

Wise Words From Friends

Idea In Short

Listen more than you talk, do great work, simplify complexity and be decisive when it matters. Stay stoic through adversity, lead with kindness and play the long game. Hire curious people, communicate bottom line up front and define success on your own terms.

What Advice Do You Often Give?

This is one of the most revealing questions you can ask someone. The answer is usually pithy and to the point, requiring no book purchase. It says a lot about the person, where they are in life and what matters to them. It also gauges the level of engagement, intimacy and vulnerability the person brings to professional relationships.

Is the advice a macho pep rally? Is it something deep about legacy, parents and children? Is it timeless wisdom or practical corporate tactics? The following wisdom comes from friends and contacts who shared their most frequently given advice. The selections focus on corporate themes: consulting, professionalism, doing good work, building a craft and creating a network of like-minded relationships.

Listen and Learn

The most common theme among professionals is listening. Listen more than you talk. Always speak last in meetings and let the client speak first. Learn to pause in client meetings and gauge reactions. It is all about relationships, so build them and practice the skill of communication. State your assumptions clearly and check your thoughts with someone you trust.

Always listen for understanding. No matter your experience or education, you never have all the answers. Stay relevant. These principles sound simple, yet most professionals violate them regularly. The temptation to fill silence with words overwhelms the discipline to listen and absorb what others are saying.

Do Great Work and Be Remarkable

Be intentional in everything you do. Be reliable. Remember that perception equals delivery minus expectations. Be consistent, patient and disciplined. Barriers exist for those who want it the most. These aphorisms capture the mindset of professionals who have learned that reputation compounds over time through repeated, reliable performance.

Great work requires starting from a blank sheet and then refining. Ask why many times in a row. Stay curious and ask more questions. Find the metric the business cares about and move it. Do not worry about all the small key performance indicators on the dashboard. Focus on the one metric that your vice president or chief executive cares about. This discipline separates effective consultants from those who drown in data without driving outcomes.

Simplify Complexity

Curate relentlessly because you will need this skill at some point. It is your job to make the complex simple. More is less, and no one wants a 100-slide deck. If you cannot explain it simply, you do not understand it well enough. This principle, often attributed to Einstein, captures the essence of consulting. 1

Simplification is not dumbing down. It is the hard work of distilling complexity into its essential elements. The professionals who master this skill become indispensable to their clients and organizations. They cut through noise to deliver clarity that drives decisions.

Be Confident

Ask what the worst case scenario is whenever you have doubt about a decision. If you can live with the answer, jump immediately. Confidence is the most important thing on earth. It eats strategy for breakfast, culture for lunch and some other fancy theory for dinner. Confidence matters.

People accept what they think they deserve. Develop and maintain self-confidence while continually demonstrating humility and eagerness to improve. You have to believe in yourself to take risks and ensure your voice is heard. Everyone has some level of self-doubt, so you must learn how to control it and prevent it from hijacking your potential.

Be Decisive When It Is Time

Start. Always focus on what you control. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. When making change, you only trade one set of problems for another. Trust your gut, because consultants are trained to draw conclusions from data-driven analysis, but frequently there is no time for that. Facing ambiguity and making decisions based on intuition is key.

The importance of making decisions cannot be overstated. Strategy consultants who have never run a business can fall into analysis paralysis. Most of the time when leading in entrepreneurial situations, you do not have the time or money to gather perfect data. You make gut-feel decisions with the best knowledge available. Live the Before, During, After approach to life. Think about upcoming work projects in three categories as you plan. Most people focus only on the during, neglecting preparation and reflection.

Be a Little Stoic

This too shall pass. Everything is temporary, whether good or bad. Do not worry about something unless you have a decision to make. Do not let perfect be the enemy of good. Comparison is the thief of joy. Give advice to family and friends only when advice is asked. If it feels good, do not say it or write it.

These stoic principles protect professionals from emotional reactivity. They create space between stimulus and response. They prevent the rash email, the impulsive decision and the unnecessary conflict that erodes trust and damages reputations built over years.

Be Human

Lead with kindness. Always assume positive intent. Breathe and relax your shoulders. Have empathy and walk in your customers' shoes. If your solution considers how to improve their position, you will get better outcomes than simply telling them what they should do. You cannot pour from an empty cup, so take care of yourself so you can take care of others.

Life is too short to work for a toxic person. The people you work with are much more than their jobs. Get to know the person behind the job and your relationships will be richer and more fruitful. This human dimension is what makes professional work meaningful beyond the transactional exchange of services for compensation.

Be Yourself

Know your North Star and anchor your decisions to it. Take time to identify the values, priorities and principles that matter to you and hold to them. Live your life, make plans and set your priorities in a way that aligns with your values, not someone else's. The best way to communicate is in your own authentic voice, not in a way you think others want to hear.

There are many ways to be successful. Learn from others and then be your authentic self. Know who you are and what you represent. Family comes before your job. Getting lost is the key to finding answers, so explore the unknown while you can. Define what success is for you personally and professionally, and follow your own path. Think about what you want to be remembered for and put your time and energy into that. Invest in a coach.

Hire Well and Communicate Clearly

Hire people who are curious and hard workers. Pedigree does not matter. You learn on the job, and most professionals work in fields where no one has figured everything out yet. The curious ones are the ones who will. When hiring, look for reasons to say no.

Bottom line up front. Frame strategic thinking simply and use tested approaches like the Minto Pyramid Principle, with situation, complication and resolution. 2 The person who writes down the thing has tremendous power. A consultant's job is to make the complex simple. Before beginning any project, make sure everyone understands the problem to be solved. Always consider the long term, because a decision may feel right in the moment but could be out of bounds if you consider the impact longer term. 3

Play the Long Game and Lead by Example

Habits create excellence, and excellence is a habit. Be grateful for feedback and stay humble enough so people are willing to give it. People will not remember all the things you said yes to, but they will remember the things you said you would do and did not do. Build a solid foundation in learning before you try to grow too quickly. Developing people is one of the best uses of your time. It takes patience, but the payoff is immense. Always prep for the next job.

Consider the three V's of leadership: vision, values and voice. Vision means defining a

future picture of success and framing a strategy that achieves it. Values means consistently demonstrating respect, accountability and trust to empower those around you. Voice means speaking clearly and listening intently, conveying what, so what and now what. It is not enough to solve a client's problems. You have to convince them to accept the answer and then own it.

Iterate and Some Final Wisdom

Progress over perfection. In technology, this often means shipping the feature even if it is not perfect and learning how people use it. There are no mistakes, only lessons, and lessons will be repeated until learned. Focus feedback on the future, not the past.

The collected wisdom distills to a few personal principles. Work smart and find what gives you flow. Be useful, create massive value and take your share. Make the boring more boring by automating, delegating or deleting. Strategy is finding your unfair advantage. Strategy is what you say no to. Wisdom is taking your own advice. Winning.

- 1Peter Drucker Quotes
- 2The Pyramid Principle
- 3Minto Pyramid Principle

Summary

Wise words from professionals distill to a few themes: listen actively, create value, be yourself and play the long game. Develop people, iterate toward progress and lead by example. Strategy is finding your unfair advantage and having the conviction to act on it.