

# If I Were a Freshman Again

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- 1) It is the habit of age to give sage advice to youth. One of the pastimes in which everyone periodically indulges is the pleasant hallucination that if he were given the opportunity to live his youth over again he would do it differently and more successfully. We are all of us, even though we have no more than reached middle age, given to regretting our neglected opportunities and our lost youth. It gives one a virtuous feeling in imagination to dodge all error but it is extremely doubtful if many of us, even if we had a second chance, would avoid many of the pitfalls into which we stumbled, or follow a straighter path than that by which we have so far come. If it is merely pleasant for us to conjecture what we should do if we had a second try at it, it may be profitable for those who are younger to listen. If only foresight could be as accurate as the backward view!

## Work Fewer Hours

- 2) If I were a freshman again I should not work so many hours as I did. I put in enough hours with my books in my hands, but I did not accomplish much. I had little concentration. Many students whom I knew, and I was one of this sort, spent a great deal of time in getting ready to work. With a book in hand they look out of the window at the clouds or at the pretty girls passing along the street, and all the time they deceive themselves with the idea that they are working.
- 3) Many an evening, when the work was heavy, I would determine to begin early and get it over with; but I could spend half an hour in arranging my books and getting myself seated in a comfortable chair. All this time I imagined I was working. I spent as much time in goading myself on to duties that I should have liked to shirk or in getting ready to work as I did in actual labor. If I were a freshman I should plan my work, I should try to develop concentration – I should work harder but not so long.

## Learn to Work with People about Me

- 4) I should learn to work with people about me. As it was I lived a somewhat isolated life. I did my reading and my studying alone, and though there were some advantages in this method, there were serious objections. Now I must often work under different conditions than those by which I was surrounded in college; there is work to be done where there is no quiet, and I do it with difficulty. As I tried on a crowded ocean steamer to put these wandering thoughts on paper I was constantly annoyed by the confusion about me and by the spasmodic attempts at conversation made by a well-intentioned but misguided young man at my side. If I had learned to work under different conversations I might have turned the conversation aside as a steep roof sheds the rain. I believe it is a great advantage for a young man to do his work himself, but he should not subject himself to the slavery of doing it alone.

## Take More Difficult Work

- 5) I should take as a freshman, if I had my work to do over again, more work that I have no especial fondness for or that I find difficult. I like an easy time as well as any one, and I do not wish to give the impression that I think it an error for a student to follow the profession he enjoys or to do the work he likes. In point of fact I believe that a student should choose those lines of work along which his tastes lead him. I think it very likely that those things we do most easily we shall do best; but I have found that training comes through struggle, and that those people are developed most who resist most, or who struggle against difficulty and opposition and overcome. I had known a good many geniuses, but they generally had the most commonplace careers because they never learned to do difficult or disagreeable things.
- 6) Students come into my office every day who want to get out of work or to drop a subject, or to cut a class exercise for no better reason than that they find the duty difficult or the instructor or the subject dull. Much of the work of life is not pleasant. Half the things I am forced to do during the busy days of the college year are unpleasant things and things I dislike doing. I have been forced to learn to give these things my best attention whether I like them or not. I wish I had learned in my freshman year to do more such things.
- 7) Just yesterday as I was sitting at the breakfast table talking to a young freshman, in whom I have a rather vital interest, as to next year's course, I suggested a subject which I thought good for him to take. "Is it easy?" was his first question, and when I answered in the negative his interest waned. In the world in which we must in time work there are few easy roads, few snap courses. We shall be forced to do a great many hard things. If I were a freshman I should learn to do such things early.

## Become A Ready Speaker

- 8) Like a great many people, I suppose I am not now doing the work that as a college student I planned to do. I am in no sense a fatalist, but I am convinced that men have their work chosen for them quite as often as they themselves choose it. If I had supposed that I should be called upon to speak on the most unforeseen occasions and upon the most unfamiliar topics, I should have given myself while in college the practice which I believe is the method everyone must employ if he is to become a ready speaker. I have learned that, sooner or later, every intelligent man is called upon publicly to express his ideas, and no matter how abundant these thoughts may be, he will suffer much pain and have little success unless he has had pretty regular and persistent practice.
- 9) I ran across an old classmate last spring, an engineer of no little repute, whom I had not met since the day of our graduation. "How would you change your course," I said to him, expecting that he would long for more mathematics, "if you had it all to do over again?"
- 10) "I should learn to write and I should learn to speak," he answered, "and I should begin as a freshman. As it was I avoided every opportunity to do either, with the idea that only ministers and lawyers have need of such practice, and I suffer for it every day. My boy is to be an engineer, but I am going to see that he does not make the mistake that I made. "
- 11) When I am called upon unexpectedly to speak, and my knees shake, and my voice falters, and the word that I long for comes with difficulty, or fails to come at all, I agree with my classmate, and I feel sure that if I were a freshman again I should learn to speak correctly and without notes.