interview, based strictly on the recommendation of a hiring manager (someone I had networked with over the years). When employers look to fill a position, the first thing they do is ask the people they know and trust if they know someone who would do well in the position. If you start building your professional network early, you'll be set. Over time, you'll continue talking to new people you meet through your current network and your network's reach and the associated opportunities will continue to snowball for the duration of your career.
11. **Sit alone in silence for at least ten minutes every day.** – Use this time to think, plan, reflect, and dream. Creative and productive thinking flourish in solitude and silence. [With quiet, you can hear your thoughts](#), you can reach deep within yourself, and you can focus on mapping out the next logical, productive step in your life.
12. **Ask lots of questions.** – The greatest 'adventure' is the ability to inquire, to ask questions. Sometimes in the process of inquiry, the search is more significant than the answers. Answers come from other people, from the universe of knowledge and history, and from the intuition and deep wisdom inside yourself. These answers will never surface if you never ask the right questions. Thus, the simple act of asking the right questions is the answer.
13. **Exploit the resources you do have access to.** – The average person is usually astonished when they see a physically handicap person show intense signs of emotional happiness. How could someone in such a restricted physical state be so happy? The answer rests in [how they use the resources they do have](#). Stevie Wonder couldn't see, so he exploited his sense of hearing into a passion for music, and he now has 25 Grammy Awards to prove it.
14. **Live below your means.** – Live a comfortable life, not a wasteful one. Do not spend to impress others. Do not live life trying to fool yourself into thinking wealth is measured in material objects. [Manage your money wisely](#) so your money does not manage you. Always live well below your means.
15. **Be respectful of others and make them feel good.** – In life and business, it's not so much what you say that counts, it's how you make people feel. So respect your elders, minors, and everyone in between. There are no boundaries or classes that define a group of people that deserve to be respected. Treat everyone with the same level of respect you would give to your grandfather and the same level of patience you would have with your baby brother. Supporting, guiding, and making contributions to other people is one of life's greatest rewards. In order to get, you have to give.
16. **Excel at what you do.** – There's no point in doing something if you aren't going to do it right. Excel at your work and excel at your hobbies. Develop a reputation for yourself, a reputation for consistent excellence.

17. **Be who you were born to be.** – You must follow your heart, and [be who you were born to be](#). Some of us were born to be musicians – to communicate intricate thoughts and rousing feelings with the strings of a guitar. Some of us were born to be poets – to touch people’s hearts with exquisite prose. Some of us were born to be entrepreneurs – to create growth and opportunity where others saw rubbish. And still, some of us were born to be or do whatever it is, specifically, that moves you. Regardless of what you decide to do in your lifetime, you better feel it in every fiber of your being. You better be born to do it! Don’t waste your life fulfilling someone else’s dreams and desires.

But above all, laugh when you can, apologize when you should, and let go of what you can’t change. Life is short, yet amazing. Enjoy the ride.

Also, if you liked this article and you’re looking for similar advice on life, love and personal growth I highly recommend that you read [The Road Less Traveled](#) by M. Scott Peck. It’s an easy, enjoyable read that literally changed my life.