

THE CONVERSATION

Five things I wish I knew when I left school

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Doing the exam jump. PA

Dear class of 2016,

Finishing school can be a daunting experience but you are young, bright and have your future ahead of you — easy for me to say, you might think.

I could fill a book with the things I wish I'd known when I left school – how to iron, how to put up a shelf, how invaluable **learning languages** is. Though the biggest one is how everyone is in the same boat, and how no one really knows what they want to do when they leave school.

So, with this in mind, let me impart some of my age old wisdom onto your young shoulders. Here are some of the most important life lessons I wish somebody had taught me before the final school bell rang.

1. Make your own decisions

When you open the exam results envelope don't put pressure on yourself to make a decision straight away. Take time to think and plan. I wish I hadn't been so influenced by what my peers were doing and what direction people thought I should take and actually took the time to listen to my own heart.

I was being pushed by teachers, friends and family to study medicine, but I knew I wanted to study more fundamental aspects of science than that. It took months of thinking to know exactly what it was that interested me most.



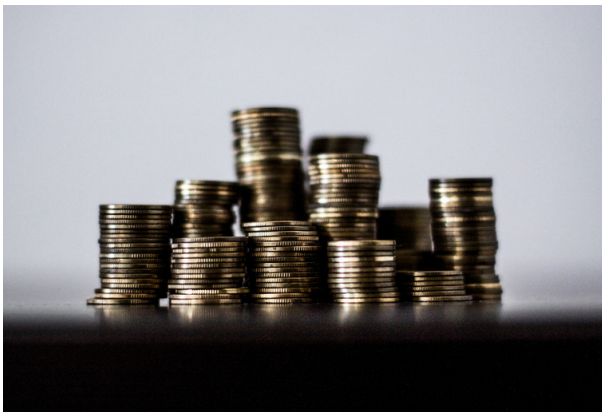
Yeh, I got this. Syda Productions/Shutterstock

Whatever your exam results may be, you are turning the page of a new chapter – an exciting, and as yet unscripted story. Make sure you enjoy this period. While everything may seem a bit up in the air, it is likely you will look back on your school leaving as one of the best periods of your life, before the realities of everyday life and paying bills come into play.

2. Manage your money

On the topic of bills, the ability to manage money is one of the most valuable practical life skills you'll ever need – yet when I left school, I knew way more about Shakespeare and Aristotle than how to budget money and pay household bills.

In school, I was blissfully unaware of how to financially navigate the real world – I had to work this out for myself. APR, insurance and overdrafts were like a foreign language to me, and it seems I was not alone. According to a recent study, more than a third of people wish there had been lessons in school on how to budget, a further third would have appreciated classes on the importance of insurance.



Look after the pennies ... Pexels

It's amazing the number of times negotiation is needed in our lives, from buying a car, negotiating our salary, or trying to get a better deal on your household bills. Many schools have debate teams, but negotiation is something you won't find in any textbooks. It's

something we learn and become better at as life progresses. My advice would be don't be afraid to ask for help or guidance and use resources at hand, such as career centres and money saving websites.

3. Make the most of your time

I wish that before I left school somebody had told me to stop worrying about what the future held and to make the most of the present time. One tip I would give to school leavers is to use summer holidays and spare time wisely. Research has shown that students who have a gap year achieve more highly at university than students who enter university straight after school and mature age students. So do something you've never done before - whether that's volunteering, a work placement or travelling to a new continent.



Just hanging around Pexels

Having worked in a number of different countries it is true, travel really does broaden the mind. Do something that will enrich your life and that will take you out of your comfort zone. Employers will always look favourably on the efforts taken by go getters who have gone out and done work experience. Work experience or volunteering is a great way to network and exposes you to a range of core workplace activities, including teamwork, communication skills and how to use your initiative.

4. Don't give up

If I could give my 17-year-old self any piece of advice over and over again it would be not to be scared of rejection. Life is full of rejections, be they personal (God knows, I've had a few), educational or professional.

Getting job rejections can be emotionally difficult and frustrating but it can also be a useful springboard to reassess your goals. There are many different pathways to get to the same destination. Missing out on grades, a course, or a job, doesn't mean the dream is over. You can look at alternative pathways.



If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again. Pexels

If you don't have the necessary experience or the right grades, perhaps think about going through clearing, doing an internship or gaining experience by work shadowing. Don't give up at the first hurdle and remain positive. After all, Leonardo DiCaprio didn't win his long-awaited first Oscar by giving up.

5. Never stop learning

When I left school I thought that was the end of homework. How wrong I was. Education doesn't stop after school. As former US Secretary of War, **Newton D. Baker**, said: "The man who graduates today and stops learning tomorrow, is uneducated the day after." Never stop learning, class of 2016, treat every day as another school day.



Taking learning outside the classroom. Pexels

And with all that in mind, I wish you good luck for the rest of your adventures in this little thing we call life!



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