

## About school

**Marty Wilson** has been studying what we all should have learnt back in the classroom, but didn't



**Knowledge of facts** and figures may get you top marks at school, but it's everything else we learn that determines the report card we get from life. Here are five things I wish I'd realised earlier in school (and life, for that matter).

### 1. Working hard is really, really cool.

"Marty is doing very well at school with an absolute minimum of effort. He tends to disrupt others." They could have photocopied my kindergarten report card and used it for the next 12 years. I was incredibly lucky to be born with a stupidly high IQ. When they tested us, I actually got a better score than my teacher - I know, I'm a freak. Dad used to say that I either was going to end up as prime minister or living in a volcano, stroking a cat saying "I've been expecting you, Mr Bond." As a consequence, I was that annoyingly smug class idiot who thought it was beneath him to study hard, and "way cool" to mock anyone who did.

Unfortunately for me, being able to sail through these formative years left me thinking my whole life would be the same. It took some big fat fail grades at a pharmacy degree, and my early bosses in advertising patiently kicking my lazy backside for me to realise that getting pass marks - without any effort at all - may get you

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the degree, but it doesn't get you the education. There's this other report card, called your character, where you only get an A for working to the absolute limits of your ability, purely for the satisfaction of being able to say: "I did my best".

### 2. It's healthy to be challenged.

You see parents washing their kids' hands to protect them from infection. Of course, as soon as our kids are out of our sight, no amount of hand sanitiser will stop them wrestling and sharing mucus, head lice and the bugs that cause impetigo to grow in unsightly places. And this is a good thing. It builds their immune systems and keeps them healthy.

It's the same with new ideas and different points of view. We need to keep mixing things up and meeting new people all our lives, just to maintain a healthy perspective. People I never gave a chance at school turned out to be great people. So I'd say to my younger self, "Don't just stick to your own friends. Make an effort to talk to people who don't fit the usual mould, they challenge your thinking and make life much more interesting.

Don't hit 50 and still have only the same friends you had in high school."

### 3. You can learn from everyone.

My adolescent mates and I wasted so much time that we could have spent learning, snidely bagging out every teacher who wasn't exactly like us, or our parents. Just because your geography teacher wore shirts that looked like they were made from curtain offcuts doesn't mean he didn't know anything.

I remember having a relief teacher once who had spent years among Aboriginal communities. He could have taught my obnoxious snotty-nosed 15-year-old self so much, but we rejected the guy out of hand because he had one eye that turned to the right. So when the poor guy glared at us and said, "You there. Stand up!", two separate students would get to their feet. Gut-bustingly funny at the time, cringeworthy now.



**4. We're all tested by different things.** What I find easy and enjoyable might terrify you. This came up when I spoke to a German woman called Karen Goeb whose son, Jensen, is confined to a wheelchair. Karen said she worked herself up worrying out about how he would handle school. She needn't have worried; Jensen loves it and it loves him.

Then, one day out of the blue, when Karen was just about to start congratulating herself, Jensen came home from school in absolute floods of tears talking about "something that happened in science class".

When Karen asked him, "What's wrong? Did you hurt yourself? Did people tease you?" Jensen bawled "No. Some stupid scientists have decided that Pluto isn't allowed to be a planet anymore!"

**5. Exam results do not define your life, but your attitude to learning can.**

It's absolutely OK to leave school not knowing that potassium permanganate burns with a purple flame. With all mankind's accumulated knowledge just a Google search away, it's not your marks compared to other students' that matter, but

your marks compared to how well you could have done. It's the habits and attitudes formed by how hard you prepared for your exams that will give you the life you want.

I've spent 20 years trying to discover what I want to do when I grow up. But it was only last year that I worked out the answer is "Keep evolving. And write about it."

That's why I now wholeheartedly thank my teachers - particularly the ones I treated so thoughtlessly - for showing me what legendary physicist Richard Feynman called "the pleasure in finding things out".

When my son brought home his first report card last year, we had a great chat and I told him that, yes, I was pleased with his grades, but I was thrilled with the comment that said "Connor loves to learn."

Here's to another testing year.



*Marty*