

Ask Others What Course You Are On

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Have you ever looked back at a picture or video of yourself from five, ten or more years ago and asked yourself "What was I thinking back then?" Have you ever looked at something you did several years ago and asked yourself the same exact question?

I have. I have done this a lot.

Sometimes when I look back at the person I was even five years ago, I am amazed at how little I knew at the time, evidenced by the mistakes I made. Here are a few of the qualities that characterize me and my life right now:

- I get up early each morning and work.
- I exercise two hours a day.
- I meditate each day.
- I rarely worry.
- I love my job.
- I do not use tobacco.
- I do not drink alcohol.
- I watch my diet and am at my ideal weight.
- I love my wife.

Ten years ago?

- It was hard enough just to get out of bed each morning.
- I never exercised.
- I never meditated.
- I worried all the time.
- I hated my job with a passion.
- I chewed tobacco from the moment I got to work until the moment I left each day.
- I would smoke when I went out with friends.
- I loved going out to bars with my friends and did it at least twice a week.
- I was at least 25 pounds heavier.
- I was going through a divorce.

These are two very different people I have just described. If I look at the guy from ten years ago I would say he is pretty close to the edge, and in a bad way. Where would *you* think each person is headed? I can tell you that the people who are now still as I was ten years ago, are not doing all that well. I have been lucky enough to change; however, if I had looked at that person from ten years ago, at the time, I am not sure I would have foreseen what an incredible change he could make. I would not have believed in the possibility.

How did I change direction like this? Well, I was fortunate enough to have a friend at the time who sat down with me one day for about 90 minutes and told me exactly where I was heading if I kept on the path that I was on. That was what it took. Ninety minutes, and a hard dose of reality. I knew this person was right, and slowly I started to alter my own course.

I am sure you may have had a similar experience as well. Or haven't you? When we look back at ourselves several years ago, most of us realize how little we knew at the time, and how many mistakes we made, which we could certainly avoid today. It can be frightening looking back at our past, and the people we were. The pain we might have caused ourselves or others. The opportunities we might have missed. I know this is frightening to me.

Several times throughout my life I have had people tell me what I would be doing and who I would become in ten or twenty years (or more). This was always something that amused me to ponder at the time; but then, I would often realize later in life that the people who told me these things ended up being right. Looking back on this is really odd for me. Many of the people were much older than me, and probably could see from their own experience what others become. And surprisingly some of these people were the same age as me, and could also seemingly predict my future.

Do you see where other people in your life are headed at the moment? And perhaps more important: Do others see where you are headed at the moment? The chances are pretty good they do. If you were to ask them they would probably tell you, although you might have to push the issue a little bit.

Do you think it would help to know where you are headed?

I do. I know it would help you.

When I was in fourth grade, I had a girlfriend named Tina who was a really nice girl. My best friend, Jimmy DeYonker, was dating Tina's twin sister. None of this amounted to much. We basically would go over to their house and stand around on the front lawn talking about nothing. Sometimes we would sit in the basement on pillows watching television. We did this just about every single day. It was a fun time of my life in many ways because it was so innocent and everything was so new and exciting. The twins lived in a very nice house and it was in a different neighborhood from where I lived.

Jimmy was fascinated with girls and seemed to worship them. He talked about girls all the time and his entire life seemed to revolve around his girlfriend and talking about how beautiful she was. In fact, Jimmy was completely obsessed with female

beauty. He always talked about how he wanted to be surrounded by beautiful girls when he grew up. I would say to him: "I bet you're going to make movies about girls when you get older!"

One day I realized that my girlfriend was a bit too much of a follower, and I decided that she would probably become one of the girls who stood around in the back of the school in tight jeans, with big hair, smoking cigarettes, skipping class, not involved in much and all run down by the time she got into junior high school. God only knew what would happen to her in high school. I do not know why I formed such strong opinions, but I made the mistake of telling Tina this and it really pissed her off. She never spoke to me again.

The thing about her was that in fourth grade Tina was just as clean cut, cute and nice as could be. I just saw something in her, a melancholy and darkness that led me to believe she would follow the wrong crowd when the time came. She did not believe the image I saw of who she would become back then but I was certain she would become that person.

A couple of years later I changed schools and I have literally not seen Jimmy DeYonker in probably over two decades. I have never heard anything about him whatsoever.

But several years later, when I was in high school I heard about my fourth grade girlfriend, Tina, and what I had predicted about her had come true. Nothing horrible had happened, but my original prediction had proven true. Then about 15 years ago I was in a [restaurant in Michigan](#) and I happened to be seated at a table right across from Tina. She was sitting there smoking and looking all disheveled, talking with a group of friends. I realized she too had seen me sitting across the way when I heard her say:

"Do you believe I dumped him in fourth grade because he told me I would smoke?" She and her friends started laughing.

I find it fascinating that Tina could not have imagined the person she would have become if she had looked into the future back in fourth grade. Imagine what it would be like to step into a time capsule and look at the person you were back then and who you would become. This could be positive or it could be negative.

Incredibly, I was watching an episode of *America's Next Top Model* a few months ago with my wife, and all the girls on the show went to meet a famous [fashion photographer](#). Guess who it was. Jimmy DeYonker. I saw him photographing all the girls on the show. His obsession with girls had literally carried over into his career some 30 years after I had first noticed it.

As interesting as these anecdotes may be, I do not claim to have some unique ability to make accurate predictions. After all, other people have correctly predicted my future as well. We can all see some aspects in others that are indicative of who they are likely to become in the future. We can sense it and see it with everyone around us.

We know the path they are on.

There are few surprises that we are likely to witness in the lives of others, because we can often clearly see where people are going, even before they can. And this brings me to you. If you ask the people around you where they see you going, they will tell you if you prod them. Most of them already see it. You do not see where you are going all the time because you are living in it. You are also denying it. But others simply see it. And they take it for what it is. It may sound daunting, but it is important to ask the people around you about how they envision your life unfolding.

Where are you headed? Are you headed for something positive or negative? Your allies will tell you if you let them. And if you are at all in trouble as I once was, there is no stronger catalyst than change in your life.

THE LESSON

Looking back at the past, one can always identify the mistakes that he or she did not know any better than to make at the time. You cannot get the "whole picture" of your life at any given time because you are currently living it; conversely, you can look at others and see things that will determine their future. You must use this outside perspective to your benefit, and frequently ask those around you about how they envision your life unfolding. Your allies will tell you the truth about yourself, good or bad, if you let them.

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