

# Advice to a Younger Self

Perspective on People:  
By Karen Friedman

I take nothing for granted. When I left my twenty plus year career as a broadcaster, I was scared. Not about the future, but about losing perspective. As a reporter, I spent my fair share of hours with people born into less fortunate circumstances than myself.

I learned so much from them. Humility. Honesty. Tenacity. Survival.

So when I chose to leave broadcasting and forge a new path nearly eighteen years ago, I feared that not spending time in not-so-nice neighborhoods with people who experienced the world differently than me might turn me into someone who doesn't appreciate what they have as much as they should.

I know a lot of people born and raised in great environments that go on to do great things. Partly because they have the means and partly because of their fortunate birth canal circumstances.

Who we are born to often dictates who we become. Yes, there are thousands of stories about people who overcome the odds and they should be applauded because those odds were stacked against them at birth.

Years ago we spent Christmas dinner with the family of close friends. One of the relatives was a prominent surgeon at a pediatric hospital. He remarked that we are all born into this world equally. I disagreed and unfortunately a holiday argument ensued. He said each and every one of us has an equal chance to pave our own way. I argued that being born to a crack addict in a crime ridden neighborhood with no nurturing, mentors or money does not afford people the same access to education, contacts and opportunities. He said a person's desire to achieve is in their DNA. I said I was glad he wasn't my doctor.

I never forgot that conversation because he was the person I feared becoming. Someone entitled. Someone sheltered. Someone self-absorbed. Someone unaware and unappreciative of people's differences.

Today I run a business. Fortunately we do well, but not a day goes by that I fear the phone might not ring or the deal might dissolve. When I share my insecurities with close colleagues, they chuckle and reassure me that at this point my career; I have nothing to worry about.



**Karen Friedman** is a professional communication coach, speaker and Chief Improvement Officer at Karen Friedman Enterprises. Her techniques to help business professionals become more powerful persuasive communicators have been applied on four continents. She is the author of the best-selling book *Shut Up and Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners* (Praeger). Also a regular columnist for American Business Journals, her columns appear nationwide. Friedman was formerly an award-winning television news reporter and is the winner of Enterprising Women's prestigious Woman of the Year award.

[www.KarenFriedman.com](http://www.KarenFriedman.com)

If I didn't worry, that might be true. But I believe those who worry work harder. Those who fear failure never take success for granted. Those who stagnate and accept the status-quo stop moving forward.

Sometimes I contemplate how I got here. It's fun and really cool. We have great clients. The calendar is full. But when self-appreciation begins to run amok, I try to dial it back and take a serious reality check.

I was born to great role models who provided, nurtured, guided and offered opportunities that others may not have received. Yes, I worked hard. I've been employed since I was fourteen. I still work tirelessly for every nugget of success. Maybe that is part of my DNA but I take nothing for granted.

Like many business owners, I've gone through dry times and scary times. But I'm blessed to do what I love and call it work. I could be working at any number of unsatisfactory jobs earning basic wages and struggling to make ends meet. I could be unemployed. Or sick. Or alone. But I'm not. That's something I'll never take for granted because the moment I do, I may not appreciate those who have so much less.

If I understood then what I appreciate now, this is the advice I would give a younger self embarking on a career:

- Treat everyone the same. Realize that we are born to different circumstances but everyone has something to offer the world.
- Stay true to yourself. Surround yourself with people who share your values.
- Follow your passion. If that means getting a night job to allow you to do what you love, do it. It will never feel like work.

- Look for ways to constantly grow and improve so you can share your knowledge with the world and become someone who is focused on helping others.

Finally, take nothing for granted and you will always appreciate where you came from and where you're going.

**Karen Friedman** is a professional communication coach, speaker and chief improvement officer at Karen Friedman Enterprises ([www.karenfriedman.com](http://www.karenfriedman.com)). She is the author of "Shut Up and Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners". @karenfriedmane