

14. What advice do you have for young people today?

by Peter J. Jessen, July 1999

My 40th high school reunion is this month. We were asked to submit a statement of "Memories." 14 questions were listed to give us ideas. But the one which intrigued me the most was question #14. After answering the others, I closed with my answer to "what advice do you have for young people today?" I wrote the following:

...giving advice to the young is an old favorite fogey past time of fogeyville. We are the right ones to ask. As I tell high school leadership groups, we learn a lot from experience and learn the most from mistakes. Having lived longer, I tell them, I've had a chance to make more mistakes from which to learn more.

So, I'll go ahead and give it a shot. Here is my advice to today's youth (good for adults as well): these are nearly timeless: The poet John Donne wrote "No man is an island" (O.K., today he would write "Neither man nor woman is an island"). So, my advice is summarized by **three themes** and **ten propositions**. Now, priests don't have to be married to give good marriage counseling. And I don't have to be successful to give good advice on how to be successful (remember how much more I've learned than you have as I've made more mistakes).

The 3 themes:

- (1) Develop and maintain good habits (physical, mental, relational);
- (2) Read widely and deeply for personal and professional development; and
- (3) Carefully select those with whom you will associate (who you hang out with).

The 10 propositions:

- (1) Change is the only constant; be prepared to neither fight or flee but go with the flow;
- (2) Without instincts for human social interaction we have to create instinct substitutes: roles. That's why we are creatures of habit. The key: don't break role. Create good habits that lead to personal and professional success, not defeat;
- (3) live by these **7 key words or phrases to live by/take action with** (see me for others):
 - (3-1) Kindness to others
 - (3-2) Positive mental attitude
 - (3-3) Lead others through making/following lists and through collaborative empowerment
 - (3-4) Equitable justice/sovereignty/conflict resolution, and (5) reconcile relationships
 - (3-5) **Read daily!** Charlie Jones has stated that we will be the "same people today as you'll be in five years, except for two things: the people you meet and the books your read." "Leaders are readers." READ DAILY on leadership in order to ensure personal and professional growth and development. In other words, watch out what ideas you let your mind hang out with. On the flip side: _watch out regarding what people you hang out with, and stay away from those who are negative, abusive, and/or who are not supportive and who work to kill your dreams
 - (3-6) "...do justice, & love kindness, & walk humbly with your God" (OT Micah 6:8)
 - (3-7) What can be done to foster "love, joy, peace, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control?" (NT: Gal. 5:22-23)
- (4) you are what you think: whether you think you can or cannot, you are correct
- (5) As you are a mind with a body, train the mind as much as the body
- (6) Associate with people who are positive, uplifting, and encouraging
- (7) Evaluate any social change program or agenda in terms of a "calculus of meaning" & a "calculus of pain"
- (8) In terms of your life's vision's goals and plans for achieving those goals, frequently ask what your **GPA (goals per action)** is, and, in light of your answer, ask Brandon's question: "Am I confident that this is the way I want to invest my time and life?"
- (9) **Don't just hope, ACT:** in Teddy Roosevelt's words, "dare mighty things" even if you fail; get "in the arena," and accept the errors that accompany all efforts, as it is better to fail and suffer and be alive than to avoid so that one "neither enjoys much nor suffers much" as they "know not victory or defeat." Thus, have "great enthusiasms, great devotions," "spend on a worthy cause," and know at least "the daring that resulted in failing and strive for "the triumph of achievement," and thus,
- (10) In Peter Berger's phrase, make sure you stand up for the principle that "Nothing should be taken so seriously that it be allowed to supercede one's capacity for laughter."