

Lessons I have learned since I graduated

I am a North grad class of 2014. I was born Ravensburg Germany in 1995 during the Yugoslavian war. I have one older sister and three brothers. We are refugees, seeking to have a better life just like everyone else. Thank God my dad was in the military and found a way to leave the refugee camps and start a new life in America around 1998. My parents have told me some crazy stories of how we barely escaped death in the refugee camp. When I hear them tell us these stories, it gives me chills down my spine. I can't imagine what my parents went through with five little kids. They made amazing sacrifices so I can stand up here and speak with you lovely people, They are my motivation to make the most of my life.

Tonight I want to share five lessons I've learned since I've graduated.

LESSON ONE: Get Educated!

This month will be five years since I walked across the Fargodome stage in my a cap and gown. I was looking into the horizon of my life with excitement, and ready for the next chapter of life. Right after I graduated, my dad looked me in the eye and told me that he was proud of me and that I will become a great man! I guess I did not realize how hard the next chapter in my life would be.

After high school, I attended M-state to finish my general courses. I ended up completing one year. I decided to take a break from school and try to make a little extra money. I knew it would be hard to go back to school. It's been four years since I took my last class. I still don't know when the right time for me will be to go after my dream job of becoming a Phy Ed teacher. But that's my dream!

LESSON TWO: LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES

Since I have graduated from high school I have worked at a variety of jobs. I tried jobs that I loved that did not require a college degree. For example, I worked at Footlocker during my first year in a college. I completely fell in love with shoes and people. Being a sales associate was very fun and it was always a great reason to talk to people. I learned some important things from that job. Not just about shoes, but approaching people with a smile and a great attitude, will lead to a great conversation.

Even though the job was perfect for me, I didn't earn enough to be able to move out of my parent's home. I decided to do something that would make more money, but also keep me in shape. I chose to get into construction as a framer, building residential homes with a few friends who started their own business called V.I.P Builders.

I have been in the trade for about three years now. The trade has taught me that the only way to get better is to make mistakes and learn from them. Learning from my mistakes is making me a better person every day.

LESSON THREE: TAKE CARE OF YOUR MINDSET

People know me as a fun-loving guy that's always cracking jokes, trying to make people smile and turning negative situations into positive opportunities. My life during high school was great. I worried about school, sports, and my friends. After high school, I have really struggled with finding my way and staying positive.

I wasn't prepared for all of the responsibilities I would have after high school. I worry now about working, paying my bills and spending time with my coworkers instead of my family. My high school friends fade away more every year. There have been certain moments in my life since graduating that have been dark. Depression and anxiety are huge factors during big changes in a young person's life like mine.

I struggle with depression and anxiety. It started getting bad a few years ago. I have found the strength to understand I need to work with people who can help me take care of my mindset. How I think really determines what I do. And, I want to do amazing things with my life!

LESSON FOUR: BE GRATEFUL

Standing here now I realize how much my life has changed. I have had some ups and downs like everyone else after graduation. I used to think that I was a failure because I didn't finish college and I don't have a lot of money. I've learned to relax and appreciate my life. I am in great health. I have family and friends that love me. I have a beautiful girlfriend who lets me complain to her about everything and she is still with me.

I have a great foundation that always has my back. Legacy is that foundation. I am one of Mrs Dehne's Ben Franklin students who helped her put this crazy idea together in 2011. Legacy taught me to be a hard worker every single day. I remember a time when I was considering to drop out of school. I thought I should start adulthood early. My friends and mentors in Legacy pushed me to keep going and never give up.

"Don't be another statistic!", I was told.

I believed those words and pushed through to graduation.

Legacy gave my parents a chance to watch my twin brother and me walk across the Fargodome stage as high school graduates. I knew on that day that all the pain and struggles they went through were worth for them.

I owe Legacy so much! I cannot even explain in words how much the Legacy Children's Foundation means to me and my family. It has given me a diploma and life lessons to do something with my life. I am very grateful!

LESSON FIVE: Stay young and keep learning!

The best part about all this is that I am still young and learning. I want to be a better person every day. So what is my journey going to look like in five years?

Who knows, maybe I will go back to school and get the degree I have always wanted, or start a business in framing. Either way, any goal I set is going to take three things: hard work, focus, and love. When I put all three together I can accomplish anything in life

Remember... get educated, learn from your mistakes, take care of your mindset, be grateful, stay young, and keep learning! I learned these lessons from Legacy and my parents.