

URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/?post_type=snippet&p=56343

Stanford's Tina Seelig asks Harrison Ford and Conservation International CEO M. Sanjayan the question at the heart of her bestselling book "What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20." Ford, a member of the environmental organization since its inception, describes how he should've seized more opportunities in college but eventually discovered his gift. Sanjayan also talks about the importance of storytelling, especially to entrepreneurs.



Transcript

- My last question to both of you is one I like to ask.. I'd like each of you to go back a couple of decades, to visualize yourself when you were a student in school, and think about what you wish you knew when you were 20.. (scattered giggling from audience) (Harrison Ford sighing) (audience laughing) - I was a desperately poor student, very difficult time in my life, and I regret deeply that I didn't take advantage of the opportunity.. This is what you might expect from your elders, but it's true.. I didn't really discover my utility in college.. Towards the end of my college years, I began to understand that I had, what moved me, might be potentially useful to me.. I found a community in storytelling, and that's what eventually became my life's work.. So that's a pretty short story.. (laughing) - When I was 20, I was trying to convince my parents or fool them into thinking that I was in med school.. (laughing) When I had really no intention of going that route..

You know, I grew up in West Africa, and my parents encouraged my hobby, which was a love for nature and being outdoors and following things around, but they always saw it as a hobby.. We'd get David Attenborough's original Life on Air series on VHS tapes, and I'd watch that whole thing, and I would kind of say, I wanna do that, and they'd say, quite literally, "That's for white people." In my language, but that's what they would say, and they were fine encouraging it as a hobby, and around the age of 20, I started realizing that there might be something that I could do productively to follow this passion that I was sort of developing, and kind of go into it, all in.. So it was a really interesting time where I was literally like taking classes just to send those grades in, and then just go do something else.. What I would do differently, if I could go back and do it again, you know, I'd pay a lot more attention in college.. Guarantee you that.. Like it's just amazing how little, like I actually got out of 20 something years of education.. I could do that today in like a year.. All of that, you could actually do, like I can't understand what I spent all my time doing.. They're amazing.. But here's some things I would've done a little differently..

Communications.. So like kind of Harrison said, obviously he went about that in a very different and profound way.. Being able to tell a story is a really important thing for an entrepreneur to have.. And if you see some of the people, particularly around here, who made these amazing changes, and they've convinced you that you could do something that no one else could, it's through that power of communication.. I would've taken it more formally.. I learned it just accidentally, and that would've been something I would've done more.. I would've probably gone harder into statistics, because understanding it helps you understand the world in a very unique way, and then I probably would have, well those are the two things.. I would really lean in heavy on the stats side, I would've leaned in very heavy on the comm side.. Writing or speaking, or whatever you take, don't underestimate how powerful that is, even, maybe especially for engineers...