20 Somethings For 20-Somethings

You're a gift to us all – and we want to see you succeed.

By Dan Wilt

I love 20-somethings. All 3 of my children, at the time of this writing, are 20-somethings. Many of my nieces and nephews are 20-somethings. Some of the people I have created with, worked with, and laughed with the most are 20-somethings. Here are my top 20 encouragements to help you succeed in life.

I was 20-something once, at another time, in another place. And because I love the 20-somethings I see and hear in person and online – their *passion*, *insight*, and *hopefulness* – I want to offer some straight ideas from an older head to see you grow as a person through this quickly passing season of your life.
Not all will apply to you, but listen for the ones that might. [Disclaimer, my own children and extended family members exemplify the best of these traits and growth – I'm quite proud of them.]

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All mature people want to hear what is awesome about them, and what needs work to avoid future pain. If I'm wrong on either side of that equation in the following, please read with grace and an open heart and mind. If just one thing applies to you, I hope it helps you build a more beautiful life.

1. **You're passionate – keep it directed in the right ways.**
   Saying yes to everything squanders your focus. Learn to say no. Passion and Restraint must walk hand in hand. Pick your passions well, and spend your energies wisely.

   Not every cause is yours to own; don't steal the ground that is holy under someone else's feet just because you can offer opinions and have a louder voice. It just creates noise so no one can hear your best – or their best.

2. **You're opinionated – let wisdom lead your posting and influence.**
   Wisdom comes with age, reflection, study, compassion, listening to all sides and perspectives, refusing to hate those who don't think like you, and seeing your life as a gift rather than as a right. Take your time responding to challenging issues, online or in person.

   Weigh your words, know that your 12 year old Facebook friend and your 75 year old neighbor is listening. It's okay – you're better, honed, more circumspect perspective will be worth the wait – for everyone.

3. **You're angry – understand that your grandparents are, too.**
   Your grandparent's political views frustrate you? Get in line. Mine did, too. It's okay. It's a blip on the life screen, and your relationship with them is the most important thing. But guess what, in most cases, it's not their world they're actually trying to preserve. It's *yours*.

   They only know how to leave the best of the world they knew (where they saw war, and hate, and love, and the best of community – when people mowed each others lawns rather than ignored neighborly needs). Are their views laced with prejudice? Probably. But so is yours (think about that). First listen to them, find common ground and goals, then talk *with* them, not *at* them, toward mutual discovery. Even if they're not listening. Hang in there for the duration.

4. **You're busy – remember that busy-ness doesn't make you productive.**
   All my 20-something loved ones and friends are "busy." They have lots of things to "do." And if they don't have something to do, there is always something to do in their hand (see the next one). Learn to love solitude. Love silence. Love prayer, and considering what your place in the world is.

   Turn off your devices, and just say no to your FOMO (fear-of-missing-out). Busy-ness is not sustainable, and won't heal you or the world. Commit to some long-term project that takes years. Really. Like Mike did with the Sistine Chapel. Why not?

"Commit to some long-term project that takes years. Why not?" Dan Wilt

5. **You're hooked – own that your phone is your psychological battleground.**
   Sorry. It's as much scientific fact as a solar eclipse. Your brain grew up electro-neurologically addicted to the rush of the digital interface, and, secondarily, on the film, tv, and music psychological endorphin kick. You hold the power in your hand – literally.

   Turn off your phone all night long. Put it in another room while you sleep. Take phone breaks for an hour a day; doubt if emergencies will happen in that time. It's important to be free. You'll know you're free when you've done it – not thought about it or talked about it – but *done* it.

6. **You're activists – just because you can stand for something, doesn't mean you need to.**
   I love the activist posture of this generation. I'm so grateful for it. But social media makes us feel like if we talk about it, we're doing something about it. So I see 20-somethings talking about every. single. thing. that. crosses. their. feed. Resist it.

   You have a purpose in life. Target. Focus. Find out what your calling is, then become narrow in your growth. And quieter online. We'll pick up with you later, in your area of focus.

7. **You're answerers – but the best answer is an even more beautiful question.**
   When children are small, they are curious and ask lots of questions. As they grow, less. Then, as I see today, I rarely hear good questions coming from my age group that reveal a heart willing to listen, learn, and discern vital decisions and perspectives (my own family members excluded – lots of good question-asking there).

   Ask your parents questions. Ask your grandparents, and aunts, and uncles good questions. It's okay if you disagree. You don't even have to tell them that. Resist the information immersion *out there*; it's not training you to critically think. And critical thinking skills are raw survival skills. Ask questions. A lot of them.

8. **You're young – learn from the wisdom served to you on a silver platter.**
   The last one leads to this. Who has been put in your life to be a mirror, a reflection point, an answerer from another point of view or experience? Family members are often there for a purpose, and old people are dying without passing on their wisdom because the youngers have written them off over their social or political views.

   It's dark. It's wrong. It's evil. Let's all ask questions, and not be afraid of answers. Listen behind what they're saying, and try to empathize with their position (see #10).

9. **You're over-stimulated – find ways to calm your spirit and focus your design.**
   I use the Daily Examen of Ignatius of Loyola (see here) to keep me quieted, focused, thankful, silent, prayerful, and hopeful. It is rescue and resuscitation to my mind and heart multiple times a day. You're being hit by data at every turn.

   Use a tool like the Examen, and get outside for a walk *without headphones*, music, or podcasts. Listen to the world around you. Really *listen*. And nurture your faith. You'll need it.

10. **You're self-absorbed – we all are; empathy starts with the second question.**
    Buckle-up. We're all self-absorbed, on some level. Here's what I've learned. It is asking the second question in a conversation that teaches us empathy. When we ask a second question, we become the *listener*, and the person being asked the question becomes the *one listened to*.

    In other words, you ask a friend, "How are you?" They answer. Often, we then talk about how we are, how the world is, and what we're doing tonight. *Empathy dies there; and so do deep friendships*. Let's try again. "How are you?" They answer. "Man, that's tough. How have you been dealing with it?" Woah. Empathy practice just began. Try it. All day today. Even try 3 questions – but that's crazy talk.

"It is the second question in a conversation that teaches us empathy." - Dan Wilt

11. **You're optimistic – learn to see the weeds that are killing the flower bed.**
    What I love about 20-somethings I spend time with is their endless optimism about the world. They hate certain things (remember, hate always looks worse on someone else than it does on us), but overall, they believe things can be better. You're missional. I love that. It inspires me.

    Here's the rub. Not everyone is *right*. Not everything everyone believes is *okay*. In fact, we are all believing things we *need* to believe are true (it's called self-deception). Weeds kill gardens; even societies and civilizations. Pay attention to both the flowers and the weeds in your own and others positions – even if they are your best friends.

12. **You're powerful – your gifts were not meant to be squandered in front of Netflix or Facebook.**
    My goodness, you are so gifted. And we need you. We need you to hone your skills (which takes years), to learn your craft (which takes years), and to become insightful and a good thinker (which takes years). Years are made of up months, weeks, days, hours, and moment-by-moment *decisions*.

    Time is disappearing currency, and we all spend it. Every week, some stats say we spend about 50 hours a week binge-watching Netflix series or laughing at YouTube videos. Guess what. You or I could have mastered an instrument. Become a scuba diver. Or conquered a mountain. Growing a few hours every week, put Netflix and media in the back seat while you become great at something.

13. **You're dangerous – power, misdirected and without accountability creates pain.**
    Ever see the scene in the *X-Men: The Last Stand* where Phoenix overtakes Professor Xavier? Just as he is about to be gone forever, he says to her, *"Don't let it control you."* Yes, the great poem by Marianne Williamson, *Our Greatest Fear*, reminds us that we are majestic creations and have been given raw power.

    But power that has little to no accountability to mitigate it? Power that lacks self-awareness, humility, and clarifying relationships? It's raw danger, to you and others. Be accountable. I promise, you'll win.

14. **You're sacred – your eyes, your face, your body, your heart, your gifts, are holy things.**
    Some say who you see in the mirror is the result of raw chance, nature taking its course and resulting in a person, with a personality. Hmm. You're too magical for me, and I hope, for you as well. As G.K. Chesterton said, "it's a magical universe."

    And you are magical, mighty, unique, precious, and remarkable. You were designed to be you, to feel, to think, to love, to care, to create, to play, to imagine. You're a gift from God to us. You really are. Be the best gift you are, and can be. You are loved, by God, and by those of us who see who you are.

15. **You're mortal – your limitations should be honored or pain is around the corner.**
    Everyone, we're told, thinks in their teens and twenties that they will live forever. We take chances, we do risky things. The challenge is that I know 20-somethings who did dumb things to their own bodies, to relationships, and to their future (broken relationships, addictions, lack of health), because they *could*.

    Just because you *can* do something, doesn't mean you *should*. Trust me; the way you do relationships now will impact your marriage. What you eat or take now, is forever changing your body. Show up to your limits, and make good decisions that forge good habits.

16. **You're discoverers – lean into your curiosities, and get beyond social issues.**
    Caring for the coral that is being destroyed around the world is important; not just sounding off about racism. You're unique, and we need you to take your place. If Facebook and Instagram are distracting you, and the culture or news is driving the agenda of your life, you will be a reactionary person forever.

    Stop it in its tracks now. What moves you? What might need your skills and call? The news won't tell you that.

17. **You're trailblazers – show us how it's done.**
    Seriously, I am so inspired by the 20-somethings around me I can often barely think straight. You are pioneers and trailblazers. What Steve Jobs or Nelson Mandela or Pope Francis or Marie Curie or Mother Theresa or Kerrie Walsh Jennings did for technology, compassion, faith, justice, physics, or athletics – you can do for something that matters.

    Why be shy? You have one life to live, and we only have one of you to show us the way. Lead us.

> "You have one life to live, and we only have one of you to show us the way. Lead us." Dan Wilt

18. **You're peacemakers – connect the human family in all its states.**
    It's a divided, polarized world out there. Hatred feels normal; who do you hate today that you feel justified in hating? Be a bridge-builder with your words and attitudes – even with those with whom you disagree (or don't like to talk to).

    Peacemaking is an art form that takes courage, patience, and a lifetime of devotion. Be about the long haul; you have the guts to do it. And just keep living the reality that we're all just different shades of brown, and that demonizing people because of race or their political views is dehumanizing no matter which side you're on.

19. **You're storytellers – tell the stories of your family line, not just your favorite coffee.**
    We need some help here. An entire generation is dying off without us documenting their stories because 1) we're not asking them, and 2) we're using our handheld technology to do other more interesting, self-

focused, and handy things.

Could you help my age group, as a family? Could you start to document the stories of your family members, in long-form or short form? Ask questions? Make videos? Make a website? Write a blog? Help us. You're native to the tech. We need you to use your superpowers to fix a severe human crisis that is about to happen – in your own family.

20. **You're photojournalists – document the world in photos, and honor people with facts.** Storytellers capture emotion, and the way things feel. Journalists capture facts, and the way things are (though facts can be relative, as brain science tells us we see what we *want* to see, hear what we *want* to hear, and believe what we *want* to believe [self-deception rears its ugly head again]).

    Would you share more objective facts through your media, and less how you feel about what someone else said? We need more objectivity, elusive as it is. Honor us with facts and good research on both sides of issues.

Imperfect and over-generalized as that list may be (maybe a few "somethings" were encouraging to you?), it comes from a heart filled with hope for you as a 20-something – and an ongoing joy that you are about to inspire us today.

We're cheering you on.

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Question: What is one phrase in this article that impacted you? Are there other ideas you would add?

Bio: Dan Wilt, M.Min. is an author, communicator, and innovative voice in the fields of Worship and the Arts. He is the creator of the Essentials In Worship Video Training Course for worship leaders and teams, and is the Founder of the 35K member WorshipTraining.com. Dan serves as the Director of Communications & Resources for Vineyard USA, and his ancient-future worship leadership blog offers weekly tools and team encouragements at DanWilt.com.

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