

NOW AND THEN

Jeff Rothbard

What would your 72 year old mind tell your 22 year old brain if given the chance?

1. The best piece of advice I could give myself 50 years ago would be to do whatever you least want to do first thing in the morning. This recommendation is equally effective both in your business and personal lives. My law partners and I refer to the work that we don't want to do as floor files as they are placed on the floor next to our respective desks where they are a constant reminder that they present a danger which becomes increasingly terrifying as we continue to procrastinate. When the files begin to smoke and burn, it may be too late to put the fire out. I now make a list of the cases I do not want to work on in descending order. It is deeply satisfying to cross them off the list as I complete them. As a corollary to this suggestion, I also would tell my younger self that, as soon as you start the dreaded task you discover that it is not nearly as difficult as you thought it would be. In all likelihood your imagination has magnified how hard it will be to finish the task. In my personal life, what I most dread doing as a day progresses is the 20 minutes of either recumbent bike riding in my basement or whatever aerobic exercise I am scheduled to do on a particular day. If I get it done before I even have breakfast, the rest of the day goes much more smoothly as I don't have to deal with the threat of working out.



2. The second suggestion I would make to my younger incarnation would be that you can learn something of value from almost anyone, or, as the old adage states "there is a bit of wisdom in every fool." After I had coached fast pitch for about five years, I thought that I knew everything worthwhile about softball, particularly when it came to warming up my players before a game. One summer after my travel team had completed its tournament season and before the fall ball schedule started, I was asked to serve as an assistant coach on the New Jersey Maccabi softball team. Since my daughter was the pitcher on the team and we were favored to win the gold medal, I accepted this offer immediately. I had known the head coach for several years as we managed different age group teams in the same organization and he and his son also served as umpires at fast pitch tournaments. However, I did not think he could improve upon my coaching routine. I was wrong. At our first practice he asked me to fungo fly balls to the outfielders. I took a bucket of softballs to the outfield and began to hit them to the players who in turn would throw them in to me. The head man immediately blew his whistle and walked over to me. "Empty out the bucket and give it to your fielders. After they catch the ball they should just put it in the bucket rather than throw all the balls back to you. This way they won't throw their arms out and you won't waste time gathering the balls." He was right. For the remaining years, whenever I hit to the outfielders they had the bucket near them. The same coach also taught me that I should not feed the pitching machine unless I was standing behind a screen. Unfortunately, I learned this safety procedure after I was hit in the shin by a line drive.

3. The final piece of advice I would give to myself is that you should never enter into a relationship with someone who has mental or emotional problems if you are aware of them. Instead of solving his or her problems, you become another problem. Several years before I met Susan I was introduced to a beautiful woman who seemed out of place in the late 20th century. She never dressed casually. In the many weeks I spent with her I never saw her wear any clothes outside of her apartment other than dresses and skirts. When we first met, she had told me that both her parents were deceased as they had died in a private airplane crash. During the eight months we were together on several occasions with no apparent provocation she would lash out at me. Rather than argue with her, I would leave and wait for her to call me and apologize. While the reconciliation was usually fun, I could not understand what would set her off. About eight months into our rocky affair, I flew to Florida to celebrate my father's 80th birthday. I did not invite her to come with me as she had no interest in family events. When I returned, she met in the airport, I immediately noticed she was observing the Jewish tradition of Kriah and wearing a small black ribbon pinned to her blouse. When I asked her who had died, her response was shocking: "You're a smart man. Figure it out." Apparently her parents had not been killed in an airplane. Instead they had been institutionalized because of mental illness and her father had just died. I could not believe that she had lied to me about her father and mother. While we stayed in contact for a few more days, I no longer could trust her and ended our relationship. Two years later she took her own life. So much for problem solving.

