

How to Get Young People to Take Good Advice

Young people have a very hard time taking good advice for two reasons:

1. Most good advice is based on delayed gratification, which requires a long time horizon.
2. Most young people do not have long time horizons.

Remember back to when you were a young whippersnapper. The days seemed to drag on. A week was an age, a month was an eon, and a year seemed like an eternity. This is true the farther back you go into your youth.

As you have grown older, you have gained a new appreciation for the shortness of the time you have – and for the importance and practicality of longer-term thinking, planning and living.

Are young people doomed to make bad decisions until they get older? I think not (not necessarily).

I have a few hunches about how it would be possible for young people to expand their time horizons and (hopefully) be more open to good advice.

1. Show them the progression of your life

If it's hard for a young person to imagine being old, show them the passage of time. Give them context for what you have been able to accomplish and to become in your lifespan.

2. Surround them with people from different ages and walks of life

Context is very helpful when it comes to time horizon formation. If a young person is surrounded only by young people with similar time horizons, you won't see a change. If that same young person sees people operating by different time horizons, they will at least become aware of the tradeoffs that come with putting things off.

3. Let them work and form routines

Life has sped up significantly for me since I started working. The more I work, the more I master. The more I master, the more I routinize. As a result, things which might once have lengthened my time perception (by making me notice novelty) become hardly memorable. If you want someone to gain a long-term perspective, let them become aware of the fast passage of time through routine activity.

4. Submerge them in history

The more I study history, the less foreign it becomes. The more I read, the less distant two centuries ago seems. When you read history, you gain a longer and longer time horizon. As a result, you can start to make decisions on the long-term scale, and that, of course, makes for someone who will likely take good advice.