

Too soon old. Too late, smart!

If you could, what advice would you give to your younger self?

There is an old Swedish proverb about life. It says, 'Too soon old. Too late, smart!'

As I get older, I find myself thinking how helpful it would have been if when young I would have known then what I know now.

Life's experiences have given me a few insights that I could have really used when starting out...

For example, that despite what your mates say, Warninks Advocaat does contain alcohol and should not be drunk by the glass before a maths exam. That you really must check that you have not left a red sock in the washing machine when you hurriedly wash all your white work shirts on Sunday night. And that no amount of Brut 33 aftershave will lead you to be mistaken for Barry Sheen! This kind of information would have saved me lots of frustration, time and money.

At WIS we are obsessed with developing our people.

Actually I have often said that "people are our product."

It has always struck me as strange that you can go through 18 years of formal education, where they teach you to dissect a rat, the atomic code for sulphuric acid and how to calculate quadratic equations, but nobody every spends even 30 minutes in all of that time teaching you how to get the best out of life. And then we wonder why people struggle with their mental health!

At school, my kids learnt home economics, how to cook, the importance of a balanced diet how to exercise and to play sport all for their physical wellbeing. However, no teacher gave any lesson on happiness. No lectures on setting or achieving goals have ever been on the curriculum. Nobody ever mentioned the importance of a positive mental attitude.

Life is of course the exact opposite of school. In the formal education system, first they give you the lesson and then the test. However, in life first you get the test. The lesson comes afterwards!

It is a source of great pride that many of our people have been with WIS for 10, 15 or even 20 plus years. And these people have developed a professional skill set that means they are at least as good as the best at what they do and sometimes better. Often my colleagues started out at the lowest entry point with

the company, as a trainee, and they worked their way up.

In some cases, prior to joining WIS members of our team had limited career success. And I firmly believe that it is the attitudinal coaching that we do – the True Blue WIS Spirit, as we call it – that helps to shape these individuals and give them the necessary tools, ambition and opportunity to forge great careers.

In a moment of introspection I found myself wondering what advice I would give myself, if I could go back in time and tap that young lad from Whitley Bay, just starting out in life, on the shoulder. What pearls of wisdom would I give him? And would he listen... you know how teenagers are!

I think there are three...

The first piece of advice I would give is "Beware the naked man who offers you his shirt!" By this I mean that you need to look behind what people say they stand for and look at the reality of what they actually represent. Another way of putting it is not to take advice on a topic from someone who is obviously not successful in that field. As they say in the USA, "If you're gonna talk the talk, then you have to walk the walk."

WIS is now the largest stock take company in the world. We have over 30,000 personnel worldwide. We are successful at what we do, and we are expanding our operations further through soon to be announced acquisition.

The reason we are successful is because we deliver value. When we talk about stock take strategies to reduce shrink, increase sales and improve customer loyalty we have to be able to demonstrate those returns to our clients, or else we lose them. We are a commercial success when others are not. Our success I would say qualifies us to advise with authority about the art of stock taking.

The second piece of advice I would give is from me old Gran. She used to say, "If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well." Readers may recall I wrote an article recently asking whether 'good enough' was ever really good enough. There is a big difference between something being adequate for the job and being fit for purpose.

My advice would be to take great care when settling for less than what is possible. What are your reasons for doing so? If life's realities dictate that what you are settling for makes perfect sense, then that is one thing. But be careful that practicality and expediency are not excuses for accepting mediocrity.

One thing that drives me nuts in the stock take field is when people tell me that they use their own people to do their annual stock take because "it is good enough and it is cheap enough." That is a classic example of people resting on their oars and being lazy. The thing is if you rest on your oars you have to be careful that the whole boat does not end up sinking...

Authoritative reports, many coming out of leading US think tanks, point to stock control as being one of, if not the, biggest factors in retail success in the coming decade. Good enough is really not going to be good enough when everyone else is getting much, much better. Actually, it may be a surprisingly short amount

of time between 'good enough' and 'we're losing market share!'

And is having your own people check your stock annually really 'cheap'? Is it hell! Having your own people do your annual stock take is the most expensive option you can ever, EVER take. It costs more in labour, is less accurate and is more open to abuse than any of the alternatives on the market. Yes ANY! A proper evaluation of ALL options (including those not offered by WIS, because we do not believe in them) can only lead to one conclusion. Having your own staff do the annual stock take is fiscally irresponsible. And if I were king, it would be illegal!

And the final piece of advice I would give him would be this. Under no circumstances ever buy a Mk1 Vauxhall Chevette off your mate. It might sound a bargain at £500, but it is a heap of junk. And it will not make you more attractive to members of the opposite sex, no matter what he says!

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