

10 Life Lessons – What Starts Here Changes the World

adapted from Admiral McRaven's 2014 UT commencement address

Make your bed

Judge their heart, not their flippers

Don't be afraid of the circus

Don't back down from the sharks

Start singing even if you are up to your neck in mud

Help someone paddle

Everyone is a sugar cookie

Sometimes you have to go headfirst

Be your best in darkest moments

Never be the one to ring the bell

1) Make your bed

If you don't take the time to do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. So make your bed every morning, You will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. And if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made. And a made bed can give you the encouragement that tomorrow will be better"

2) Help someone paddle

For the boat to make it to its destination, everyone must paddle. Everyone must exert effort and paddle in unison towards the goal. You cannot make it alone – you will need some help – from friends, teammates, teachers, parents, administrators, and the good will of strangers in the community. You must also trust someone to guide your vessel...(a captain, a coach, a parent) Be careful who you choose

3) Judge their heart, not their flippers.

I was fortunate to have been influenced by two veterans both of whom served in Special Forces. Their training was a great equalizer. Nothing matters but your will to succeed. Not your color, ethnic background, socio-economics, your social media status

4) Everyone is a sugar cookie – it is just how life is sometimes.

There will be times when all your effort will be in vain. No matter what your best will not be good enough. No matter how hard you try to get it right, someone will find fault in it. Your efforts will not always be appreciated. In SEAL training, when someone fails uniform inspection the student had to run, fully clothed, into the surf. Then, wet from head to toe, roll around on the beach until every part of your body was covered in sand. The effect was known as "Sugar Cookie." The students then had to sit that way the rest of the day...cold, wet, sandy, uncomfortable.

5) Don't be afraid of the circuses.

If you fail to meet those standards your name was posted on a list. At the end of the day those on the list were invited to the circus. A circus was two hours of calisthenics designed to wear you down and break your spirit, and encourage you to give up. Bigger picture...being invited to a circus meant for that day you didn't measure up. Everyone,,,,,EVERYONE...makes the circus list. Parents, teachers, and even preachers. Your teammates and YOU will have days when you don't quite measure up. You are going to fail. You will likely fail often. It will be painful. It will be discouraging. At times, you will be tested to the very core. Sounds negative right? Wait, here is an interesting by-product of a circus. Over time, you get stronger. You find an inner strength and discover you are resilient.

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- 6) Sometimes, to achieve greatness, you have to be willing to go head first.
The record for the obstacle course had stood for years when Admiral McRaven's class began training in 1977. The record seemed unbeatable, until one day, a student decided instead of swinging his body underneath the rope and inching his way down the slide for life bravely mounted the top of the rope and thrust himself forward head first.
- 7) Don't back down from the sharks.
You are taught that if a shark begins to circle your position – stand your ground – do not swim away. Do not act afraid and if the shark darts towards you – summon all your strength and punch him in the snout. There are a lot of sharks in this world. If you want to complete your journey you will have to deal with them.
- 8) You must be willing to do your very best even in the darkest moment.
Darkness. Total absence of light. It is frightening and easy to get disoriented. One of the drills required of fire fighters involves being placed in a box. The space is cramped, filled with smoke, and is totally void of light. During those moments you must remain calm, trust your training, and proceed towards your goal. In contrast, there is something comforting about even the slightest light, a small candle across the way. Children are comforted by a small crack left in the door so that they can find their way. In those dark moments, trust your training and when possible be the light that others can follow and find comfort.
- 9) Start singing even when you're up to your neck in mud
We have all seen it, or something similar, a scene where people are facing what appears to be insurmountable odds. Up to their neck in mud, suddenly one voice begins raised in song terribly out of tune but with enthusiasm. One voice becomes two and before long everyone is singing. What was once a dreary scene now becomes tolerable because if one person can rise above the circumstance, then others could as well. If I have learned anything it is this...the power of one person King, Mandela, and recently a young girl from Pakistan, Malala – one person can change how others feel by giving people hope.
- 10) Don't ever ring the bell. M.E.Q.
M.E.Q..

Start each day with a task completed. Find someone to help you through life. Respect everyone. Know that life is not fair and that you will fail often. But if take you take some risks, step up when the times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden and never, ever give up — if you do these things, then the next generation and the generations that follow will live in a world far better than the one we have today.