

40 Things I Wish I Knew Sooner (The Compact Guide to Life)

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Life would have been very different if I had a future version of myself time-travel and give me all the secrets that I know now. No, not what my past-crush used to think, winning lottery numbers, or how to leverage other people's secrets. I'm talking about valuable life advice and social "hacks" that were far from obvious.

These are things I wish I knew sooner and that most people don't ever figure out.

Last month, my friends and I were hanging out and someone had brought his little cousin, an upcoming high school freshman. His cousin reminded me a lot of myself when I was his age just six years ago. Still trying to figure out life, socially awkward, unconfident in myself.

Then I thought about who I am now and all the ideas I now know. Ideas that would have blown my mind back then, for example, the fact that people aren't worrying about other people 24/7 because they're focused on themselves and carry the same insecurity we do. These are liberating realizations that took a lot of weight off of my shoulders because I used to constantly worry about trivial things.

So I suggested to my friends that we'd turn the upcoming high schooler into the "ultimate freshman" by telling him all the things we wish we had known when we were his age. Having a head start would be amazing and he seemed excited.

Of course, I didn't expect him to internalize every bit of information because I doubt he'd understand the value of everything we were telling him—some things you just have to learn for yourself. But if he took at least just one, any one, he'd be much further than most people his age (further than people my age too.) We wrote everything down for him and I should have made a copy for myself because that list was gold and is worth looking at every day. In fact, everyone could be better if they had that list to consult every day.

This list is different from what we gave him. Many of these points I had brought up, but this has much more meat. This is the compact guide to life.

40 Things I Wish I Knew Sooner:

1. **Just because everyone else thinks something is true doesn't make it true.** The majority isn't always correct. The unconventional, the creative, and the crazy ideas sometimes shine through, but it is scary having no support and only critics. People worry about fitting in and agreeing with everyone else, not realizing that the majority can be wrong.

Research everything that you have doubts in because believing everything that others tell you is foolish. Many people don't do the extra work to validate things so they spread misinformation or they have mindsets that limit them, so how can you trust 100% of everything you hear?

2. **Everyone is the protagonist of his or her own story.** People are busy focusing on themselves, worrying about what others think about them, and everyone else is a side character. Good news because that means people aren't thinking about you as often as you worry. [They're just as insecure as you are.](#)

3. **Confidence is the key to just about anything and it can be learned.** Attracting love interests, business connections, self-esteem, and so much more. It will get you what you want in life and gives you an advantage over everyone else.

You're not doomed if you don't possess the qualities of a confident person in this exact moment in time. It doesn't take a stroke of luck either, because with deliberate practice and a clear goal, learning [how to be confident](#) is possible.

4. **First impressions are important so work on always [setting a good first impression](#).** Posture, what you wear, your handshake. Everything plays a role.

The truth is people will judge you based off of what they see about you the moment you are present. Recovering from a terrible first impression isn't impossible but it is much harder than optimizing for a great one. You will find that doors open for you if you carry yourself well.

5. **Don't look to relationships to make you happy because you should be happy with yourself first.** Relationships (and sex) aren't the be-all end-all of human existence.

Putting all your expectations into your significant other is a huge burden on both him/her and the relationship. The expectations will be impossible to meet and you will be more inclined to act needy. Be happy with yourself first so you can be the best version of you possible for your special other.

6. **There's a big difference between genuine friendships and convenient friendships.** The former is very difficult to form, but very well worth it if you find at least one or two. When you do find genuine friendships, try your best to keep in touch because it's easy to let things fall through and disappear.

7. **Being yourself doesn't mean you shouldn't work on improving yourself.** Don't use it as an excuse to be a half-assed version of yourself. Aim higher. "Be yourself" is vague and outdated.

8. **Don't make assumptions about people because you're wrong 85% of the time.** I'm sure you've heard something along the lines of "They could be going through something right now" before, but that's not what I'm talking about. Someone you think is a loser may turn out to be an interesting person that you'd love to be best friends with. Someone you disagree with on a subject may actually have a lot more in common with you than you think. A lot of times in the past I've judged someone only to speak with them for five minutes and realize I was 100% wrong.
9. **Family matters, but they can be wrong too.** It's scary how much we rely on family to shape us at a young age.
10. **Being an adult doesn't make you any wiser nor does it mean you have everything together.** Most of us are still trying to figure things out and we're playing it by ear a lot of times. "Respect your elders" is a common phrase that I'm partial on. I treat everyone with respect, but that doesn't mean ignorance disappears with age and is replaced by wisdom. Sadly, this means learning how to hold your tongue more often as you grow older.
11. **Be willing/excited to meet people.** You're going to have to initiate because most people are just as scared as you are. Even when you develop a solid social circle you may have to be the glue.
12. **Lowering your expectations is the key to happiness.** Expect too much and you're bound to be disappointed on a daily basis. This does not mean lower all of them nor does it mean lower them to an impossibly low standard. You should still maintain expectations but limit them or keep yourself in check to make sure you don't expect too much.
13. **Making your weaknesses and insecurities into your greatest strengths is possible.** Not many things are completely unchangeable. Confidence used to be one of my greatest weaknesses, now it's my strength. Women used to intimidate me, now I love women and am better with them than most I know. The above may sound conceited, but it is an example that your weaknesses don't have to stay as weaknesses.
14. **Bring closer those who raise you up and surround yourself with great influences.** They say you're the average of the five people you hang around most. Your friends and family shape you a lot so make sure you spend a lot of time with people who are good influences. Whether they're success-oriented, happy individuals, or know how to raise up your spirits, surround yourself with them. It makes life much more enjoyable.
15. **It's okay to be different.** Don't spend so much time trying to be like everyone else. The world is *huge*, do you really think the people who are around you at this moment have it all figured out? Besides, some people are attracted to someone that stands out (in a good way.)
16. **People see what you want them to see on the outside.** If you're nervous, don't show it. People tell me I'm a natural public speaker. Bull, I am not. Public speaking gets my heart racing and nervous, but I don't show it. I work on it and improve, but the fear doesn't go away. I just refuse to show it because I know you only see what I present to you. Don't let your fears show.

17. **Introverts don't hate social interaction.** I'm an introvert, but no one would guess that. I need time to recharge on occasion, but that doesn't mean extroverted characteristics are outside of my realm.
18. **Thinking you're the smartest person around is a mistake.** Every time we look back at ourselves five years ago we think we were an idiot. We always look back a few years and say how ignorant we were. Imagine how much wiser we'll be five years from today. We think we're smart now, but will our future selves think so? I sure hope not. I want to look back and see improvement.
- Take this entire list for example. I didn't know any of this stuff five years ago. I can't wait to see what else I'll learn in the future.
19. **It's so easy to make someone's day.** People feel invisible sometimes. Maybe it's been a while since someone gave them a hello, eye contact, or a smile. It's not hard at all to cheer someone up just by acknowledging them with a smile.
- If you see someone sitting alone and you have time, why not stop by and say hi? That's all it takes and you can see their eyes light up. Sure, maybe it's "weird" because it's out of the norm, but I don't do it for myself most of the time. I do it because I see someone who needs it more than anything I need at the moment.
20. **Life isn't easy for pushovers, be assertive when needed.** There is a strong difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness. Don't venture too far, but it is much better than being a doormat. Fine-tune as you go along and [learn how to be assertive without being aggressive](#).
21. **Learn how and when to say no, saying no isn't selfish.** Being a yes man can be draining and being a people pleaser can be annoying. If you think about it, being a people pleaser is quite selfish in itself. Are you really taking requests because you want to help or it's because you think people will like you more? Not only that, but it's easy to be abused when you're *too* kind.
22. **Say yes more often to your friends when they invite you out because enough no's and they'll stop trying.** Sometimes you may want to just stay in by yourself, that's okay because I need "me time" on occasion too. But then it becomes too easy to say you're busy or tired and it becomes a habit. Then they stop trying and you slowly lose your friends.
23. **Nothing is worse than insecurity.** It's all in your head and it's hard to break these feelings, but it's liberating when you finally do. There's no cure-all for insecurity because there are people who worry about all sorts of different things. The question you should be asking yourself is, "Is this all in my head?"
24. **Don't beat yourself up when you fail.** Failing isn't always a bad thing and it's expected. It's 100% impossible to avoid failure, so why hang on to the times you do fail? Focus on your next goal and learn from your past mistakes. Don't slow down your stride.
25. **Rejection isn't the worst thing in the world, inaction is.** At least with rejection you gave it a chance with a possible positive outcome. If you fail to take action you default into rejection anyway. Therefore, inaction is the

worst thing you can do (or not do.)

26. **Actively listen to others, always.** People love talking, especially about themselves. Ask questions and make sure you spend at least 60% of the time listening with 40% talking. Everyone is eager to get their share in a conversation, so let the other person.

Also remember that people love hearing their own name. It is the sweetest sound in the world, so remember everyone's names. I used to be terrible with names, but now I am quite good with practice. If you're bad with names, you can always [learn how to remember names](#).

27. **Reminding yourself, "This too shall pass," can get you through most things.** It's a powerful phrase that reminds you that nothing is permanent. During a horrible breakup? This too shall pass.

The other half of this is that it can teach you to cherish the good things you have right now, because that too shall pass.

28. **Don't worry about making everyone like you.** It's impossible.

29. **Want what you already have, stop wanting what you don't.** Gratitude on an extreme scale.

30. **People aren't constantly thinking of you.** You're not the center of the universe, so stop worrying about every little action.

31. **Don't bother with things outside of your control.** Focus on the things you can control.

32. **It's useless to regret something that has already occurred.** You learn from the majority of them so you can avoid them again in the future, don't linger on the past.

33. **People you disliked in the past may turn out to be your best friend now.** It's worth re-connecting with people you knew in the past whether you were just an acquaintance or if you actually disliked them.

34. **Don't burn bridges, ever.** Always try to patch things up because you never know how your paths may cross again.

35. **You occasionally need to remove people from your life.** [Cut out toxic people](#) who bring you down. It's harsh but it's not worth having people around you who do nothing but bring you down. Even family is suspect to this but it's a lot harder to distance yourself.

36. **Life can change at any second and so can you.** Get used to change and embrace it. [Seek change](#). Sometimes you don't realize it but your environment is limiting you. In California I feel much less productive

because it's easy to be distracted.

Moving to Arizona led to me growing a lot more and I've done great things as a result. Change can be anything and doesn't always have to be environmental. Either way, test your adaptability.

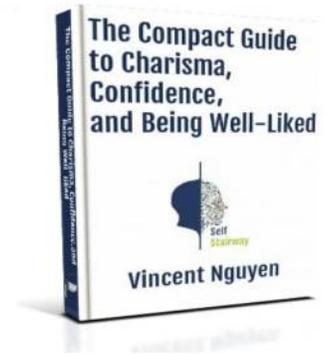
37. **Expand your comfort zone whenever you can.** You can gradually expose yourself one step at a time until you're ready to take on whatever it is that scares you. Things seem a lot less traumatic when you take them in pieces instead of tackling the beast all at once.

38. **It's difficult to find people you click with on a deep level and that's okay.** There are a lot of people out there. You can't expect to click with the majority of people you talk to. Don't beat yourself up because you're lonely right now.

39. **College is not the only path to success.** It could even hurt you sometimes.

40. **Life isn't so bad after all.**

Question: What would you add to this list?



This article was written by [Vincent Nguyen](#). Visit [Self Stairway](#) for more articles on practical life advice.



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