

Billionaires' Tips For New Grads: Advice From Jobs, Oprah, Zuckerberg And More

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College students across the country will accept diplomas and step out into the “real world” for the first time this month. Some have jobs, many don’t, but all are hopeful about what lies ahead.

As to their first steps beyond the comfort of campus, whose advice should they follow? What lessons should they heed as they embark on this great journey of independence and self-sufficiency? How about listening to some of the most successful people anywhere: visionary business leaders who built empires from nothing and now rank among the wealthiest on the planet. Here’s a curated list of lessons billionaires have given to college graduates over the years in commencement addresses.

Steve Jobs: Live Each Day As If It Was Your Last



When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: “If you live each day as if it was your last, some day you’ll most certainly be right.” It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” And whenever the answer has been “no” for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something. *~Stanford University, 2005*

Bill Gates: From Those To Whom Much Is Given, Much Is Expected



My mother, who was filled with pride the day I was admitted here-never stopped pressing me to do more for others. A few days before my wedding, she hosted a bridal event, at which she read aloud a letter about marriage that she had written to Melinda. My mother was very ill with cancer at the time, but she saw one more opportunity to deliver her message, and at the close of the letter she said: “From those to whom much is given, much is expected.” *~Harvard University, 2007*

Oprah Winfrey: We All Need Makeovers From Time To Time



People love makeovers, because the physical results are always so astonishing. But I like doing them because of the possibility of transforming more than the way people look. You want to change the way people feel about themselves. One man, a guy we’d just seen walking down the street, with a beard that was almost to the ground, it looked like he

was hiding behind all of that beard. And after we got rid of all that hair and he could actually see himself, he said, “I feel alive again.” The makeover allowed him to see himself in a way that he’d forgotten was there. You know, we all need makeovers from time to time in our lives, and graduates, I know this, that if you can see the possibility of changing your life, of seeing what you can become and not just what you are, you will be a huge success. *~Duke University, 2009*

Michael Dell: Never Be The Smartest Person In The Room



Try never to be the smartest person in the room. And if you are, I suggest you invite smarter people ... or find a different room. In professional circles it’s called networking. In organizations it’s called team building. And in life it’s called family, friends, and community. We are all gifts to each other, and my own growth as a leader has shown me again and again that the most rewarding experiences come from my relationships. *~University of Texas, 2003*

Michael Bloomberg: Don’t Stay Down Long



My first job out of school was on Wall Street and I stayed there for 15 years. It was a terrific ride: Fun times, and lots of praise from my bosses. Everybody loved me – right up until the day they fired me! But I remained optimistic – because happiness for me has always been going out and trying to beat the odds. So the next day after I got fired, literally the next day, I started a new company. *~Tufts University, 2007*

JK Rowling: Failure Can Be the Foundation Of Success



So why do I talk about the benefits of failure? Simply because failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. Had I really succeeded at anything else, I might never have found the determination to succeed in the one arena I believed I truly belonged. I was set free, because my greatest fear had been realized, and I was still alive, and I still had a daughter whom I adored, and I had an old typewriter and a big idea. And so rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life. *~Harvard University, 2008 (Note: No longer a billionaire)*

Jeff Bezos: Gifts Are Easy, Choices Are Hard



I will hazard a prediction. When you are 80 years old, and in a quiet moment of reflection narrating for only yourself the most personal version of your life story, the telling that will be most compact and meaningful will be the series of choices you have made. In the end, we are our choices. Build yourself a great story. *~Princeton University, 2010*

Mark Zuckerberg: It's Easier If You Do Something You Love



When you go home to dinner and you have the worst tasting vegetable on your plate you can make yourself eat that if you want. But if you play a game, even if it's really hard, if it's something that you like you're going to power through it. If you actually do something you love it's a lot easier and takes on a lot more purpose. *~Belle Haven Community School in Menlo Park, CA, 2011*

Steve Ballmer: Don't Have Passion, Have Tenacity



Passion is the ability to get excited about something. Irrepressibility and tenacity is about the ability to stay with it. If you take a look at all of the companies that have been started in our business, most of them fail. If you take even a look at the companies that have succeeded, Microsoft, Apple, Google, Facebook, you name it, all of these companies went through times of hardship. You get some success. You run into some walls. You try a formula for a new idea, a new innovation, it doesn't work. And it's how tenacious you are, how irrepressible, how ultimately optimistic and tenacious you are about it that will determine your success. *~University of Southern California, 2011*

Larry Page: Tackle Big Dreams, There's No Competition



I think it is often easier to make progress on mega-ambitious dreams. I know that sounds completely nuts. But, since no one else is crazy enough to do it, you have little competition. There are so few people this crazy that I feel like I know them all by first name. They all travel as if they are pack dogs and stick to each other like glue. The best people want to work the big challenges. That is what happened with Google. *~University of Michigan, 2009*

Eric Schmidt: Don't Bother To Have A Plan



Don't bother to have a plan at all. All that stuff about plan, throw that out. It seems to me that it's all about opportunity and make your own luck. You study the most successful people, and they work hard and they take advantage of opportunities that come that they don't know are going to happen to them. You cannot plan innovation, you cannot plan invention. All you can do is try very hard to be in the right place and be ready. You know, the pacemaker for example was invented 70 years in one form or another before it was applied. It was applied to this one poor fella, and 25 pacemakers later he was still alive. But the important part is he wouldn't have been at all had the pacemaker not have been invented. You never know. *~Carnegie Mellon University, 2009*

Eli Broad: You Can't Be Successful By Being Timid



No one ever made a million bucks by being cautious or timid or reasonable. I was 22 years old and recently married when I had the crazy idea that I should give up my career as a CPA and become a homebuilder. I didn't know anything about building houses.

Sometimes the craziest ideas are the ones that yield the greatest payoffs. I took the risk in 1953 of building houses without basements – something that hadn't been done in the Midwest – because the monthly mortgage payment would be less than what most people were paying for rent. *~UCLA School of Arts and Architecture, 2006*

Pierre Omidyar: Prepare For The Unexpected



To truly prepare for the unexpected, you've got to position yourself to keep a couple of options open – so when the door of opportunity opens, you're close enough to squeeze through. To a large degree, life – like a software program – is a linear thing. We all face the temptation to freeze-frame the past, and project it into the future. The future doesn't always follow a straight line. So as a software engineer, you learn to strive for a certain flexibility in design: You learn to avoid being locked in to a single solution – to build a platform that can be used for a number of purposes. *~Tufts University, 2002*

Ross Perot, Sr.: Plan Your Decades



Your generation has more decades to plan than any that have come before it. Many of you should expect to be productive into your 80s and 90s. As you step into that future I encourage you to think about serving your country and giving something back to the United States. In your 20's I encourage you to travel and explore the world. Get to know and respect the citizens of this planet. Have some adventure and learn about yourself and discover your true passions. And then I hope you bring it all back. *~Southern Methodist University, 2006*

Ted Turner: Work Like Hell And Advertise



When I get asked a one liner, 'what's the secret to success?' I just say: "Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell and advertise." *~Montana State University-Northern, 2011*

Reid Hoffman: Be Contrarian And Be Right



Always think creatively and boldly. Where do you see a massive opportunity? Where do you think something is going to change, where you see something that most other people don't see? Part of being a successful entrepreneur is to be contrarian and to be right. It's the two that are particularly important because if it was obvious to everyone there's no market opportunity, there's no gap to go do something about it. But then you have to be right about it. *~UC Berkeley School of Information, 2011*

Carl Icahn: Think For Yourself



When you go out there, you can be one of two types of guys. You can be a guy that thinks for himself, and I think the world and our corporations are now waiting for that. There are CEOs that really do think for themselves, that are innovative, that go against the trend... You should try to stand against the trend, even though it might cost you your job, cost your promotion. But in the end, think for yourself, be innovative. If you have ideas, go slam the table, don't worry about it, because that's what this company needs. *~Drexel University School of Business, 2008*

Steve Case: The People Around You Matter



No matter what you do in life, your ability to succeed will be largely dependent on your ability to work with people. Indeed, it has often been said that what you do is less important than who you do it with – that the people you surround yourself with, whether a spouse, or friends, or co-workers, will ultimately be the principal determinant of the course your life will take. So don't just focus on the job descriptions, or the brand name of the organization you're going to join – also focus on who you'll be working for, and with. *~George Mason University, 2009*

Jerry Yang: Don't Let The News Get You Down



I can promise you that great things are being started in down-times like this. Yahoo! started in an economic downturn in the early 90s. Other great companies, great ideas, products, even social movements have come about as people were throwing away the status quo and doing EVERYTHING in new ways. In some ways, there's not a better time to be a graduate to be part of this renewal *~University of Hawaii, 2009*