

10 Extraordinary People and Their Lessons for Success

by Sarah Green

From presidents to hip-hop producers to poets, the last page of every issue of Harvard Business Review is always an interview with someone who has succeeded outside the traditional corporate world. Here, some of our favorite lessons from the class of 2013:

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on having long-term colleagues: "Treat people well. Don't mislead them. Don't be prickly. Don't say things that are aggravating. Try to be as agreeable as you can be. Try to be helpful rather than harmful. Try to cooperate."

Cartoonist Scott Adams on using his MBA: "When the comic strip first came out, it showed Dilbert in a variety of settings—not just the office. I didn't really know what was working, because I had no direct contact with readers... So way back at the dawn of the internet, I started putting my e-mail address in the margin of the strip... I found out that there was a common theme: People loved it when Dilbert was in the office, and they liked it a lot less when he was at home or just hanging around. So Dilbert became an office-based comic, and that change made it all work."

Chef Nobu Matsuhisa on starting as an apprentice: "I was 18 and didn't know anything about fish. My mentor taught me the basics. For the first three years, I didn't make sushi; I washed dishes and cleaned the fish. But if I asked questions, he always answered. I learned a lot of patience."

Saturday Night Live producer Lorne Michaels on hiring: "I wouldn't choose anyone whose side I didn't want to be on. It isn't like we hire 12 and figure six will work. We don't bring

in anybody we're not rooting for. Sometimes they succeed in week five, but for most people it's two, three, four years before they become who they're going to be. You have to allow for that growth."

Hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons on meditating twice a day: "Every creative idea, every second of happiness, is from stillness.... But the way you move around the world has nothing to do with the stillness in your heart. Moving meditation—that's what we have to practice. It doesn't mean you have to move slow; you just have to see the world in slow motion."

Golfer Arnold Palmer on learning humility: "One time at Augusta, I was going into the last hole with a one-shot lead to win the Masters, and a friend from the gallery hollered at me, so I walked over and accepted congratulations. And then I proceeded to make six on the hole and lose. My father had warned me about that. I was told all my life not to accept congratulations until it's over."

Poet Maya Angelou on courage: "One isn't born with courage. One develops it by doing small courageous things—in the way that if one sets out to pick up a 100-pound bag of rice, one would be advised to start with a five-pound bag, then 10 pounds, then 20 pounds, and so forth, until one builds up enough muscle to lift the 100-pound bag. It's the same way with courage. You do small courageous things that require some mental and spiritual exertion."

Designer Philippe Starck on persuading clients: "I'm very good at explaining. I don't work like a diva. I don't say, "Oh my God, that must be pink," and refuse to discuss it... I am cuckoo, yes. I am the king of intuition. But I am also a serious guy. I explain in a clear way. And then, even if it's something that looks completely different than expected, something completely against mainstream thinking, clients understand. I explain that it might look strange but why, given the two to five years it will take for development, it will for so many reasons be exactly the right thing to do... And then the clients agree, always, 100%."

President Mary Robinson on being frank: "At every stage, it's [a] passion for human rights

that has prompted me to speak truth to power, to stand up to bullies, to be prepared to criticize even the United States after 9/11. People told me it wouldn't help my career as high commissioner, but it seemed much more important to do the job than to try to keep the job."

Historian David McCullough on hard work: "When the founders wrote about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they didn't mean longer vacations and more comfortable hammocks. They meant the pursuit of learning. The love of learning. The pursuit of improvement and excellence. I keep telling students, 'Find work you love. Don't concern yourself overly about how much money is involved or whether you're ever going to be famous.' ...In hard work is happiness."