

Don't Disown Your Past Selves

One of the great temptations of growing older is the temptation to throw your own past onto the “garbage bin of history” The past carries so much baggage – from your mistakes to your missed opportunities to your past blindness. Probably the greatest baggage comes in the form of Past You.

Because hindsight is 20/20, you can often see what Past You was really like. Often enough, you can remember quickly that Past You was selfish, arrogant, ignorant, alienating, and otherwise unequipped to succeed in what needs to be done.

If you have this hindsight, odds are that you have gotten better or wiser than Past You. And odds are, you'll feel tempted to mitigate Past You in any way possible. After all, Past You is an embarrassing part of your life. It can feel far better to put Past You away for good.

This disowning does not work.

You have to remember that there will be plenty more Past Yous before you die. You can't decide that you dislike or trust them all or you'll lose all. You must remain confident in your ability to generate Future Yous that will win.

You must also remember that Past You had some good things going, too. It produced you and educated you, who are now looking a back on Past You's with such shame and disappointment. If I were to disown my younger self because of a series of embarrassing workplace interactions, for example, I'd also be disowning all the days of adjusting and learning the ways of office work.

What to do?

The answer lies in redemption. You have to act now in ways such as to redeem the meaning of Past You. If you learn and practice better workplace etiquette now, all those series of embarrassing workplace conversations become redeemed. The Past You of those awkward times becomes not an embarrassing liability, but an important teacher and participant in your growth.

Intellectual Credit: Jordan Peterson's work on meaning, particularly in *Maps of Meaning* and surrounding content.