The Adult Learner Survival Guide
Wisdom, Inspiration, and Advice for Moms, Dads, Military Personnel, and Other Working Adults
Second edition: Now with 10 new stories and 10 original cartoons!
If you’re reading this e-book, you probably have questions like:

- *Should I go back to school?*
- *Can I afford it?*
- *How will I make the time?*
- *What will be the payoff?*
- *Is it really worth it?*

Get the answers to these questions and any others that are on your mind by requesting more information about going back to school.

We’re happy to help.
The Adult Learner SURVIVAL GUIDE
Wisdom, Inspiration, and Advice for Moms, Dads, Military Personnel, and Other Working Adults
A Post University E-book by Adult Learners, for Adult Learners
SECOND EDITION
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PREFACE

For many years now, our adult learner students have been sharing their stories about what it’s like to return to school after a 10-, 15-, or even 40-year gap. Their stories are about procrastination, determination, friendship, balance, curiosity, and confidence. They never fail to amaze and inspire us.

With this in mind, we launched our Advice to Your Former Self Contest on our Facebook page in 2012 to collect and share more of these insights -- opening up the opportunity to not only Post University’s adult learners, but also to those attending other colleges and universities.

The contest brought in hundreds of stories from adult learners nationwide, who wrote about the advice they’d give themselves if they could start their college or university education over. Our judges selected one entrant to win the grand prize of $1,000, Victor Belarmino from Virginia. But it was a very tough decision, and we felt many other submissions should continue to be shared more broadly.

We decided to publish them in this e-book to help new generations of adult learners succeed in their educational endeavors. Our hope is that this e-book is a resource you can keep coming back to for motivation, support, ideas, and encouragement.

From adult learners nationwide to you, enjoy.

-The Post University team
The first edition of our e-book received an overwhelming response from adult learners around the country. It quickly became apparent that we need to share more of what our readers have loved so much.

This second edition brings you 10 new stories culled from our Advice to Your Former Self Facebook Contest. There is one new story in every chapter, detailing an adult learner’s personal challenges, successes, and lessons of going back to school.

But we didn’t stop there. We’ve found that humor can go a long way in de-stressing adult learners and adding some fun to life. That’s why this second edition features six of the most popular adult learner cartoons from our blog, plus four never-before-seen cartoon originals drawn by Dave Blazek.

Dave is a nationally known cartoonist, advertising creative, and mastermind behind the internationally syndicated “Loose Parts” cartoon. Dave’s cartoons are one of the biggest reasons adult learners visit our blog, and we thought they’d be a perfect addition to our Adult Learner Survival Guide. Media, bloggers, and other publishers are welcome to post any of the cartoons on their sites to share with their readers. Please see our note about publishing the cartoons in the next section.

Finally, adult learners are doing a lot of great things, as the stories in this e-book show. But another great thing they’re doing is making history. So we’ve added a new section in this second edition that takes a look at adult learner trends in the U.S. and why adult learners are one of the fastest-growing segments of college students. Some of the numbers might surprise you.

We hope you enjoy the second edition.
A NOTE ABOUT PUBLISHING OUR CARTOONS

All media, bloggers, and other publishers,

You’re invited to post any of the cartoons in this e-book on your sites if you think they’re funny and want to share them with your readers. Please include the following license with the cartoon to use it.

Post University cartoon by Dave Blazek is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Based on a work at blog.post.edu.

Happy publishing!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the hundreds of adult learners who entered our Facebook contest for sharing their thoughts and advice with the world.

We would also like to thank Post University faculty, staff, and families for helping our adult learners reach the academic and life goals that they’ve shared with us.

A thank you also goes to the team at Gregory FCA for proposing our Advice to Your Former Self Facebook Contest and e-book initiative, and helping us create and execute it.

And finally, we thank Dave Blazek for his wit, charm, and talent in bringing our adult learner cartoons to life.
IN DEDICATION

To all hard-working and courageous adult learners around the world
FOREWORD

There have been numerous times when I thought to myself, “If I only knew then, what I know now …” In light of these words, I found Post’s Advice to Your Former Self challenge quite appropriately titled. It quickly reminded me of two key lessons I learned a few years ago: Education is a continual process, and it is a process that explicitly requires the sharing of knowledge with others.

These are two lessons that I believe absolutely apply to everyone who took part in making this collection of knowledge and advice possible. Everyone contributing to this effort made the choice to continue the pursuit of knowledge by attending a college or university. And everyone here also made the choice to share what they have learned in the hopes to enlighten those who will follow.

I soon realized that after starting at Post University, regardless of the fact that I was separated by distance (living in Virginia and taking classes online), I was part of a community of lifelong learners dedicated and committed to the spirit of education. The opportunity to give advice to our former selves was a humbling reminder that learning is not a journey we take alone.

-Victor Belarmino
Post University Class of 2012
Post University’s Advice to Your Former Self Contest winner
CHAPTER 1

STOP PUTTING IT OFF

“Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

-Maria Robinson
GET GOING

BY DEBORAH FORBES - CONNECTICUT

If I could go back and talk to myself a few years ago before I made the decision to go back to school as an adult learner, the advice I would give to myself is: Start now and don’t procrastinate another day. Worry about the money later, make the most of it, take multiple classes, ask for help from everyone that you know, and embrace the experience.

I dragged my feet trying to figure out how I would pay, and finally, after landing a job that had educational assistance, I made the decision to go back to school. I now look back at the time I wasted trying to figure it all out when I could have been earning credits, even if by only taking one class each semester. Sign up today and don’t put off the decision one more day.

I did get some assistance from my employer, but there was a cap. So for half a year I did not take classes -- a decision I now regret. When I applied for government assistance, I found out that not only did I qualify for low-interest student loans, but also for free grants from the government and school! Who knew!

I tried taking two classes at a time. For financial reasons, every now and then I only took one class. I am now enrolled for my next degree, happily taking and managing two classes each semester, working full time, and raising my three pre-teen kids by myself, all while maintaining my honors average.

Finally, the one thing I do not believe I took advantage of was asking for help, such as on the discussion boards, since I am an online learner. Students in the class have formed study groups in person or on the phone.
I also hesitated to ask for assistance from my family on handling the kids so I could get papers and homework completed with a little less distraction.

I graduated with my first degree last August and was excited when I walked [in the Commencement ceremony] this past May and had my children cheering me on. They were honestly excited for me. Their mom was graduating and it was a big day for everyone. The experience was
The Adul t Learner Su rvival Guide

Know that there is going to be a day when you walk across the stage and receive your degree, and your family will be there watching and cheering more loudly than anyone there.”

- Gretchen Calder

great and I recommend jumping in with both feet. Today I am halfway through with my bachelor’s degree, and already taking classes I need for prerequisites for my MBA.

I cannot explain the feeling of accomplishment in completing my college degree. Looking back, saying I cannot finish because of this, that, or the other thing now seems silly. Best of all, I am an example to my three children of what you can do if you put your mind to it.

TURNING LIFELONG GOALS INTO LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS

BY GRETCHEN CALDER - NORTH CAROLINA

Today I embark on a journey of a lifetime. It is something I have always wanted to do. I want to become a teacher. So remember this is going to be a process. Take your time and remember that you are doing this for your family and your kids. There will be times when you need to make sure you set aside a time to get your studying done. This might mean staying up when everyone else is asleep, but in the end, it will be worth it.

My daughter got a kindergarten welcome bag, and in it there was an eraser to remember that everyone makes mistakes and a sticker to encourage you. When you feel like giving up, try and you will succeed. Know that there is going to be a day when you walk across the stage and receive your degree, and your family will be there watching and cheering more loudly than anyone there. Always remember to count on the support from your family, because they are your proudest cheerleaders.

When it comes to classes, choose ones you will be able to use in your
degree. Don’t just take a class because it might be easy. Don’t take the easy road. Take the one that will make you the best teacher you can be. Remember playing school when you were a kid, just like when your grandma was a teacher. She is your inspiration.

Each week, make sure you take the time and really read the other discussion board posts and think about what they mean, because each person is going to take the text differently. Most of all, even when you’re so overwhelmed, think of all the good you’re going to be able to do after becoming a teacher and how many kids’ lives you will touch. Best of luck!

THE PAST CAN BE THE GREATEST PRESENT

BY VERGIL DIAZ - MISSOURI

Returning to school as an older adult, you must come to realize that although you might be the oldest one there, you are also the one with the most to give. As a returning adult learner at the age of 62, there was a time I might have felt out of place attending class, either face-to-face or online. That was just an excuse to not go.

If one has a dream, then one must pursue the dream, and be prepared to accept a challenge. On reflection, I am pleased that I started to pursue my dream and set an example for my 7-year-old daughter. I am a former military member of the 1st Special Forces Delta Force, and the concepts ingrained in me as a member, I now use as a returning adult learner.

Once you get started, you are just like all the students, whether online or in person. You are given the tools to succeed and the tools to get the job done. After all, we are all pursuing a career change of some sort. Having the faculty to encourage me is the primary reason I am attending Post University. With the staff’s help, and how I was trained, I am able to face the challenges
I have no regrets about the past and the procrastination. I will use my life experiences combined with the new knowledge I receive to fulfill my dream of becoming an attorney. It is never too late to start the process. All it takes is the motivation to make one phone call and start the process to a brighter future. I always tell my daughter when times are tough, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. To the end of the tunnel I go.

MORE POSITIVES AWAIT
BY SUZANNE BECK - CONNECTICUT

Some of the best advice I can give is don’t wait. If you are even thinking about getting a college degree, just do it. I received my associate degree in human services 22 years ago, and I wish I had continued while still in my twenties.

However, I am on my way to my Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Post, and I agree with the motto of “better late than never.” Not only will I have my degree, but I have noticed some other positives as well. My reading speed and level has gone up; my writing has improved; and the more I learn, the more neurons I am creating, which actually provides more capacity for learning opportunities.

I have to give credit where credit is due. I learned that in class! I have made friends on discussion boards, and have felt supported by both classmates and professors. I have been enriched by learning new things from my classmates, and do not feel so alone because there are others, like myself, who are going back to school and working. I work close to full-time, and take two classes each module. It takes some
adjustment, but you learn how to juggle everything. My friends understand what I am doing, and know that it is temporary, so they have forgiven my decline in my social life.

The folks at Post are very helpful and approachable. I was guided through the process every step of the way, and always had my questions answered. I really do feel that I made the best choice for myself at this point in my life. And again, for anyone even thinking about going back to school, I highly encourage that choice. Good luck.
The words “could have, should have, would have” will always hold you back. Banish these ideas and jump into your educational journey, no matter how old -- or young! -- you are.
CHAPTER 2

SET YOUR CAREER IN MOTION

“The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle.”

-Steve Jobs
Hello future and present college students. Technically, I am still in school myself. I am a junior getting my Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice. So far it has been an exciting and challenging ride. When I first started college, I often wondered why I had to take classes that didn’t appear to have anything to do with my degree choice (not counting electives).

Classes such as statistics, algebra, and principles of marketing and management made no sense to me. Then it hit me. Post University, along with most other colleges I am sure, want you to be well-rounded. What you might think isn’t relevant, will be. It isn’t set in stone that you will land a job in your degree choice, so classes that seem unimportant, are. At some point, you will utilize everything you learn in school. For example, I just realized there are more jobs available in the field I am interested in, which would enable me to refer back to those management classes.

My best advice, which was given to me by my advisor, is this: Don’t wait until the last minute to take those classes you hate or don’t think you are good at. Take them early on so that in case you don’t do as well as you like, you have plenty of other classes to help raise your GPA. Also, make sure you are very familiar with the latest editions of APA and MLA formatting, because there will be a lot of writing.

Be proud you have gotten this far. So many people only dream of going to college, and you are there. So make the most of it, enjoy it, and most of all, learn! Good luck to all!
Learn what you love. That is what I would advise my pre-college self, and anyone else entering college. Don’t pursue that finance degree because you think it sounds glamorous or because it might help you earn a big salary someday. Don’t go to law school if you don’t want to be a lawyer, even though that’s what your parents think you should do. If you don’t like the sight of blood, don’t be a doctor.
Figure out what you really enjoy, how you want to spend the majority of your days, and follow that path. I spent four years pursuing a BBA [Bachelor of Business Administration] with a double major in finance and international business. Unfortunately, it wasn’t until much later that I realized I’m not interested in any of the career opportunities that my degree makes available to me.

I wish I had spent more time thinking about how I would really like to spend my working days instead of choosing classes based on my perception of their eventual monetary yield. You’ve probably heard the saying, “Do what you love and the money will follow.” As cliché as it sounds, it is absolutely true.

Can you make a lot of money doing something you don’t love? Sure, people do it all the time. Will you be happy? Probably not. Can you make a career out of doing something you enjoy? Absolutely. Will you be happy with that career? Yes, most likely you will.

Unless you’re fortunate enough to win the lottery or inherit a million dollars from your Great-Uncle Bob, you will have to figure out a way to support yourself. So to say that money isn’t important would be idealistic, but untrue. Most of us spend at least half of our waking hours for the better part of 40 years working. Who wants to spend all that time feeling trapped in an unfulfilling job or trudging through work just to pay the bills?

But, if you’re doing something you enjoy, something that actually interests you, work won’t even feel like work. Each day at a job that you actually enjoy will instead feel like another step toward the fulfillment of your career dreams.
So, my advice to you as you consider college is simply this: Learn more about what you already love. Study what makes you happy, then put that knowledge into action following a career path that you will enjoy.

**THINK BIGGER**

**BY RITA RUUD - NORTH DAKOTA**

When I first went to college, I wanted to be a veterinarian. I took all the classes and graduated with a high enough grade point average, but I wasn’t accepted when I first applied to veterinary schools around the country. If I could go back, I would tell myself, “Why not apply to medical school?” It never occurred to me to think bigger and go for the big prize. Sure, I wanted to be a veterinarian, but we had no vet schools in the state and it was almost impossible to get in.

But we did have a medical school in our state. Why didn’t I think of that? I guess because the women in my family encouraged me to be a nurse, and I couldn’t picture myself as a doctor. So think bigger and expand your top circle of careers to study for!

**THE GREATER THE CHALLENGE, THE GREATER THE GAIN**

**BY CLINT WAGNER - ALABAMA**

What dream, goal, or target doesn’t have a hardship, struggle, or roadblock to get you there? Go back to school any way you can. For the most part, we all know the challenges of being a working adult, mother, father, and student at the same time. It’s tough. We all at one time or another have
said, “I am not going back to school.” Yes, I said it too. But the benefits of an education far outweigh the disadvantages.

We all go back to college for various reasons -- to get a raise, to get a promotion, maybe even to change careers. How are you using your education opportunity to get to your end goal or your dream? I know for me, getting back into college helped me with structure, discipline, responsibility, and most of all, time management, which is crucial in my career.

The first course I took, “Learning Across the Lifespan,” was a great introductory course back into college. It definitely made it a smooth transition back into college for me. Take care and always go after your short- and long-term goals. Never give up.
A college degree can help you earn more money. But it’s equally important to pursue your passion. Combine the two, and you can strike gold in more ways than one.
“If you hear a voice within you say ‘you cannot paint,’ then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.”

-Vincent Van Gogh
THE ODDS HAVE MET THEIR MATCH

BY DEANNA SAXTON - GEORGIA

Wow! I am in college. I cannot believe at 46 I enrolled in a university. I decided to go to school, well, for no particular reason. I just wanted something new in my life that was going to challenge me. It certainly has done just that.

My husband passed during my registration time, I had to take care of my two grandbabies every day all day, and I was looking for a job. I was going through a lot personally and it was winning, until I listened to myself and my admissions counselor. His words were a tremendous help to me.

If I was going to give myself some advice, I would tell my former self to stay focused, get organized, do not listen to other people’s discouraging words, and most importantly, believe in yourself. There are a lot of people out there who are on your side, who want you to succeed, and who want you to be the best you possible.

You have to put all interruptions away and just focus on you and your goals. If you start to feel discouraged, just step back a minute and breathe. When you’re focused again, finish what you started. It is OK to make mistakes. Everything isn’t going to be perfect every time. Ask questions, give answers, and have the time of your life learning something you didn’t know yesterday.

THE GIFT OF LIFE EXPERIENCE

BY SUSAN SISKAR - NEW YORK

I am a 53-year-old teacher who started college at 29 years old when my sons were 5 and 3 years old. That was 24 years ago. I took classes while they
were in school, which meant taking it rather slowly at first. It was challenging, but wonderful. After spending days with only toddlers around me, I got to spend time reading, discussing, and thinking in an adult setting. I loved it -- all of it -- being a wife, mom, and student.

My advice to my former college self would be to believe in yourself. Just because you are not fresh from high school and have obligations to more than just yourself does not mean that those younger students have a leg up on you. In fact, because you have more life under your belt, you actually have that leg up.

You’ve managed to organize you and your life, and can do anything you set your mind to. You’re not too old. You are smart. You’ll not only do OK, you’ll
Just because you are not fresh from high school and have obligations to more than just yourself does not mean that those younger students have a leg up on you.”

- Susan Siskar

COMING IN FIRST PLACE

BY KAREN KING - CONNECTICUT

Put yourself first! Be the first to open your textbooks. This gives you an advantage to familiarize yourself with the information that will be discussed. Put yourself up front when sitting for lecture. No way can you fall asleep! Put yourself first in class discussions. Instructors love participation.

Put yourself first when learning new things. This helps to expand your mind. Put yourself first when volunteering for community services. It’s always good to give back. Put yourself first when saying “no.” Becoming overwhelmed never feels good. Finally, put yourself first by being persistent. You will be amazed at how far you will go.

INITIATE INNOVATION

BY JOHN COLEY - FLORIDA

No matter one’s plans, snags are always a possibility. So have a back-up plan at the ready. Be diligent in your effort and enthusiasm for your original goal, but accept what results from your efforts. Then ask yourself, “Why was it thus?” If you don’t like your answer, try another plan.
An education is a personal journey. Stay true to yourself, and the journey will be much more fulfilling.
CHAPTER 4

CONQUER YOUR FEARS

“We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal and then leap in the dark to our success.”

-Henry David Thoreau
LESSONS FROM FAILURE

BY DUANE WILLIAMS - NEW YORK

My best advice is to learn to accept failure. When you accept that failure is not the end of the world, you will be able to reach your goals. Always believe that you can do anything the next person can do and that anything is possible. If you want a 4.0 GPA, go for it. You can do it. Never let fear of failure control you.

THE SMALL IDEA

BY SANDRA PAUWELS - FLORIDA

When I first went back to school two and a half years ago, I felt overwhelmed. Then I realized that I was trying to plan things too far ahead. So I set small goals for myself. First I would work for an AA [Associate] degree, and then I would evaluate where to go next. Then I decided on earning a BA [Bachelor of Arts] degree, and again I would evaluate what's next. Now I am a master's student.

I had no idea when I started that drinking from the fountain of knowledge would be so fulfilling. I think that the smartest thing I did was to set small goals and take one step at a time. I look at how far I have come in such a short period of time and I know it was because I set small, manageable goals for myself. Once one goal was accomplished, I set a new goal. Working on the master’s degree seems like a piece of cake!
My advice to my former self would be to fight the fears of uncertainty and remain focused on your goal. Although it is scary to have to embark on this new journey, and people might criticize what you love to do, it is important to stay true to yourself and pursue what will make you happy. Set aside everyone’s opinions and listen to your heart.

There will be days when it won’t be easy. Giving up and taking the easier route might pay off in the short term, but in the long run, you cheat yourself. There are things that become more of a priority at the time and it is fine to enjoy these hobbies, but do not let them interfere with your school. Push through and finish. Take it one day at a time, and before you know it, you will have finished.
CONCENTRATE AND DOMINATE

BY FLORA SHAUGHNESSY - LOUISIANA

Many of us have set limits on the things that we need to accomplish in life. Many books have been written regarding self-help and most of them read the same. Here is the advice I give to everyone I know that would like to get ahead in this world. It’s just two simple words: “concentrate and dominate!”
Realize that you gain invaluable experience and knowledge from trying new things and making mistakes. Don’t fear the unknown. Embrace it and learn from it.
CHAPTER 5

DO YOU

“Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!”

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
FROM OBSTACLE TO OPPORTUNITY

BY JEANNETTE MATOS - CONNECTICUT

I started college at the age of 29, because I had a child at the age of 17. By the time I could do something for myself, my son was 11 years old and my daughter was six years old. I had to practice what I preached to my kids -- the importance of having an education to get where you want to go in life.

They saw how hard it was for me without a college degree. I was working in a factory as a machine operator full time making under $15,000 a year with no real chance to advance in the small family business. Just to make ends meet, I also worked at Stop and Shop part time. Being a single parent is the hardest job I've faced.

When I got laid off, I decided I would use that time to go to school so I could make a better life for my kids, and show them that if I can do it, they can do it better. I sat at the table every day with my kids to do my homework, just like them. I even took them to class with me so they could see for themselves how important it is to have a higher education.

I had many, many obstacles in my way, but I kept going until I had to leave it for a while and go back to work full time to support my family. It took me 10 years to return, but I did. I never gave up my dream to return and finish what I have started. My kids saw my efforts.

By this time, I had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. But this illness didn’t stop me either. In fact, this made me stronger. To me, college was the best experience I’ve ever had, because not only did I meet new people from all walks of life, I learned to live in a whole new world.

Being in college clubs -- such as student government, criminal justice club, and the legal study club -- opened many doors for me. I learned how to deal with the real world of professionals who took time to show us the careers
we as students are interested in. College gave me not only the experience I needed to advance, it also showed me how to have confidence in myself.

You learn a new way of thinking about life and gain the positive outlook that comes at the end of the tunnel. I can stand here today with my degree in hand that I earned with all these obstacles in my way. If I can do it, you can do it better. Believe me.
INVEST IN YOURSELF

BY DWIGHT RODGERS - GEORGIA

The advice that I would share is that it's never too late to invest in you. At the age of 43, I decided to return to school to continue my education. I had my first son at the age of 15, and I thought my life was over. Being an African American male with a son so early, continuing education was not in the cards for me. As soon as I graduated high school, I immediately joined the military.

By age 21, I was on my second marriage and with my third son. There was no way I could make myself a priority at this point, so I did what any husband and father would do: I worked to support my household. I found myself at 43 years old looking back over my life and thinking, “Why do I feel such a void and so unfulfilled?”

I realized then that I had lived my entire young and mature adult life investing in everything and everyone else’s life, and not my own.

After being divorced for 16 years, I relocated and started my job hunt, which was a challenge of its own, not having a formal education, though I had 25-plus years of experience in my field. I said no more. Today I start to live, and for the rest of my life I will invest in me.

I have been attending Post University since January 2010, and have completed my certificate in human resources, an Associate of Science degree in management, and am currently seven classes away from a Bachelor of Science degree.

I can just feel my face smiling while typing this message. I have every intention of completing my MBA with Post, and wish they offered a
doctorate program. I would be all in. The day I received my first certificate from Post, my world changed. I wanted nothing more but to keep that feeling. I felt such an achievement, and I had only received my certificate. You can only imagine the day I received the associate. Whew.

I say all of that to say this: You get one life, and there is no better gift in this world than that life, so make the best of it. Invest in yourself, and you will be able to enrich the lives of others in so many ways when your life is full. Be well.

**TAKING THE LEAP TO LEARN**

**BY CYNTHIA SCALORA - CONNECTICUT**

In 2008 I found myself laid off from yet another dead-end job and facing the choice to either go back to work or care for my ailing father-in-law. I made the decision to take time off from work to be a caretaker for my father-in-law. I never once regretted that decision in the two and a half years I had with him until his passing in 2010.

I found that after his passing, I was lost. All of my time was consumed with caring for his needs that I found myself not knowing what to do with my time. For almost a year, I was in a fog over my grief. I put on a lot of extra weight and found myself depressed.

My mother called me one day and talked me into thinking of going back to school. I did a lot of research and finally decided on Post University. I have always had an interest in the legal field, and after speaking with a very helpful academic advisor, my education path was set. In May 2011, I started my education journey in paralegal studies. I have completed the courses and received my certification.

I decided to continue on with my journey and obtain my associate degree
in legal studies. I will admit in the beginning I was scared that I wouldn’t be able to handle the online classes. But the professors are very informative and always willing to help with any questions I have.

I thank God every day for the opportunity that Post University has given me. Not only have I educated myself, but I have moved forward in my life, lost almost 100 pounds, learned to carry my father-in-law’s memory in my heart, and let my grief go. I hope that my story inspires someone else to take the leap of faith and live his or her life for the better.

A BETTER SELF

BY ANTHONY J. MEDAGLIA - CONNECTICUT

One of the best pieces of advice I would give my former self as an adult learner would be simple. Now that I have been enrolled in the MBA-Marketing Program at Post University’s Online Education Institute over the last five modules, I have discovered so much about the power of education, the lifelong journey, and the new catalyst of self-improvement.

This is my turn to think about me, which, in the long term, equals enrichment and success for me and my entire family. I have wanted to do this for a very long time, allowing many years to pass, because as a devoted husband and father, I concerned myself with the expense aspect, which I couldn’t seem to justify while raising a family.

I would have to put one message to myself in that proverbial time capsule of advice, and, as Nike says, “Just do it!” Take the plunge and it will be the best move and decision you will ever make. Having a rich and wonderful
former career in New York City for several advertising agencies and Foot Locker, Inc. was the pinnacle of my younger life and career. There was much gratification of having 30 years of experience in one of the most exciting business meccas and cities in the world.

I was sure my journey was slowing down as my life and the universe took me away from the Big Apple and landed me closer to home. I began teaching and nurturing many students to get on track with their marketing and business careers, which I feel so passionate about doing. Retrospectives and perception are everything, and our professional and personal lenses are a most peculiar thing. To my delight, gladly the exact opposite happened. My career was all of a sudden on the fast track for a long and rewarding second half! I actually find my career and new MBA educational journey to be exhilarating, refreshing, and most robust!

My new work-life balance is better than ever before, yet the accomplishments I have achieved have increased and the focus on quality, happiness, and reward has been heightened significantly. I thank Post University, co-workers, and the Online Education Institute for unleashing my inner innovations and inner abilities.
Don’t let your dreams remain as dreams. Turn them into reality.
CHAPTER 6

BALANCE YOUR LIFE

“Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm, and harmony.”

-Thomas Merton
IT’S A FAMILY AFFAIR

BY SARA LOPEZ - MAINE

Going back to school as an adult takes more than signing up for a class or two, paying the tuition, purchasing textbooks and supplies, and sitting in front of a computer at different hours of the day. No, we do not have it that easy.

There are spouses, children, grandchildren, pets, chores, and careers that require time from us daily. So one might ask, “How do we as adults go back to school and do well, all while fulfilling personal and professional obligations?”

The answer is not as complex as one might believe it to be. Instead, the answer requires commitment on our part and patience, as well as understanding from our family. One way I managed to be there for our children -- who are in high school and play sports -- is that I brought schoolwork with me to the game. That way I did not miss watching them play and I could efficiently use any timeouts or halftime to read a few pages or revise a paper.

I spent two years thinking about going back to graduate school. After applying for and enrolling in the human services program at Post University, I knew that I made an outstanding decision. Post University faculty members prepared and inspired me to reach for my goals, and I am proud to say that as a Post University graduate, I am now a doctoral student, studying for my doctorate in psychology.

However, the support of my husband and our children is what pushed and encouraged me to graduate with a Master of Science in human services with two concentrations and distinction. Without them, I would...
not be where I am today.

My suggestions to older students are to enroll in a degree that you’re passionate about; designate a specific time of day as study time; leave the cell phone on silent; stay on track with assignments; carry a textbook with you at all times (you never know when the doctor’s office is running a hour behind schedule); plan ahead for lengthy research papers and projects; set time aside for family; and above all else, remember self-care.

**RUNNING THE COURSE**

**BY VICTOR BELARMINO - VIRGINIA**

Let me start off by saying, I love to run. Little did I know, though, that my lessons in running would apply to my tenure as a grad student, and ultimately to life as well. Thinking back after just completing my MBA at Post, three key lessons come to mind. As with many experiences in life, I see things as a runner. Thus the lessons are my miles in life.

Mile One: You have to pace yourself. The race is not won in the first mile, and neither can I complete everything all at once. Between work deadlines, school responsibilities, and family obligations, you have to set a realistic pace. You do not need to cancel things out, you just have to balance and set your pace early every week.

Mile Two: Be open to the journey. There are times when I have decided to veer off my normal running course, maybe stretch it out a little farther, and even go on unplanned routes, especially in new cities. By doing so, I saw some amazing sights and even realized a higher level of endurance. Just the same, my Post University MBA experience demanded the same of me. Being open to what the courses provided, and most important, what
my professors and colleagues brought to the table, introduced me to new insights on the world and new insights to myself. Letting go of the preconceived notions that years of work and life experience bring can turn a learning experience into a phenomenal opportunity.

Mile Three is not so much a new lesson, but one that I have to be reminded of from time to time. It is to appreciate the value and importance of the journey. It does not matter how far I run, or how fast I run each mile. What matters is that I simply get out there and run. By virtue of doing so, the potential for something amazing happening greatly increases.

And so it goes with my MBA experience. It did not matter that it took 10 years for me to finally decide to go back to school, nor did it matter that
I was not able to finish the program in the time frame that I had initially planned. What matters is that I did it, and at this phase of my life it’s all a part of my journey. I am humbled and grateful to be part of the Post University MBA Class of 2012. Thanks for running with me!

THE LIFE QUILT

BY SUSAN SUNDELL - CONNECTICUT

The life of an adult learner can feel like an overwhelming, endless series of tasks. Many pieces must come together to create a whole picture of a vital life. I prefer to think about my education at Post as one square of a life quilt, rather than a task timeline to be feared or dreaded.

As a mom, teacher, volunteer, homemaker, dog owner, you name it, and now student, many squares must be stitched together for success in school and in life. Each one is important, deserves attention, and must be crafted individually to create a whole person. Well, that’s a nice thought, but in the hectic pace of life, who has time for quilting? You do.

With boldness and creativity, each square can receive the time required for completion. What resources do you have available to you? Take stock of them. Do you have people in your life willing to help? What technology do you have available? When your attention span and mental edge begin to wane, take a break, work on a different life square, play with the kids, and above all, be organized.

Use snippets of time as well as technology to help organize everything. I have learned, for example, to use a 10-minute time frame to create a Word document to gather information needed for a unit from electronic sources,
print, learning gleaned from discussion boards, and any insights I gain during the week.

This saves study time and allows me to respond to my fellow classmates quickly and thoughtfully. A dedicated study time is important, but don’t get frustrated if it gets interrupted. Think of it as stitching on another square to create a vital, successful, whole person living an intricate and fulfilling life. Have fun and keep stitching!

THE STRESS-BUSTING TRIFECTA

BY SHAWNE TABRON – NEBRASKA

As an adult, taking on the everyday challenges of life, work, family, friends, and other activities can take a toll. But when you include going back to school, it can become overwhelming. I am a single mother of four children of all ages. I have always worked two jobs, sometimes three, just to keep my head above water. What I’ve found to help me get through the stresses of life and college are prayer, working out, and planning.

Prayer allowed me to release the burden of what my life consumed. There were times when I had no one else to talk to who would remotely understand my situation. It provided me with peace and happiness to say, “My life was not too much to handle.”

Working out also gave me energy, insight, and relief. I know not everyone’s schedule can incorporate going to the gym, but if you give yourself just some time, you can gain perspective on what to do next. Planning is also a great tool. I live by a planner. Planning gives a clear outline of your day-to-
day tasks and you can visualize where you are spending your time wisely.

Having a large family as I do requires some work. If you have family or friends that can assist, please use them, but don’t use them up. No one wants to feel used. Also, if your children are of ages where they can have friends over, let them. My children seemed to busy themselves best when friends were over and didn’t worry me too much.

Friends and social time will have to be placed on the backburner. If you desire to achieve a higher education, you have to do what’s best for you, and friends have to wait. I’m not saying give up your life completely, because as adults we all need “me” time and an outing to unwind.

Also make sure you eat right. A well-balanced diet will increase your memory, thinking, and energy levels. I highly recommend omega-3. Also engage with others who are doing the same as you are for motivation and help when needed with studies. My final word, never be afraid to ask for help.
Stay committed, be patient, and seek support when you need it. You’ll be better positioned to juggle all of life’s responsibilities as you earn your degree.
CHAPTER 7

ESCAPE THE TIME TRAP

“The key is in not spending time, but in investing it.”

-Stephen R. Covey
YOUR MOTIVATION IS THE DEADLINE

BY KRYSTLE SMITH - PENNSYLVANIA

Always keep up with your work. Once you get behind, you’ll never catch up. It’s tempting to just take a few days off and get back on track over the weekend, but you won’t. It’s too overwhelming! Keep up, and your college experience will be a lot less stressful!

SLOWWWW DOWWWWN

BY JACKIE MAHANNAH - CONNECTICUT

I started taking online classes at Post University at the end of 2011. I have really enjoyed all of my classes. One of the most important things I have learned so far is to take your time with your work. Make sure you read everything carefully so you fully understand what your teacher is looking for. I found that I used to rush through my work, but now I have learned to slow down so I can fully understand what I am working on.

The other important thing I learned is that your advisor and other Post staff are really there to help you. My academic advisor and my financial aid advisor took the time with me so I could understand how everything works within my degree program. I look forward to the next couple years at Post to finish my associate degree in legal studies and my bachelor’s degree in criminal justice.

PUTTING PROCRASTINATION TO BED

BY JANETTE RATHBUN - WASHINGTON

For too many of us, returning to college in an online format means that we
have the flexibility to procrastinate. When emergencies arise, it is great to not have to worry about making it to a lecture at a certain time, but too often insignificant “emergencies” start to eat away at time we would have used for our education.

Sure, I could sit down and write a discussion response, but the deck hasn’t been sprayed down or the oven needs to be cleaned. Any number of things can take our attention away from school when we are working from our homes.

My advice is to make that flexibility work for you instead of against you. Free Wi-Fi is available in so many places now. Keep your laptop with you and take advantage of it. You might be surprised to discover that places you already frequent, like the grocery store, offer complimentary Wi-Fi. A
change of scenery can shift your focus from your home, family, and job to your education. This can be invaluable when fighting off those demons of procrastination.

**BEFRIEND PATIENCE**

**BY CARLOS BARROSO - FLORIDA**

Think of the wonderful opportunity you have by living in these great United States of America! You can choose your own career path and mold your own future whatever way you wish. Just remember the greatest virtue of all that you need to carry you through the difficult courses that you face in college: patience. Some of the material might be quite difficult at first, but with patience you will tackle these tasks head-on. As the time passes, you suddenly realize, “Hey, I can do this!”

Sometimes, you might feel the required course you are taking has nothing to do with your life goal, but if you apply patience, you will soon see the benefits of learning that particular lesson well. Patience allows you to pace yourself, and by so doing, you are able to take a huge challenge and break it up into smaller fragments that you can do little by little on a daily basis.

The years one spends as a college student are, in retrospect, very short indeed, if one has patience. Otherwise, you might see the time it takes to graduate as insurmountable and you might begin to despair. Despair is your greatest enemy.

Even if you do poorly in one area of study, do not be discouraged. Disappointment and discouragement are direct opposites of patience. With patience, you will clearly see that doing poorly in one class simply means
that you have to study harder or perhaps spend more time on that subject.

Many times, students may have self-doubt about whether they have chosen the right major in college, and the worst thing you can do is make a hasty decision to change things in midstream. Patience however, gives us the ability to ride out the storm of self-doubt and allow everything to fall into place, until, surprisingly, we see the sunlight peeking through the clouds. Based on the aforementioned reasons, I confirm that for the student, patience is truly the greatest virtue.
Everyone — including the most successful people in the world — get 24 hours in a day and seven days in a week. Learn how to maximize the value you get from every minute to drive yourself to the top, too.
CHAPTER 8

EXECUTE THE LITTLE THINGS

“The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra.”

- Jimmy Johnson
OWN YOUR GOAL

BY ZORAIDA CABRERA - CONNECTICUT

Taking the step to higher education is an achievement unto itself. Feel proud of a journey that many do not start. Take the time to create a plan, and work on your time management. This is the key to being a successful student.

Pay attention in class and take notes. Things you write down stick in your mind. When you have a course in the classroom or online (as I finished online), make note of when things are due and do not procrastinate. Read ahead, read completely. The “fine print” that many ignore contains valuable information to make your life easier!

Take deep breaths, take thinking breaks, and make connections with people in your classes. They are some of the most valuable resources you will have sometimes. Take the time to get to know your staff, professors, counselors, deans, etc. They are also valuable resources to help you succeed, because when you succeed, they succeed and the school succeeds.

College is a community achievement. It’s not just one person seeking their own improvement. It is a collection of people with similar goals working together to achieve this goal with good grades, great experiences, and wonderful acquisitions of knowledge that will last a lifetime. Come prepared to class. If you come late or unprepared for class, you might as well have missed it, because being ready is half the battle!

Complete your degree by taking one day at a time and one class at a time. So if you need to slow your pace, do not stress that you won’t finish “on time.” It is not a matter of anyone’s time but your own, when you are ready and when you can successfully make the best of your situation to achieve great things!
Here’s some good advice: Don’t wait until the last minute. Don’t wait for the final day of your eight-week-long module to submit an assignment. Don’t wait until the day before the registration deadline to sign up for classes. Don’t wait to submit your book order because classes are hard enough with all of your equipment.

Don’t wait for something you don’t know or don’t understand to solve itself. And most of all, don’t wait to start your degree altogether, because it won’t get cheaper, it won’t get easier, and it certainly won’t do anything for your professional life until you complete it!
EMPHASIZE PREPARATION

BY JOAN NELSON - CONNECTICUT

The best advice I could offer to myself if I were starting college from scratch would be to always be prepared. Many times during my previous classes I had some Internet problems that no one could have anticipated. As a result, I would have to submit assignments late due to outages, down email, and having no access to another Internet source.

Moving forward, I plan on using all of my resources that are available to me. I have approached family members regarding use of their Internet if ever I should need it. I am purchasing a new computer so that I have a fresh start, and hopefully do not run into any unforeseen circumstances.

The last piece of advice I would give is to always do the readings way before they are due. If there are any questions, you are not scurrying around trying to find the answers.

FACTOR IN “CHAOS” TIME

BY AMANDA BRINE - NEW HAMPSHIRE

If I were to give advice to my former self, I would have to say plan ahead. Make a schedule, stick to the schedule, and give yourself some flexibility, because life happens! If you think a class will take you two hours a day, plan for four. You never know what can come up while you’re studying. Enjoy the learning process -- and remember it's a process. You don't simply open a book and understand all the concepts in one day. Take it one step at time, and take lots of notes!
These practical tips can go a long way in helping you reduce stress and stay organized while earning your degree.
LEARN OVER A LIFE SPAN

“Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.”

- Albert Einstein
YOU SET YOUR OWN LIMITS

BY KRISTIN MOSS - CONNECTICUT

As an adult learner, the most important thing to remember is that you need to embrace time! Don’t label time as your enemy, but use it to the best of your ability. There is no such thing as “too old” to expand your knowledge and further your career.

There is also no such thing as “not enough time” if you seize the day and all of the hours in it. There is no such thing as “too much school” if you possess the drive to continue learning. There is no such thing as “too much to do” because if you put your mind to it, you will succeed.

Remember there is ALWAYS time to grow, learn, and achieve your goals. Take as much time as you need and move at your own pace, because if you get caught up in needing to finish “on time” then you lose sight of what is most important -- your educational success!!

GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN

BY GRAHAM ROMETT - FLORIDA

I regret going to college right out of high school. I think for me it was a bad deal because at 17 or 18, you’re naive to life. If I continued on that path, I don’t think I’d appreciate my four-year degree as much and I had some growing up to do.

I was paying for everything by myself, and due to finances and some other factors, I dropped out after two years. I could not keep up with going to school during the day and working at a diner at night. I found that working
at the diner took me away from my studies.

Even with a few loans, I still needed to pay a monthly bill for the remainder of what the loans did not cover, plus room and board. I cooked and I washed dishes. I also knew if I worked at that diner, I wouldn’t go hungry.

My best decision was to join the military. I recommend everyone serve in the military for a few years prior to college to get some experience, leadership skills, and technical knowledge. I attended college courses while I was in the service to try and get ahead. After fulfilling my contract, I took the Montgomery G.I. Bill and Navy College Fund and finished my four-year degree.
In the end, I had zero school loans. I went from an average student prior to the military to making the Dean’s List several times after the military. Sure it took longer than expected, but I did it, paid for it, and I learned a lot about myself in the process.

WHERE’S THE FIRE?

BY CHARLOTTE PARSCAL - CALIFORNIA

My best advice would be to not worry about the time it takes to reach your goals. Even if it seems like you are starting late, or are anxious to start your life, take your time in college and learn about yourself while picking up your degree.

KNOWLEDGE IS A TIMELESS ASSET

BY STEVE BEARDEN - CONNECTICUT

Dedicating yourself to a life of learning and education will help lead to an open mind. In a few years you will care more about what is going on in the world. Having an open mind will help you process the events and issues. It will help ignite thought rather than reactive emotion. You will need this to be objective in your reasoning and decision making.

You will also have a son. Sorry to ruin it, but you really need to start saving some money now. Back to my point. Your son’s mind will be a sponge and you will be there to help him fill this sponge with knowledge, memories, and values. What knowledge will you share with him and pass down? He will look up to you in many ways, so be sure to pass down your learning and wisdom to him.

Learning will most certainly not end after your graduation, my friend. Your career will challenge you in many more ways than you think. You can best
equip yourself with a sharp mind and eager spirit. Find what you enjoy doing and strive to add value to the field.

Your employers will expect you to continue learning and growing. Be open to these great opportunities to learn and expand your skill sets. Being open to lifelong learning, both formally and informally, is what you will carry with you at all times. What you know makes up a great deal of your character.

I promise you now, in the not too distant future, you will be expected to learn and adapt faster than you are expected to now. Take your studies seriously and come out on top. Your future successes will only open more doors for you to explore.

There are many things in the world that can be taken from you. Your education is not one of those things. Knowledge is truly a timeless asset.

“
What you know makes up a great deal of your character.”
-Steve Bearden
Learning is a lifelong endeavor. Relish the journey.
CHAPTER 10

DON’T FORGET TO HAVE FUN

“You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

-Christopher Columbus
ENJOY THE RIDE

BY JAIME CAMPAU - OHIO

Before I became an adult student, I could not imagine returning to school and working towards a degree. As I continue along this path, the best advice that I can think of if I had to go back to the beginning is don’t stress. Take time for you.

As you go through your classes, remember that life continues to go on, and will not end just because you’ve decided to go back to school. Spend time with family and friends outside of what you’re doing in class and work. Make it fun.

AN OPEN MIND OPENS DOORS

BY CRYSTAL HOLDRIDGE - CONNECTICUT

My advice as an adult learner is to always keep an open, positive mind, but be realistic with your goals. Having an open mind when starting anything new is crucial. If you walk into college or any new setting with judgments, you automatically limit yourself to the possibilities that are open to you.

When I started college, I felt out of place because of my age and thought that all student programs were more for the traditional students. But I was very wrong. When I finally built up the courage to attend a few meetings in different clubs, I felt as welcome as anybody else who walked in the door -- and just as capable.

If you walk into college or any new setting with judgments, you automatically limit yourself to the possibilities that are open to you.”

- Crystal Holdridge
A positive attitude is also crucial. One of my favorite professors told me that in order to succeed you have to be able to visualize it. If you can see yourself on that stage receiving your degree in one, two, three, or even four years, you have your goal in sight. You know exactly what it is you’re looking to achieve, and now all you have to do is figure out how to get there and on what terms.

Do you want to be valedictorian of your class? What GPA requirements are
there at your next school? In order to fulfill these short-term goals, what do you have to do? Usually the answers require time management, acquiring effective study skills, networking, and most important, a positive attitude.

My last bit of advice is in regards to all your goals, whether they are short-term or long-term. Be realistic with yourself. If you are learning something extremely new, don’t expect to master it right away. If you think you can complete three papers in a day, you probably need to reassess your schedule. Leave yourself enough time and energy to complete all your goals, and remember the saying, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

PUT ON YOUR HAPPY FACE
BY AMY PARSONS - COLORADO

Smile as often as you can. You will never be perfect, so laugh at your imperfections.

POP OUT THE PEP
BY JENNIFER BENDER - PENNSYLVANIA

Hello, this is me, your more mature, smarter, and slightly older self. Today I would like to offer you some advice on going back to school. First of all, be excited, not nervous. Yes, it is a lot of money you are spending on yourself, but you are worth it. The kids will not always be at home, and you will need a career. Besides that, you will want a job, so you can spoil your children and grandchildren.

Secondly, you need to be prepared, because there will be some harder classes that will require a lot of your time (FYI -- college algebra). You will
get through this, and the family will persevere without you being available every second. You are required to use the discussion board almost on a daily basis, and this isn’t a stressful thing. It is wonderful. It is like having adult companionship every day. Instead of talking to yourself or the cat during the day, you now will have an outlet for your conversations.

The professors seem to be fun and enjoy being there for you online. The professors that are the best are the ones that really get into the discussion boards and help keep the conversations going. If you find yourself with a professor that is not very active on the board and the conversation is dead, go to the web and find out information on the subject and add it to your post with the web address. This seems to wake up the conversations.

Also, at times the papers due might seem overwhelming. But you will always find a way to get them done. The Internet is amazing and you can easily find all the information you would ever need. On a final note, beware of having the cats around the laptop when you’re working. They like to hand in a quiz or two for you. (Luckily you were already done and just checking it.) Good luck and many blessings on your endeavor!
If you’re unhappy with your circumstances, do something about it. Realize that sometimes the change required is simply to change your attitude.
A PROLIFERATING POPULATION

The past couple decades have seen a dramatic shift in the composition of college student populations in the U.S. Adult learners, typically age 25 and over, have emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of college students.

In fact, more adult learners are enrolling in college than their traditional, 18-to-22-year-old counterparts. Enrollment of students age 25 and over increased 42 percent between 2000 and 2010, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This compares to a 34 percent increase in enrollment of students under 25.

Student Enrollment Increase, 2000-2010

Those numbers aren’t expected to change any time soon. The NCES projects the enrollment of students 25 and over will rise 20 percent between 2010 and 2020, but just 11 percent for students under 25.

Projected Student Enrollment Increase, 2010-2020
The size of the adult learner population varies across colleges and universities. Adult learners made up about 15 percent of all undergraduate students during the fall 2011 term, according to a 2012 U.S. News survey.

Taken to a larger level, 38 percent of all postsecondary students in a fall term are adult learners. This is according to a National Student Clearinghouse Research Center study examining students from the fall 2009 to fall 2011 semesters.

At some institutions, adult learners are now the overwhelming majority. Among the 10 colleges with the most adult learners, an average of 68.4 percent of undergraduates are 25 or older, according to the U.S. News survey.

Some major factors are driving adult learner growth, which we’ve gleaned from the hundreds of stories shared in Post University’s Advice to Your Former Self Contest, and through our conversations with students every day.

Namely, adults are looking to achieve a goal they set for themselves. Economic setbacks and a changing job market have required many Americans to embark on new careers that involve new knowledge and skill sets. Many other adults are transitioning life roles due to family changes and other events, and they feel now is the time to attend college. Still others are recognizing the value of going back to school with real-world experience under their belts that they can build upon.

Together, these and other factors have created a vibrant new college student population that is sharing insights and ideas with others eager to learn and innovate. We hope you’ve enjoyed taking part in the slices of life that some have shared with us in this e-book.
IN CLOSING

Your education is one of the greatest achievements of your life. It can open doors that you thought were once locked -- doors to better jobs, advanced careers, new knowledge, and personal fulfillment. The 40 adult learners who’ve shared their stories in this e-book are living proof of it all.

We hope their insights and advice help guide you on a successful, happy educational journey. Absorb it. Live it. Build upon it. What will your story be?

*Live as if you were to die tomorrow.*
*Learn as if you were to live forever.*

-Mahatma Gandhi
THANKS

Thanks for reading our e-book! Feel free to share it on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+.

If you have any questions about earning your college degree as an adult learner, the Post University team is here to help. Request more information online or call us at 800.345.2562.