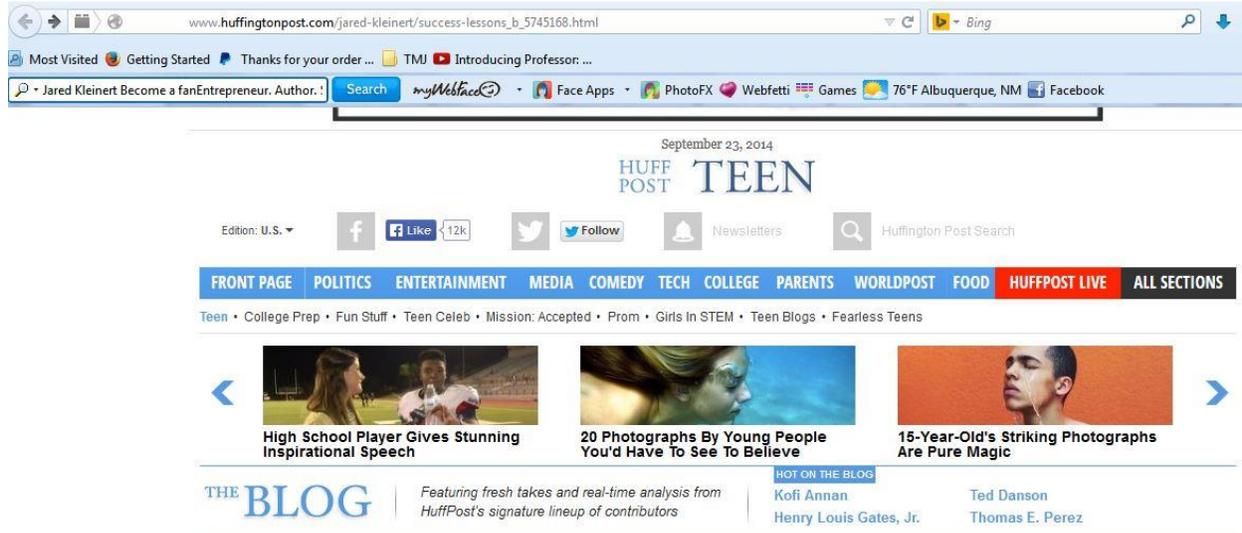


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What Tony Hsieh, Pro Athletes, the Founder of UGGs and Others Taught Me About Success (Part One)

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It's September. School just started again, yet I won't be going back this fall ([gasp!!!](#)).

Instead, I'm taking a year off from school in order to take control of my own education, and will be documenting all of my experiences on a new blog I just launched called [The Gap Year Experiment](#).

With no curriculum to follow, and a world full of opportunities now available at my fingertips, I had to decide what things were most important to learn. What are the skills, experiences, and habits I could create during my "gap year experiment" that would help me get the most out of the next 365 days of my life?

To answer that, I asked some of my mentors, friends, and role models to give me their 1-3 sentence responses to the following question:

Knowing what you do now, if you could have taught yourself and/or done one thing at 18 years old to create a better foundation for your future success, what would it have been and why?

These lessons, as I quickly came to realize, were too valuable for me to keep to myself, so without further adieu, here is what I learned.

Success in Business

1. "When I was 18, I was full of dreams, energy and excitement. I couldn't wait to graduate and start making money. I saw an Opportunity to go into business with my brothers and I seized it! I Worked hard and Never gave up. Years later, I started reading and filling my mind with ideas and Inspiration. It changed my life and my career took off! If you are just starting out don't wait. Time is your most precious resource. Invest it. Use it well. Start now!" -- **Peter van Stralen, CEO of Sunshine Brands**

2. "Be unapologetically true yourself, both in business and in life, and broadcast who you are to the world. The right people will eventually find you." -- **Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos**

3. "If I had been focused on my future, I may never have had this one. If I had been focused on foundations, I may never have built one. If I had been focused on success, I may never have achieved it. You have to do what you love because you love it and not for any other reason. And so I have nothing to teach my 18-year-old self because it's my 18-year-old self that my present-day self should be learning from." -- **Neil Strauss, NYT Bestselling Author**

4. "By 18, I had worked four summers on the construction crew of my dad's company, held after school jobs in gas stations. I also cleaned a bakery, and after leaving high school worked on a road-building crew to make the streets for a new subdivision in my home town. Without a doubt it was the diversity of the people that I met during this time that expanded my view towards becoming an entrepreneur, versus following the typical University-to-life career path of my friends. I narrowly avoided joining a bank in a coastal town so I could surf every day, when the local grocery store owner took me aside and said, 'You have so much you can do with your life, so get out and explore.' So, looking back I would not wish to have changed anything. Traveling was the most critical step in me seeing opportunity, especially the fact that nobody in America owned sheepskin boots, while the product was everywhere in Australia, which ultimately led to UGGs." -- **Brian Smith, Founder of UGG Australia, Author and Speaker**

Finding Mentors

5. "To create a better foundation for success, I would have welcomed the advice of working with a mentor sooner. I was quite independent early in my career (few female mentors were available), thinking that dependence on others and asking questions were a sign of weakness, as was failure. Instead over time, I learned that I didn't have to go it alone. The goal of a mentor is to shorten our learning curve. Failure wasn't an option early on; now it is the only option. Fail Faster, Succeed Sooner, is part of my philosophy. The power of relationships, particularly of a mentor and a mastermind, means that I can ask for the help and expertise of others to move forward more quickly." -- **Dr. Cheryl Lentz, The Academic Entrepreneur**

6. "The best foundation is built on someone else's mistakes. Find a mentor about 10-15 years older and grab onto their wisdom. Competition is too stiff to allow for many mistakes of your own!" -- **Bud Moeller, Former Partner at Accenture and Professional Race Car Driver**

7. "Though it can be tough, force yourself to be in situations where you feel like the dumbest person in the room. Constantly surround yourself with people smarter than you, but don't allow it to intimidate you; instead, use it as an opportunity to learn." -- **Nick Arnett, Summit Community Development Manager for the Thiel Foundation**

8. "If I could have done one thing at 18 to better my foundation for success, I would have become an apprentice. I would have spent a lot of time reflecting on areas that fired me up, and then I would have found those who were absolutely CRUSHING it in these fields. I would rank them sequentially, and then reach out to them individually describing in detail how I could ADD VALUE to their lives in exchange for learning from them. Would I get a lot of no's? YES. Would I keep persevering until I found a mentor? YES. What you put out in the universe becomes a magnet...and this magnet would result in a powerful mentor to guide me through my late teens, early 20's." -- **John Lee Dumas, Founder of EntrepreneurOnFire**

On Building Skills

9. "I would have taught myself more programming languages. At 18, I had dabbled in computer science a little bit and could build a blog, but that was about it. If I could go back and teach myself anything, it'd be more programming languages. There's something incredibly powerful about being able to sit down at a computer and prototype an idea in a weekend without having to call upon your "techie" friends to help you." -- **Stacey Ferreira, CEO of AdMoar, Co-Founder of 2 Billion Under 20**

10. "If I could have taught myself one thing, it would have been how to get over my early fear of cold calling and cold approaching individuals I don't know. So many of The Muse's biggest successes are due to cold outreach, and I wish I'd forced myself to get comfortable with this a lot sooner!" -- **Kathryn Minshew, CEO of The Muse**

This is part one of a four part post. [Stay tuned here for Parts Two, Three and Four of this article!](#)