

Advice for New Graduates

Kids grow up fast. What advice would you tell them for succeeding in today's world? Regardless of career path, here are four pointers helpful in achieving success.

First, listen carefully.

"An MBA has value, but I prefer to look for more important attributes like common sense, the way applicants handle themselves and their attention span," says Ron Shaw, president and Chief Executive Officer of Pilot Pen Corporation of America and author of the book "Pilot Your Life." "For example, during the interview, at what point does it seem like their minds start to wander?" he adds.

The ability to listen is the essence of good communication and leadership skills. This involves not only listening to others but also to your inner self and your gut.

Second, develop a questioning attitude.

Questions are one of the most powerful techniques for learning, growing and making fruitful decisions. The quality of the answer is a function of the quality – and creativity – of the question. In other words, ask the right questions and you open doors to clearer understanding. By listening carefully and asking thoughtful questions, you may think in different ways and head in new directions with opportunities previously beyond your imagination.

Third, provide fanatical customer service.

Think of the best and worst customer service you've recently experienced. How did each make you feel?

"One of the greatest examples in shopping is at Nordstrom's," says Shaw, speaking about the store's customer friendly policies, including for returned purchases. "No matter what it is, you're always right ,and they will take it back ... They are unbelievable."

No matter what career path you choose, aim to exceed customers' expectations with exceptional service. It will pay big dividends. And remember that "customers" include co-workers, bosses and all others to whom you provide assistance regularly.

Fourth, aim high.

The fact is that most people and businesses don't have clearly defined goals. When you don't know where you're going, it is easy to go astray.

Set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable and compatible. Don't, however, underestimate your ability to achieve high goals. Accomplishing easy goals is not the same as achieving meaningful personal success.

In speaking to audiences, Shaw asks them to think of the five wealthiest people they know personally – not Bill Gates or Warren Buffet, but family members, friends or acquaintances. Most likely, four of the five people named will be in business for themselves.

"If you really believe in your product or service, why not do it yourself?" says Shaw. "But you must understand that there are no shortcuts to success."

Take the time to think how you can excel in today's world and achieve success.