

How I Became A 21-Year-Old Business Executive

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At age 21, I have already graduated college with both a BBA and MBA from the University of San Diego, and started my first full-time job, as the director of business development at Hughes Marino, the largest commercial real estate company in San Diego, California, that specializes in tenant representation. How did I do it? I didn't take the usual route, and I never did anything the easy way. Here's my story.

Start Early

I've always prided myself on being different, whether it dropping out of preschool, refusing to wear make-up until my junior year of high school or never having a sip of alcohol. I graduated high school at age 18, but what made me different was how I chose to build on it. After about a month of college, I decided to graduate early. I knew I wanted to pursue my MBA, and I figured that I would be better off getting it sooner rather than later. I declared my major as business, mapped out my schedule for the next year and a half, and accepted the fact that I would not have much of a life.

I graduated from the University of San Diego at age 19 with a perfect 4.0 GPA—the highest academic average in the graduating class—and with a few years of work experience behind me. I was the only graduate too young to attend the graduation parties.

Immediately after getting my undergrad degree, I began the full-time Masters of Business Administration program, also at USD. *This time will be different, I told myself. I'll take the full two years to complete the program, have balance in my life, and focus on having fun.*

Two of the three were true. For some strange reason, I decided to take nine MBA classes at a time, in addition to an internship at a local investment bank, in order to finish my degree in one year. The school said it couldn't be done, but I'm a big believer that rules aren't set in stone. If you can and are motivated enough to do things better, albeit differently, then go for it. Three weeks after turning 21, I graduated from the program.

Don't Be Afraid To Ask

Don't be afraid to ask for what you want. You have to ask for things to be successful—a lesson that women in my generation could hear a few more times throughout their careers. Ask for opportunities. Ask for a raise. Ask for a *job*.

So many of my graduating friends are struggling to find available positions through the company's website, job search sites and career counselors. However, you can't just wait for your dream job listing to appear online. It won't happen. You have to *ask* for it. FedEx a beautiful package with your resume, a flawless cover letter, a personalized list of how you can contribute to the company and a portfolio of your past work. Then follow up with a personal phone call.

Think about how that compares to submitting a generic form online. Who is going to get the interview? Out-think your competition, and you'll stand out.

Expect The Unexpected

So what now? My life had been planned to the tee for 21 years. It was officially time for the real world.

After considering entering the field of finance at local wealth management firms and investment banks, I decided to pursue a path not normally embraced by children of successful businessmen.

I chose to join the family business.

Some may think that working with your parents is stifling or controlling. To me, it is a world of opportunity, and I am working for the people that truly have my best interests at heart.

Yes, it comes with challenges. I feel enormous pressure to prove myself and never fall into the persona of the “boss’s daughter.” However, for the first time in a long time, I am in no hurry. I love where I’m at, and I *love* what I do. I wouldn’t be in the position I am today if I didn’t embrace doing things differently.

Success Is Uncommon

This isn’t to say that graduating early from college is right for everyone, or that jumping right into an MBA after an undergraduate business degree was the best for my intellectual development, but it was right for me, and it has afforded me many great opportunities that I would otherwise not have. Everyone is different. The important thing is to *embrace* it—not suppress it.

It’s okay to be the odd one out. In fact, I think being different, and being unique, is one of the key components of being successful. A quote that has stuck with me through the years is, interestingly enough, from sports coach Cal Stoll: “Success is uncommon, therefore not to be enjoyed by the common man.”

If I strived to be normal, how could I ever be different? If I was never different than my peers, how could I achieve greater success than the rest of the pack? So the next time someone says you’re unusual, take pride in it. That’s what will set you apart—and set you up for success.

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