
"... success is a personal perspective: if you chase it you will never achieve it. Also, those who demand respect rarely deserve it. Don't use your title 'doctor' outside of work and avoid using it in work too."

Letter to me at 33

At 33 you think you have life all sorted but that's when the chaos begins. So here is a letter to my former self aged 33.

Buy some hair clippers and shave your head! Have children. Don't think you will get your life back when the kids grow up: you won't. You won't want it either. Apologise to your parents for taking them for granted for years.

Drink, but not too often. Eat, but not too much. Exercise, but not to the exclusion of everything else. Work, but not to the exclusion of everything else. Dance when you can, even if you can't; sing when you can, even if you can't. Don't worry about the future — it'll take care of itself. Time is life's great leveller: all stars fade and every dog does have its day. Talk and listen in equal measure but always make your own decisions. Do not be dull but be kind to those who are. Don't be 'impressed' by others; they are just faking it.

Some people think literally, which is confusing, but remember that 'the literal' find 'the lateral' thinkers confusing too, understand? Beware of the certain, for they are most certainly wrong. Ignore the moaners and embrace the doers. Say 'yes' 90% of the time but remember it's important to also say 'no'. All resilience, leadership, and caring training is futile.

Don't read self-help books for they will only make you miserable. Read medical research papers but remember most are unscientific nonsense. Learn some Shakespeare quotes:

'Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, William Shakespeare, 1604–1605)

Other quotes will resonate too:

'Truth is like poetry... and most people hate poetry.' (*The Big Short*, 2015)

and:

'In my experience, eloquent men are right every bit as often as imbeciles.' (Tyrion Lannister, *Game of Thrones*)

Make an effort with your friends and family, forgive their failings, and hopefully they will forgive yours. You are lucky if you have two close friends and blessed if you have three. Keep your own counsel, for gossip is a poison that will steal your soul. Only give advice when asked.

Don't look to the government or the royal colleges to sort out your professional life; this is only your gift. Understand also that education is a broad church; choose positive people with the most potential, not the best 'qualified'.

Don't become deluded in your own self-worth or be drawn into entitlement. Remember, success is a personal perspective: if you chase it you will never achieve it. Also, those who demand respect rarely deserve it. Don't use your title 'doctor' outside of work and avoid using it in work too. Beware the passive aggressives; they are everywhere. But calmly do what is difficult, and keep pushing on. Don't ask what the profession can do for you but ask what *you* can do for medicine. Your vocation will bring you contentment and remember that people are prone to falling painfully from a moral high ground.

Don't steamroller your children into medicine; it will make you all miserable. A vicarious life is no life at all.

Life is short, so best get on with it.

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