

WINNERS DON'T CHEAT

A short eBook on setting goals and forming good habits
when leaving school

By Sean Jacobs

*Author of **Winners Don't Cheat: Advice for
young Australians from a young Australian***

HOW DO I GET MY KID TO DO THIS?

This is the number one question I get from parents.

I had a 'slow start' both in and out of school. I suffered from poor grades, displayed poor habits, didn't know exactly what I wanted to do and would often be distracted.

I failed to get into university on my first go and showed no serious promise – at least compared to some of my other schoolmates – in building a career and becoming a success.

But I turned that around.

I formed good habits and, going from strength to strength, slowly achieved all of the goals I had secretly begun setting for myself.

'I can't get them to be interested, or to do anything!' is a common complaint I hear from parents.

Importantly, my book – [*Winners Don't Cheat*](#) – is not full of rules, directives or lists. In fact, out of 20,500 words I mention the word 'should' less than 10 times.

In this very short Ebook I want to share with you some of the points that might help nudge a similar turnaround in the young people you may know. If you're a young person reading this well done. You're off to a good start.

As we can appreciate, saying you 'should do this' or 'should do that' to a young person probably won't work well.

This is even true for young professionals, parents and adults (even for me now it can at times be a stretch!).

In fact, on the basis that I *should* get better, I can remember setting up all kinds of rules for myself when I was in high school. But they soon fell flat.

WHAT WORKED FOR ME WAS THE POWER OF CREATING GOOD INSTINCTS VERSUS SETTING UP HARD AND FAST RULES.

Creating good instincts versus hard and fast rules.

And tapping into these instincts means exploring some of the ideas around:

- **KNOWING BETTER**
- **EMULATING ROLE MODELS**
- **CONSTANTLY 'DOING' AND**
- **SHOWING GRIT.**

KNOWING BETTER, DOING BETTER

“If you don’t know better, you can’t do better.”

- John Hope Bryant

There will always be something or someone that inspires young people.

The most tricky task is finding out what that is.

Granted, it’s difficult. The gaming console and the relentless pressures of social media create a fog around what person your child looks up to or what experience may have struck a chord with them.

But it might be noticing their favourite movies, the characters they admire, the books they’ve read (even if it is only one or two), or what music they listen to.

These small things can inspire ideas around the broader world. It can introduce young people to the attitudes, priorities and behaviours to get better.

'The best way of attaining enduring success is to find a role for yourself where your skills fit the opportunity.'

- Steve Redgrave, five-time Olympic rowing gold medallist

Once here you can start to orient toward finding your aptitude. Are you better at numbers over English? Or is it the other way around? Some other questions to prompt them are:

- **WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR FREE?**
- **WHAT COMES EASILY TO YOU BUT HARDER TO OTHERS?**
- **HOW DO OTHERS VIEW YOUR TALENTS AND GIFTS?**
- **WHAT DO YOU LOVE TO DO?**

'Knowing better' is different for everyone.

I wouldn't sweat if not having exact answers. But it's useful to start planting the ideas at an informative time while in high school.

'Knowing better' is different for everyone. When in school, 'knowing better' for me meant going to a small conference with other young people from all over the globe and sharing ideas on current and international affairs – areas that appealed to me over science or maths.

It was such a small thing but it came at an informative time.

EMULATING ROLE MODELS

This then prompted me to look at the people I admired in that field.

I looked at the Condoleezza Rices and Colin Powells of the world – people in vogue at the time. I looked at what they were doing when they were my age and noticed they didn't waste their time. They painstakingly crafted their successes one step at a time.

They placed a strong premium on setting goals, working hard and achieving results. So I figured I'd better do the same.

'Everybody needs to see a version of themselves do something,' says the comedian Chris Rock, 'it's just good, it makes you feel like you can do it.'

It's a great point. But I caution that young people shouldn't find role models that only look like themselves.

Don't seek out role models that only look like you.

My key observation, after looking back on my 20s, is to seek role models from a variety of sectors, which enables you to cast your net of motivation a lot wider.

From time to time I've heard many young people immediately disqualify themselves by saying that university or various careers are 'not for us' – a view based entirely on complexion or gender and current capability over any desire or will.

They don't see anyone that looks like them in a certain profession and sense 'I can't do that'.

I know because I've been there.

But there are literally tens of thousands of role models to choose from.

Personally, for example, I motivated myself by looking at figures like not only Neville Bonner – Australia's first indigenous parliamentarian – but the logic of neuroscientists like Sam Harris, the perseverance of political leaders like John Howard, the written words of soldiers like Patrick Leigh Fermour, and the self-education of reformers like Paul Keating.

Never does a role model have to look like you, or be from your sector, to help inspire your own path to achievement and success.

CREATING INSTINCTS, NOT RULES

Knowing better, and having an appreciation of your role models, creates an instinct for young people to do better and form good habits.

To get better at writing, for example, I read more. To get experience, I joined clubs and put my hand up for activities.

This wasn't due to any rules or following a regimen. It was driven by the instinct that these were elements I needed to endure to get better, build experience and improve.

Importantly, because I had realised this myself, it was an organic process – there was no one telling me to do it or tapping me on the shoulder. Should I work some more on my essay or should I pack up the books and call it quits? Should I hit the pavement and go for a run or put my feet up? 'Knowing better' means giving the right answers to these questions.

In many ways it reminds me of the difference between 'trying' and 'doing'. As Stanford's Bernie Roth [explains](#):

"SO IF YOU'RE TRYING TO DO SOMETHING, IT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT HAPPEN, AND IF YOU GET AN OBSTACLE IN THE WAY, IT WILL PROBABLY STOP YOU AND YOU WON'T GET IT TO HAPPEN. IF YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING, NOTHING IS GOING TO STOP YOU. THE OBSTACLE, IF YOU GET IT, YOU'RE GOING TO FIGURE OUT A WAY AROUND IT, AND YOU'RE GOING TO ACTUALLY HANDLE IT, AND THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE."

ENOUGH LAPS TO SWIM THE EQUATOR

So far I've shown that instincts and habits form from 'knowing better' and studying role models.

The last piece of the puzzle is preparing for the grind.

Some of the lessons of hard work I share in my book:

- The swimmer Mark Spitz – the Michael Phelps of his day – **SWAM ENOUGH LAPS OF THE POOL TO COVER THE DISTANCE OF THE EQUATOR.**
- Daley Thompson, the decathlon legend, famously quipped that he **TRAINED ON CHRISTMAS DAYS** because he 'knew his opponent wasn't.'
- Tiger Woods just **HITS GOLF BALLS FOR FIVE HOURS A DAY** (on top of an already maniacal training routine).
- Mozart, who we all thought was a child prodigy, **WROTE MUSIC THE WAY ANY ORDINARY PERSON DOES.** As Geoff Colvin explains in *Talent Is Overrated* "surviving manuscripts show that Mozart was constantly revising, reworking, crossing out and rewriting whole sections, jotting down fragments and putting them aside for months or years."
- And who can forget Winston Churchill's famous line where, standing on the edge of history, he told the British people that '**I HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER BUT BLOOD, TOIL, TEARS, AND SWEAT.**'

A QUICK FINAL NOTE ON FAILURE

My final brief point is that failure is part of success or taking on anything worthwhile.

It is a hard lesson, and one that never seems to get any easier.

The sooner young people become acquainted with it the better.

And if you've formed sound habits and instincts, aligned with your aptitude and skills, drawn lessons from a range of role models, and recognised that hard work doesn't stop, then you're much better prepared for the future than many others.

I hope you've enjoyed my free short eBook. Please see the next page to see where you can find out more lessons, and how you might be able to fuel your own turnaround at a critical point in life.

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BUY THE BOOK

For more details or to buy a copy of Sean's book please [click here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Jacobs is a security specialist, having worked for Australia's inaugural National Security Adviser and led security planning for major events including the 2018 Commonwealth Games and G20 2014 Leaders' Summit.

A former national water polo champion, he has also worked as a senior ministerial adviser and for the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, and the United Nations and the Australian aid program in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. He is a graduate of Griffith and Macquarie Universities.

TESTIMONIALS

"For a young man, Sean Jacobs has achieved an enormous amount, so it's not surprising that he has maturity and insight beyond his years. Everyone can take something from the many digestible lessons within this book."

- John Eales, most successful captain in the history of Australian rugby.

"This young man is 'the real deal'. He is articulate, interesting, and inspirational."

- Queensland Community Forums.

LISTEN AND GET IN TOUCH WITH THE AUTHOR

Sean currently hosts [The Jacobs Podcast](#) – a podcast aimed at creating better individuals. A discussion on the book can be found [here](#).

Sean's website can be found at www.seanjacobs.com.au.