

# MY ADVICE TO A 16-YEAR-OLD ME



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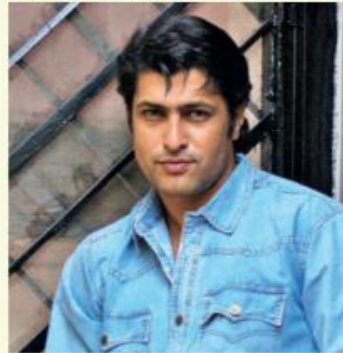
## DR MUFFAZAL LAKDAWALA SURGEON

At 16, I was torn between wanting to pursue my passion for cricket as a professional sportsman, and medicine. I chose to take up medicine, and went on to become the country's first bariatric surgeon. Looking back, I would advise my younger self to take the same risks. I believe that it is very important to take calculated risks, to not wait for things to happen, but to make them happen. With passion, you can make your own destiny. Over time, I realised that medicine was more than a career choice for me — it was my calling. To this day, I often take up challenging cases that many doctors and surgeons are unwilling to touch. I am often asked why I want to risk my reputation when I have already established myself. My reply is that I got into medicine to save lives. I know that I may not be successful all the time. But that does not mean that I should never try.

Today, I do find it hard sometimes to put on a brave face when things don't work out, especially when I have to deal with the constant glare of the media and social media. Criticism can be disheartening but should never cause you to lose faith in yourself and give up.



## SALIL ANKOLA CRICKETER AND ACTOR



My teen years were anything but normal. I was playing cricket for the country's Under-19 team and was very focused on being a successful sportsman. Today, I would advise my 16-year-old self to stay that way, to not lose focus and become distracted with parties and the spoils of fame, and to pursue my ambition with the same level of dedication and determination I started out with. I would tell myself to pay more attention to my physical fitness and become aware of the latest medical advancements to prevent injuries. At the age of 28, I developed a bone tumour in my shin, which was operated on by someone who had no business operating on anyone. Had I researched my options prior to getting that surgery and paid more attention to myself, I know that I would still have eight years of cricket left in me. I would also remind myself that if I worked hard at that age, I would spend the rest of my life like a champion.

## ALOK KEJRIWAL ENTREPRENEUR

Coming from a business family, I dived into the world of entrepreneurship at the age of 16. It was a huge gamble and fortunately, it turned out to be the right decision for me. Looking back however, I would encourage my younger self to spend more time studying. Entrepreneurship can be very demanding and can also be very lonely — as a teenager, I would often feel miserable about not being able to spend time with my friends. The fact that I was so young also often meant that I was not taken seriously. This was quite frustrating for me.

In India, there is also a lot of pressure from our parents to do things a certain way. There is very little respect for passion. Instead, a lot of the advice we receive is based on a vague sense of what is good for us. The bottom line is, anything that makes us happy is good for us.

If I could go back in time, I would remind myself that entrepreneurship is rooted in discipline. It is important to develop reference points, to choose the right mentors and brace yourself for a lot of hard work. There are no immediate rewards. I also recommend that all aspiring entrepreneurs be prepared to learn new skills on the go.



## SHOMBIT SENGUPTA ARTIST



At 16, I visited Kolkata from the refugee camp I was raised in. The big city, with its bright lights, tramways and large buildings began to tinge my dreams and ambitions. Although everyone advised me that there was no future in art, I convinced my mother to enrol me in Kolkata's Indian College of Arts in 1969. A classmate invited me to the American Library. This was my first glimpse of the Western world. I remember my father telling me about how a painter's entire perspective on colour had changed when he went to France. At the library, I discovered that this artist was Vincent van Gogh. I knew then that I had to go to France.

I came from a very poor family, but art made me optimistic. My first job was as a sweeper at a lithographic print shop. Meeting artists such as Jean Carzou and Leonor Fini opened my mind. Public education in France was free; I enrolled at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, selling my art to support myself. Now my work is exhibited at top galleries. If I were to meet my 16-year-old self now, I would encourage him to follow his passion, to never bow down to the pressure to conform and to never stop dreaming.

## HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR ARCHITECT

I wanted to be an architect even before I knew what the term meant. I began creating designs for forts, tanks and sections of buildings while still in school. As a teenager, I wanted nothing more dearly than to study abroad and come back to India, where I could apply my skills to develop our country. That sense of national pride inspired me to start my



practice here. I kept reinventing myself — every six months or so, I did something new. That kept me ahead of the race and let me experiment. Several things I talked about years ago are only receiving attention now. I am happy to see that there is much more awareness about the environmental impact of design and minimising wastage now.

However, there is a pressing need today to be more progressive in our approach. We must balance our environmental concerns with our requirement for urban development. We must stop talking about development and start doing what needs to be done.

Looking back, I would encourage myself to keep experimenting fearlessly and to keep championing the causes that I believe in.