

# If Only I Knew Then What I Know Now

## What advice would you give to your 21-year-old self?

Dr Costas I. Karageorghis FBASES works his network to provide some golden nuggets of advice.

I don't know whether you have ever had the thought "If only I knew then what I know now"? It is a thought that often plays on my mind and so, when BASES kindly awarded me an International Conference Grant to attend the 2017 International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) World Congress in Seville, Spain, I decided to ask some of the luminaries in my field whether if a time machine were to become available, what single piece of advice they would give to their 21-year-old selves. I hope that the responses of the eminent scholars will resonate with the young as well as the not-so-young. The advice offered transcends disciplinary boundaries and so every BASES member should find at least one 'golden nugget' in here.

Prof Peter Crocker (The University of British Columbia, Canada) was the discussant for a symposium that I organised and the first delegate who I met on arrival in Seville. Perhaps alluding to the theme of our symposium, which concerned a paradigmatic shift from cognitivism to hedonism in exercise psychology, he said that you should avoid getting caught up in one epistemological position; be open-minded because taking a blinkered/mono-theoretical approach can restrict your progress and understanding. I then bumped into Loughborough University's latest addition to the professoriate, Prof Christopher Harwood FBASES, who would advise his younger self to fully see through a particular approach (e.g. goal-orientation theory). He went on to elaborate that when you're a young scholar, you might well know more about a given topic than your supervisor. Invariably s/he will have to attend to so many matters each day that reading time is severely restricted. Through reading, you can discover many ways in which a particular approach can be developed.

Staying with the theme of reading, John Curtin Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Nikos Ntoumanis (Curtin University, Australia), offered the advice that as an aspiring psychologist, you should read intensely and broadly (i.e. beyond the confines of your own discipline), as this is the time in your life when you will have the most time to read. To bolster your learning and understanding, Prof Stuart Biddle FBASES (University of Southern Queensland, Australia) advised that you can gain a huge amount from teaching experiences. He told me about the wide variety of topics that he taught during his early years in academe. Biddle is in league with Einstein who said that if you can't teach it *simply* then you don't know it well enough.

The University of Birmingham's Dr Maria Kavussanu, an invited keynote speaker on sport morality, provided one of the

most insightful responses. She said that, whenever possible, you should avoid saying "no" to "important people". Sometimes your resistance to a suggestion from a superior at work can come back to bite you. Prof Susan Backhouse FBASES (Leeds Beckett University) gave a response that could provide extracts for a printed T-shirt: No one has it all figured out, everyone is just trying really hard to make it seem that way. Embrace the uncertainty and trust your gut instinct.

Prof Diane Gill (University of North Carolina, USA) indicated that you should decide early on what the priority for your career will be: that is consultancy versus research. So either start a research line that has long-term potential or be sure to acquire excellent consultancy skills. Along similar lines, Prof Bonnie Berger (Bowling Green State University, USA) suggested that you should decide whether you want to pursue the sport route (i.e. working with a small number of elite people) or the exercise route (i.e. working with a large number of people from the general population). The implication from the advice of both American scholars is that it's better to be at the bottom of a ladder that you want to climb, than half-way up one you don't!

Perfectionism expert Dr Andrew Hill (York St John University) advised that in deciding where you want to work, find a place that provides the best fit for you - it doesn't have to be a Russell Group institution. The work intensity of the Russell Group is such that many aspiring academics crash and burn. A mid-ranking institution can provide the perfect balance between teaching and research, as well as between professional endeavours and a family life.

It is notable that none of the experts repeated any of the advice of their colleagues - this is a coat of many colours. It is thus down to you to consider what they have said and to gauge which, if any of their messages resonate most strongly for you. And if I were asked to respond to my titular question, what to say? Hmmm, perhaps when you are attending the ISSP World Congress and it's the hottest day ever recorded in Spain (48°C), decline the organisers' invitation to go on the open-bus tour of Seville. ■



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