



Ruth Gawthorpe

Sometimes you have to break the rules

Dear younger Ruth,

You have an undeniable entrepreneurial spirit. You have a desire to be independent, a love of people and an unorthodox approach.

I can't say whether not going to university was the right or wrong decision, but looking back, all the opportunities we had because of it led me to where I am now. From our first careers class reading about jobs, to the HR training that taught us about economics, it was all giving us the foundation we needed to run our own business.

So, follow that spirit because it will lead you down the right path, and take these small pieces of advice with you:

Sometimes you have to break the rules. Even back when you were working at Woolworths, you didn't want to be bound by rules. You saw that the new pick and mix wasn't selling, so you did something about it. You got an A board (which wasn't allowed) and fluorescent cards (which you weren't supposed to use) and guided people towards the stall. And it worked so well they couldn't figure out how the sweets were selling out.

But, because it wasn't in company branding, you had to stop it.

Looking back, this is when I decided I didn't want to be part of the corporate world. I wanted to trial, test and do things that were a little unorthodox.

Actually, I decided this several times. Later in life you'll achieve what felt like an impossible transformation for HCL and this is when you'll realise it's time to set up your own business.

So always question the norms. Ask 'why not do it like this'? It means taking a big leap of faith, but you'll be amazed what can come from your ability to see things differently.

Every job is a learning opportunity. Doing all those temp jobs while you're a Mum will pay off. You'll do it because you want to look after your son, but you were actually working out the business models and how they operated (although you won't realise at the time). You'll find it fascinating.

It'll teach you to roll up your sleeves, to get to know things by doing, and to pull up the rug and really understand how things work so you can help to fix them.

It'll also give you confidence. All this time spent honing your skills means that when you get into HR, you'll climb the ranks at warp speed.

Trust your people. From the moment you were given a job prospectus at school and 'personnel officer' caught your eye, you've had an interest in people.

I've always loved that people see things differently to me. So, when you're hiring, don't look for mirror images of yourself. Look for people that can bring something different to the table. Know your weaknesses but don't let them weigh you down. Instead, surround yourself with people who have those skills and that you can rely on to help you.

And when you're working with people, try not to over control. If you can win hearts and minds great things happen in a business. Let people flex their own muscles and do it their way.

Get people to trust you. Getting clients will be hard as a transformation business owner. A service is intangible, so you need to show them the ABCD of trust.

A, that you're able, that you're capable of doing what they need.

B, that you're believable, that you have the credibility and willingness to do it.

C, that you're compassionate, that you can put yourself in the shoes of the client and understand what they need.

And **D**, that you can be depended on to follow through and deliver quality solutions.

This is not easy. It takes time and it's hard work and, sometimes, you might not enjoy it - you can't stand networking or small talk, but it's a burden a CEO must take on.

Nevertheless, don't be afraid to speak out. Ignore group think and follow your own voice. It's what gets the attention of many people throughout your journey (plus, you'll build a huge following on LinkedIn by being your unorthodox self).

On that note, look out for the people who will see and help you: John Cook, who will give you your first break into HR; Andrew Pearce, who will think you're a corporate spy but eventually acknowledges your drive for success; or your partner Pete, who will give you the stability you need to go after your ambitions.

Think ahead and adapt. You've always been good at anticipating the changes ahead of you, which will be an important trait as an entrepreneur. It means that when Covid-19 happens, you'll already have been doing smart working for years. You know only too well that work happens in brains, not offices. So, know when to stick with your ideas, just like back in Woolworths.

But you've also got to be constantly learning and changing. If you see something isn't working, then quickly learn from it and move on in another direction. Analyse, get to the root cause, then use your creativity to build back up again and find the right solution.

You're on a lifelong learning journey so try and learn something new every day. Proper, practical stuff you couldn't get at school. Whether it's reading an article or listening to a podcast, the more you're learning the more intelligently you can talk about a subject. It will give you a growth mindset that supports adaptability.

Don't underestimate yourself. You may doubt your capabilities at times, but I'm proud to have proved you wrong.

You're conscientious, creative, optimistic and tenacious. You'll show yourself that you're wonderful with people and at delivering transformation.

In 2023, you will have three businesses. You'll be helping businesses work better and improving people's quality of life. You'll become a leading smart working expert working with some brilliant companies.

And, most importantly, you'll try to be an excellent role model to your son and your granddaughters.

This is what you will be most proud of. The next generation is so important and you're trying to change things for people now, but also for them.

So, keep listening to yourself and speaking up. Keep pushing business leaders, workforces and government bodies to adapt and grow.

Believe in yourself, because you were always meant to be an entrepreneur.

From your older self,

Ruth Gawthorpe

About Ruth Gawthorpe

Ruth is a passionate advocate of Smart Working on a mission to create a more inclusive society. She is CEO of The Smart Working Revolution, Programme Director at The Change Directors and NED at The Pioneer Group, with decades of experience working in people, transformation and change.



Read more CEO journeys and scaleup marketing insights [here](#).

