

Succeeding in your work environment

Potential employers want to see evidence that you have worked on a project from start to finish, evidence that you're someone who can finish the job.

The ability to accept a task and see it through all the way to completion is highly prized. That means analysing the situation, generating potential solutions, considering every pitfall, and making answers or options available. A person who can be trusted to see a task through like this, will be highly sought-after.

Question the assumptions other people take for granted. But don't simply criticise anarchically so as to look clever. Make sure you've bothered to think about better solutions than the ones you're about to question.

Organisations want you for your originality, energy and the freshness that you'll bring to them. Don't be too quick to conform and become like those around you, otherwise it makes you expendable or interchangeable.

The world needs problem-solvers, not just lawyers and doctors. Too much emphasis is placed on being qualified rather than being effective. To be effective you may have to take into account factors not directly taught by your profession.

You need to be able to deploy different aspects of your personality according to the needs of the situation: highly vocal confidence in the morning with one set of people, patient listening with another group in the afternoon, and then artistic expression or sporting enthusiasm with clients or colleagues in the evening. That said, at the hub of all these different faculties, is your own set of values and beliefs. You are simply expressing them in a range of different ways.

Having an adaptable personality is a very useful skill. It's not being fickle or fake. Adaptability means you try to respond in a tailor-made fashion to the individuals you encounter. It doesn't mean you have to agree with them, or be a sycophant. Adaptability only requires you to be sensitive to their needs and expectations.

Develop the ability to adapt yourself to the task, but also to adapt the task to you, so it gets the best from you.

Be a pleasure to work with. A smile and a positive attitude make a difference to any environment where people get together.

It's the little things in life that add up to make a very big difference. Patting someone on the back is a small gesture, but it means a lot to that person.

Any field of work will appreciate somebody who can talk with colleagues and clients about other aspects of their own life: their sports, hobbies, and interests. Similarly, someone who has the gumption to set up a team or an after-work activity, is worth their weight in gold.

It's vital to take responsibility for your own learning. Identify your strengths *and play to them*. Identify your weaknesses *and address them*. Actively seek out mentors, allies and opportunities.

Get yourself known in your institution - actively go about and introduce yourself to people so that you can ask their advice when you need to. Have the nerve to say what you think, to challenge the status quo in a positive and helpful way. Be *constructively argumentative*.

It's a valuable skill to be able to feel comfortable with other people no matter their rank relative to yours.

The very best people don't just gather useful information, they are able to *interpret* that information in direct relation to everything else that is already known. They then use their new information to produce a convincing model or theory of what is happening and why.

The best individuals are in competition with themselves, attempting to improve their present performance compared with their previous performance, rather than looking sideways to how other people are doing.

Young people who have proactive hobbies tend to do a lot better in later life. They haven't simply learnt how to think, they've learnt how to do things as well, and that 'getting things done' is a key skill in itself.

Rules and self-discipline have their place. For instance, a good game of football can only be played with rules, and when everyone playing respects those rules and plays within them.

The most impressive people are those who can do well consistently and who can bring something different to their arena, something that's not been done before.

Be trustworthy in every respect. Be trusted to be on time, to get the job done, to be as good as your word. There will always be excuses available to you for failing, but they are no good to the person who has trusted you. We all know individuals who can be relied upon to do the job - be one of them.

The most important 'performance indicator' in any job is "Are you enjoying the work?" If the answer is yes, most other things will fall into place soon enough.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Performing well under pressure**
- **Don't wait to be taught**
- **Learning from others**

Teamwork & leadership

My first concern is my team, because if they are feeling good and motivated, then everything else takes care of itself.

It is very likely that our greatest feats will be achieved in partnership with others.

The chances are that if you chose your allies carefully, you'll be amazed and delighted by the contribution other people can make to your projects. They might not bring what you thought they would, but that's the beauty of it. They'll contribute stuff you never even dreamt of. You have to take the chance and let them into your world of ambitions.

Your own accomplishments will be magnified greatly if you can choose good people to work with, then inspire and help them give their best.

There is always a shortage of good managers and leaders - such general skills can be very valuable to an organisation and are well worth developing in yourself.

As a leader, you mustn't get caught up in the smaller details. It will only exhaust your energies. You have to delegate to others so that you can manage the bigger picture.

Choosing the right people to work with is vital: people who you personally are comfortable with and who you trust and respect to get the job done. If they don't fit that bill, get rid of them as soon as you can, because they'll hold the show up, and neither you, they, nor the project will benefit from the mismatch.

A leader needs to bring 'vision' to the team or to an organisation. A vision of where we're headed and how we're going to get there.

Delegation requires you to give the other person a clear understanding of *how and when* they need to report back to you.

You can only delegate if you trust the person to whom you give the task. But giving someone full responsibility for how they complete a task will very often inspire in them a sense of pride and determination in doing the job well.

The best teams comprise different personalities with different areas of expertise: sales, manufacture, distribution, research and development - perhaps even a customer or two. The worst thing you can have is a lot of like-minded people.

Make sure your team members have a definite target to be aiming for, and a definite motivation for doing so.

Once the core values have been agreed upon, let people have their own autonomy about how they are achieved. If you allow someone a sense of responsibility for something, then they can take pride from having it work out well.

Give people responsibility - it motivates them to be successful - and then give them the credit. *That's* good management.

The trick is to find people's strengths and play to them so as to allow them to contribute to the team. Leadership is all about helping individuals to get the best from themselves.

New friendships are best formed when strangers are put into a new environment and can draw together against a common enemy or a joint goal.

Don't be greedy: share your plans and ideas with partners and investors and employees. Let everyone have some input, even if you know the final decision will be yours.

Without involvement, there is no commitment. Involve each member of the team as much as possible.

Every team member is a potential source of great ideas, not just a pair of hands. Ask people to make suggestions on a regular and frequent basis.

Be sure to walk around and see what's going on. You *cannot* manage effectively from your office.

It's still too rare for a leader of an organisation to regularly take the time and trouble to go and examine how other people are doing things, so as to better motivate one's own teams.

Things don't go wrong because *everything* goes wrong. It only takes one malfunctioning organ to kill a body. So don't neglect members of your team, or parts of your task.

Criticise someone's behaviour rather than the actual person, so rather than feeling that they themselves are flawed, all the person needs to do is improve their behaviour to win your respect.

If someone's underperforming, consider giving them *more* not less responsibility and encouragement - it may increase their sense of feeling valued and trusted.

People don't hate work. It's as natural as rest or play. If they commit themselves to mutual objectives, they'll drive themselves more effectively than you can drive them.

You've got to give people time and attention, but even a smile, a nod or a thumbs up can bridge a lot of gaps.

If you lose someone from the team, you must not spend any time in pity but put all your efforts into encouraging the remaining team members. That is the job of the leader.

Constant encouragement and recognition of achievements on a daily basis make for a very healthy atmosphere. You get the best from people by building them and supporting them. Leadership is all about helping individuals get the best from themselves.

School exams and degrees can be such an isolating process that you have to make a special effort to learn how to work within a team. Try to form a 'study team' to encourage each other and share tips.

Develop the ability to lead people in such a way that they do not even know they are being led, so that it becomes a joint endeavour.

The more you do for those you lead, the more they will do for you. Care as much for their well-being as you would for yourself. They will sense it and you will earn from them a special level of respect.

When you're in a leadership position, you have to generate and radiate self-confidence, courage and sureness of purpose. That is key to the leader's role. You can and should invite everyone's considered opinion and potentially good ideas. But you, and you alone, must make the final decision and broadcast it clearly with no room for doubt. That's your right and your responsibility.

The key to success is being able to motivate and to look for the best in yourself and others. You are the sum of yourself and those individuals who you choose to rally around you.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Communicating emotions**
- **Powerful thinking techniques**
- **Managing your time**

Coaching, teaching & tutoring

The best way to really understand something is to teach it to someone else.

It's the oldest saying in the book, but it's still true: you learn a little by being told, even more by being shown, and the most by experiencing for yourself - *especially* if that involves mistakes! A good tutor simply provides a safety net so you don't fall too far.

How fast a person learns something, *whatever the skill*, is directly related to their character and the style of their learning process. The more the student is actively involved in hands-on experience, the faster and more thorough the acquisition of confident and usable skills.

Resist the urge to be spoon-fed, because it only helps you in the short-run, but leaves you vulnerable in the long run. Experience things for yourself.

Anyone whose teaching should give the people they're teaching a sense of control over their own success.

Good tutors support their students in finding their own independence. As much as you can, try to give the student the responsibility for their own learning.

Present the students with the problem - the goal - and invite them to work out how to solve it.

Unless you help the individual student develop their skills and pleasures in all aspects of their life, not just the one you are teaching, you won't get the best from them.

Suggest a strategy for *generating* solutions, but try not to suggest the solutions themselves. Don't give someone a ready-made answer because then they'll never learn how to do it for themselves.

The most effective form of helping is enabling the other person to see for themselves other points of view on a problem or situation.

A teacher is no longer primarily an information provider - they help the student learn to select what information may be useful to them, and to prioritise their use of it.

I don't listen to myself when I talk, I try to listen to the other person listening, to make sure that I'm being heard accurately.

A good tutor uses their knowledge of the student's existing knowledge and passions to help find a bridge into a new subject.

Ask the person what their aspirations are, and ask them how they plan to get there. Then you can start a collaborative discussion with them about what they are committed to and keen to invest themselves in. You can be an ally to their aspirations rather than a hindrance.

Pocket money, praise and other treats are too often used to reward only unenjoyable activities. Shouldn't children learn that they can also earn praise and reward for doing the things they love to do anyway? That would set a good precedent for future life: that the world will reward a job well done and it's all for the better if you also enjoy that job for its own sake. That can guard against the very negative notion that work is something you're not meant to enjoy.

The best teachers actively and regularly learn from their students by inviting their students to teach them something. Both parties benefit enormously from such a relationship.

The High-School Sports Coach in a small-town American community is an important person, looked up to and respected by successive generations. Coaching is a very important part of life there in the USA, but in the UK I don't think we've ever properly understood the role of coaching in the process of learning and pursuing excellence. We're the poorer for not appreciating it.

When I'm teaching, it would be nice to be thanked occasionally or to be told when my example or anecdote has worked really well.

A good teacher presents all sides of the argument unbiasedly.

Cultivate an atmosphere where questions and debates are commonplace - where there is no such thing as a stupid question if it leads to a better understanding, where the student can admit that they still don't get it.

Teach by example; ask your students their opinions on things; and ask them to teach *you* something.

The ability to explain things in many different ways using metaphors, analogies and examples is a real plus. If the lessons are eccentric and unusual, it makes them all the more refreshing and memorable for students.

A teacher needs to radiate passion for their work, and respect for each student as an individual rather than as part of a class.

Good teachers have other interests: they seem happier and more rounded for it. Such interests can be a portal by which students can better appreciate their teacher's personality.

A good teacher dares to go beyond the curriculum. This extra knowledge invariably pays off, shedding fresh light on the material that is within the curriculum.

Help your students make connections between what they experience in their own everyday lives and what they're learning from you.

Students have to feel that you've got *their* best interests at heart, otherwise they won't have faith in you.

Spending time with your students is a great compliment and a key ingredient of a good relationship. Take an interest in their lives, and establish some trust.

Praise people as often as you can. You can't over do it.

I teach 'why to learn' I teach 'how to learn' and then I get out the way because I'd be trampled in the rush for them wanting to learn.

Teaching should be highly-collaborative between teacher and person being taught.

What we've got to aim at is '*individualised learning*' i.e. going at the individual's pace, not as part of a class. An individual learns best when they set their own pace for something they've chosen to do. Progressing at some 'class average' every lesson is belittling some students and holding back others.

Bear in mind that all individuals and all groups will have different learning styles, so you as the teacher must adapt yourself and your material to get the best from whoever is learning.

The main joy of being a teacher is all about the magic of seeing someone develop. The main downside are the extreme highs and lows in that development process.

Listening to students is one of the hardest skills for a teacher to master, because you get so used to teaching by talking.

The best way to take care of someone is to train them to take care of themselves.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Finding your passion**
- **Being independent and in control**
- **Learning from others**

Handling conflict & negotiation

Thinking in terms of black or white, right or wrong, yes or no, is always self-defeating. Look for the middle ground that can be negotiated.

If the fuss you kick up is well justified, then keep it up, because it's the squeaky wheel that gets oiled.

Try always to arrange a deal where both sides feel reasonably good about the bargain struck. It's almost never a situation of Yes or No, win or lose. Most often there is an agreeable option somewhere in the middle that needs to be created by *you*.

When considering a confrontation, take the trouble to see the battle from both sides.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Communicating emotions**
- **Your attitude toward problems**
- **Overcoming shyness & building self-confidence**

Improving your place of work & study

The basic philosophy and values of an organisation have far more effect on its achievements than do technological, economic resources or organisational structure.

In the current educational climate, there's a real danger that students get little encouragement to excel at anything. Yet mastering something can create great confidence that will spill over into the rest of life.

Have you got an 'anonymous suggestions' mechanism for people in your organisation? Do you produce a monthly newsletter that publicises each and every suggestion and outlines the management's responses to it? Many of the most innovative organisations get their best ideas from the people they teach or serve, because they listen intently and regularly.

Academic institutions solely headed up by practitioners, could benefit from the joint-directorship of specialist managers and entrepreneurs.

We like to involve the senior students in the admissions process - right from helping sift through application forms to interviewing candidates. They bring a whole new perspective on evaluating the newcomers.

There should be an acclimatisation month for new students at university: one-to-one meetings, support groups, and peer mentoring by previous year's students. This should apply to both undergraduates and post-graduates. It would make the following year or years of course-life and personal-life so much richer for that sensitive preparation period. As it is, 99% of university departments offer little more than a two-hour 'get to know you' session which only half the faculty and few former students bother to go to.

Keep an eye out for the young people who are getting by, but who nonetheless are ticking bombs because they have unresolved, unaddressed emotional issues which will hold them back and which one day could seriously bring them down.

Peer counselling is a very useful first step for students who find themselves worried about things. The peer counsellor can help the individual pinpoint the problem for themselves, and help them devise their own solutions - all this without the stigma of going to a professional counsellor.

The vast majority of young men and women would welcome a traditional one-to-one mentor-mentee relationship with a senior adult with whom to discuss personal life and specific vocational choices and development. Mentorship makes particularly good sense because, on their own, a school or university can rarely succeed in giving the intellectual nourishment that results in a student excelling. The right mentor could make all the difference.

There's no collaboration between schools, universities and companies, hence students are too often ill-equipped with the skills to cope with their new environment when they move from one level to another.

An organisation would best serve itself by actively helping its individuals to achieve two things: 1) to continuously develop their portfolio of skills and experience so they don't feel as if they are being left behind while new technology and media move on a pace around them; 2) to develop an all-round level of life-satisfaction in their personal and professional life that is sufficient to sustain them in the longer term. Failing the individual in either of these aspects will only result in expensive and unexpected departures.

A good measure of any organisation is how well people are known within it. Are its individuals understood and appreciated, or are they just part of the crowd?

Organisations need a robust and regular mechanism for anonymous ground-level feedback that can reach the policy-makers. In respect of these suggestions, decisions shouldn't simply be imposed, they should be voted on. That might seem like a hassle in the short term, but prevents long term malaise.

You should take full responsibility for your own learning-curve within any institution, but that doesn't mean you can't approach your seniors and ask them to support the development course that you've planned for yourself. This might include different departmental postings, IT courses, projects of particular interest to you, and even secondment to another company or volunteer organisation. Point out that your organisation will benefit from your increased skills and confidence.

Regular, even daily, team work in which people have practise of being leader and of being led, is very developing of the interpersonal skills that will form the cornerstone of most professional lives.

Some companies run outwardbound courses to develop the skills and working relationships of their young professionals. These are invariably a great success. If a training institution treats its students well, the students will be happy to come back on a regular basis and lend a hand.

Having top professionals give guest lectures to students is all well and good, and should be a regular, not an occasional thing. What's best is if you have that guest explain their step-by-step thinking processes in achieving what they did. This allows the students to see that there was an understandable progression towards the achievement.

A good variety of students is always a healthy thing. This should mean different interests, backgrounds, and if possible, different cultures and nationalities.

More schools and universities should consider offering Mandarin as a foreign language - think of the role China seems likely to play as an economic and political force in this new century.

Think about the noise levels where ever you teach. Computers are noisy, and uncarpeted floors don't help. Noise is a major fatigue factor for anyone teaching.

There needs to be an easily accessible and popular communal space where students and staff can mix informally, and where lots of important business can be done over tea and biscuits.

Some of the most important information sharing, relationship-building and work initiatives happen around the coffee machine, in the gym, or with a drink after work.

Don't let the coffee room get turned into a storage room or into someone's office. It's not just a coffee room, it's the heart of the place.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Your values and priorities**
- **Learning from others**
- **Travelling & working abroad**

School Special

Most schools underestimate the potential of their students in many aspects of their lives. We need to be asking how schools can constantly improve their teaching of daily life skills so as to take education well beyond the exam curriculum.

A lot of schools I've seen just don't seem to appreciate what university life will ask of their students. The ability to self-motivate, and to be self-reliant aren't features of school-based teaching. This means that a lot of young people struggle when they get to university.

Too often there is a sense of rush in school life because of a study timetable that does not allow time for consolidation and wholly conscious well-informed decisions. It was the founder of IBM, amongst others, who warned: "Don't confuse activity with achievement."

Extra-curricular activities and after-hours hobbies are an excellent way for teacher and students to earn each other's respect and for students to work with other students. This is even better if it's weekends away rather than just evening-classes. An expedition lasting a week or two is what's really needed. There are far too few if any of these opportunities in the average year for most students.

Why isn't there more acknowledgement of extra-curricular activities and voluntary work in the community? Why can't a grade be attached to these things which counts just as much as an academic grade? Surely, we are sending out the wrong messages about what should and could be valued by our society.

I see a lot of teaching going on in schools, but not a lot of learning. We need to give the young person sovereignty over their own learning, so that they learn because they are *desperate* to learn, passionate to learn, because they are learning what they *personally* have chosen. It won't be easy, but it's where we've got to go.

Careers Guidance Services, whether in school or university, are very often grossly undervalued by their institutions. They have too few properly qualified staff running them, and the students are given too little time to spend with them. The usual scenario is a school teacher working on careers-guidance either part-time or just for a year or so, and their careers training will run to barely a few days a year. When you think that hundreds of students may all have careers questions which will underpin their vital life-course decisions, you're bound to ask: *are these arrangements enough?*

Do teachers and tutors always have to be full-timers? So much can be learnt from strong links with industry and people who can draw on their experiences of a different working world.

Single-sex schools seem to be kept alive by parents who think this environment will bring better grades for their children and protect those children from problematic relationships. This is a great shame. Mixed schools bring such pleasure and essential social skills for their students.

Many specialists in the field of nutrition now estimate that one in five teenagers, particularly young women, are improperly nourished and have stunted growth because of the poverty of their diet. For any educational institution, it is not enough simply to offer food-choices; there has to be a clear educational message here, untainted by an eye to budgetary concerns or, worst still, fast-food sponsorship. Nor is it sufficient to put fresh fish, fruit, vegetables, milk and water *alongside* a selection of junk foods like chips and sugared drinks. It is the absolute duty of educational establishments to make a well-informed stand, to make a clear and positive judgement, and to exclude confectionery, sweets and *mediocre* foods from school premises, so as to concentrate on actively promoting health-enhancing snacks and meals.

The current emphasis on exam grades is completely distorting and undermining the whole experience of what school has the potential to be.

Schools Inspectors have acknowledged that financial pressure on state and private schools is motivating many of these institutions to *deliberately* distort or omit vital careers information so as to gain financially by keeping their students in school for a year or two longer. Also, there is overwhelming evidence that Careers Education and Guidance is severely marginalised by the academic community in many schools and universities where it is regarded as a *third-class* subject. This is bitterly ironic, because it is hard to think of a more important subject than what to invest years of your life in, and the self-motivational benefits that the vast majority of students derive from finding a vocation, far outweigh its costs in time and money.

What would make a great contribution to young people's self-motivation is not a traditional concept of career guidance, but some far broader category of guidance as regards short or medium term life-objectives. These might come in the form of an outwardbound endeavour, a volunteer task, or a particular study-goal. It is unlikely that Careers Guidance Counsellors alone are appropriate providers of such multi-disciplinary goals.

A British teenager can expect just one interview per year with a qualified full-time Careers Counsellor. Moreover, in their last two years of formal schooling, almost all youngsters will receive less than one hour per week allotted to careers, usually a class hosted by a schoolteacher minimally-qualified to teach it. Almost all school students rate their experience of careers-teaching as extremely negative. Despite which, most of them report wanting more guidance, and believe it would be beneficial in motivating their academic and vocational goals. Presently, sources of guidance are very largely 'informal advisers' drawn from friends or family or from other schoolteachers. In the USA, the problems are all too similar to the British experience. On both sides of the Atlantic, complaints tend to focus on the excessive ratio of students per careers counsellor, and the very credible fear that advice is being biased by the agendas of large corporations or by central government, who very often contribute heavily to the salaries of careers counsellors.

British educational and psychological research professions have too often shied away from studying important issues, such as happiness and well-being, because they say it would be difficult to define them.

Secondary School students very often complain that their formal education is not relevant to other aspects of their daily life nor to their subsequent university or professional lives.

The school in all its guises, whether the head, the staff or the students, needs to show very clearly and very often that its priority is *caring about the individual*.

Could school teachers more often be practising professionals from other arenas of the working world who teach as a part-time role? It seems that talks given by visitors are a once-a-term phenomenon rather than the weekly event they should really be.

Everyone should have someone else to take care of in school, someone else to look out for. It makes everyone feel the better for it.

Party Politics should be taken out of education because it's leading to ill-advised and too frequent changes of plans and policy.

The trouble with school sex education is that too few competent people dare to tackle the relevant stuff like masturbation, chatting someone-up, sexual self-respect and sexual good-manners; and they certainly don't do it early enough, which can mean age 11 or 12 for many young people.

Get rid of teachers who don't love to teach, because good learning is all about discovering a passion for your subject, and students can spot an apathetic teacher a mile off.

This extreme emphasis on examination in the school curriculum is distorting the whole purpose and pleasure of learning, and is overshadowing the *unexaminable* but none-the-less *essential* elements of the school experience. The tail is wagging the dog, because people aren't really learning, they are *learning* to take exams.

Though class-sizes of 12 students or less is one way forward for better education, the real goal is each student learning independently at his or her own pace.

It's an unfortunate irony that, where the business of a good school is in trying to give young people confidence to develop their own centre of gravity, most young people are scared of being different.

Bearing in mind your school life might last anywhere between 11 and 20 years, I think a successful and enjoyable experience is just as important as a successful working life. It is a profound shame that school is too often seen as a *preparation* for life, rather than as a life in itself. 20 years is quite a career by any one's measure, and it's not a dress-rehearsal.

The relationship between intelligence test scores and performance in other areas of life, such as work, is low if not non-existent.

Many students would greatly benefit from an apprenticeship at 16, rather than more academic work in college, and some students who would be best for an apprenticeship even a couple of years younger. Keeping them in school does them a grave disservice.

Even at the most caring schools, there is too rarely one to one time given young people on a regular or reliable basis, and it's a shameful fact that nine-tenths of Secondary School students can go through their *entire school career* not ever having someone sit down with *just* them for an hour or more to talk about anything that the student regards as important. The school rarely considers this, but the *student* is all too aware of it. If there could be a rescheduling and resourcing so that one to one hours become the weekly norm not the yearly exception, it is extremely likely that the benefits would show themselves in greatly enhanced exam results, appropriate career orientation, and mental and physical health.

Schools have a moral duty to educate the whole person - physical , intellectual, emotional and spiritual. In the present climate of academic league-tables and examination reform, many schools are paying far too much attention to things academic, which comprise only one part of the intellectual dimension. This disproportionate emphasis has resulted for many years now in the erosion of extra-curricular activities, and hence the severe neglect of the other three major dimensions of a young person's development. This gross imbalance is resulting in stressed, disillusioned and confused young people who are too often poorly equipped to cope readily with what complex modern life will require of them. Such a misguided educational ethos impoverishes not only the young individual, but very quickly takes its toll on wider society. But we can change that, and we *can* change it today.

You have to allow learning to be messy - involving false starts and mistakes.

For outdated historical reasons, academia has far too much attention and kudos in our society and in our schools. There are other far more important and relevant attributes. For instance, community service should be regarded as more prestigious.

Putting 25 people in a class and hoping they'll learn something is a long shot. School is a blunt mechanism for teaching anything, and it's the individual who suffers when it doesn't work.

Mixed schools provide a great opportunity to learn how to be friends with someone from the opposite sex, without having to be dating.

Schools do a great dis-service if they conspire to deny access to the Armed Forces recruitment teams. Many schools are guilty of this, because they fear the financial penalties to their school for losing 16 year olds who might otherwise stay on and do further years of schooling. The Armed Forces offer many young men and women good opportunities in a wide range of skills and experiences in modern-day Peace Keeping and Disaster Response roles.

There's *never* enough choice of sporting activities in school. I can appreciate there's financial restrictions, but only having five or six team sports just isn't enough. Loads of people never find anything they like, so they don't get in the habit of doing sport and feel they're failures. We can't all be good at football and cricket.

Extra-curricular activities shouldn't be optional add-ons, otherwise their benefits miss the very youngsters they can most help: the ones with narrowed horizons and limited experiences, the ones who won't allow themselves pleasure until certain perfectionist goals have been achieved. So we should make these extra-curricular activities compulsory for all young people, but we should also make them as pleasurable and rewarding as possible.

Drugs, sex and depression very often don't get discussed properly at school because schools are nervous of these subjects that require too many resources to deal with effectively.

Peer mentoring not only helps the mentored person, but has the added benefit of developing in the mentor a sense of pride in being useful. It doesn't need to be the only form of mentoring in operation, but it can be part of the safety-net of support.

Modern-day teachers with packed academic timetables very rarely have sufficient time for the pastoral care and careers-guidance roles that all students require as a matter of course.

Teachers need highly and proactively supportive headteachers, or else the teacher's position is too often untenable in the face of hundreds of individual students and their parents.

A lot of our best schools now run study classes that focus on how to develop memory skills and other techniques that feed directly into the exam culture. What is interesting is that these places very rarely even look at how to understand and deal with issues of emotional self-management.

Excellent nutritional standards in our schools, universities and work cafeterias would save the country enormous sums in healthcare for long-term problems caused by inadequate diets.

There's still a big gap between what we know school food should be and what it is in most cases. There are disgraceful variations in quality and nutritional value, and it's no surprise that ravenous teenagers will always be tempted by chips and pizza if they're on offer. We have to offer better.

Remember that 'Just say no' - isn't enough. A young person needs to want to say no to drink and drugs, and this requires them not feeling too miserable, and not hating themselves. To achieve this, their parents, schools and mentors need to be supporting them in every aspect of their life.

There needs to be a complete re-evaluation of what education is for. What knowledge and skills do people need now, and what will they need in 10 years' time? It's not going to be easy for the system to adapt, but there will be a very high price to pay if it doesn't.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Being a good parent**
- **Making the most of college**
- **Finding a balance in life**