



The power of the young

Jill is an entrepreneur. She is a big thinker with big ideas. She is also an idealist. She imagines a world in which companies make their impact on society their primary bottom line and the financial results that follow as their second bottom line. She is smart and articulate and her ideas are really good, but she's struggling to get anyone to take her seriously.

What's the problem?

According to the companies that close the door on her, it's because she's only 24.

There is something about youth that the more experienced often forget and don't take advantage of - their passion. Passion is a valuable currency. Some are rich with it and some poor. Some trade it in over the course of their careers only to be left at the end of their lives with a big house and a fast car but no more passion. The youth, low on experience, are often rich in passion. More importantly, it is their passion that provides the necessary capital required to make the kind of progress that the financially rich can only look upon and drool.

Steve Jobs was 21 when he founded Apple. Mark Zuckerberg was 20 when he started Facebook. Michael Dell was 20 when his company built its first computer, Bill Gates was 20 when Microsoft became Microsoft. Larry Page and Sergey Brin were 25 when they founded Google and Richard Branson was only 22 when he opened Virgin Records. Everyone on this list was low on experience and even lower on cash when they started. All they had was an intense passion to pursue their visions and an ability inspire others to join them in their pursuit.

Horatio Nelson, the British admiral made famous for defeating Napoleon's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar, had an unusual habit when at sea. He would go to the bottom deck and spend time with his most junior officers. In those days, this was just not done...an admiral socializing with the youngest ranks? It was unheard of. But Nelson didn't go down to tell them a thing or two. He didn't go below deck to whip them into shape. Quite the opposite. He spent time with them to get something from them. To get something they had lots of, more than any of his ranking officers: unbridled passion and blind optimism...and Nelson loved it!



As we progress in our careers our passion has a tendency to wane. We get mired in the weeds. We become more concerned about benefits and compensation packages. We make safer and safer decisions for fear we may lose what we've worked so hard to get. Worse, we often forget why we started down the path in the first place. The young remind us why we started. They remind us of ourselves when we were their age. They are like a jolt of electricity that can recharge even the most beleaguered of devices.

Nelson spent time below deck to soak up this passion. He understood that it was the responsibility of the experienced to pass down their lessons to the inexperienced, so that, one day, they would become the great admirals of the seas. But he also understood that the passionate had a vital role to play in the system. Nelson wanted to hear their ideas, their dreams, their optimism. It kept him going. His ability to "stay young" was one of the reasons he became one of the greatest leaders in history - commanding astonishing loyalty from the young and the experienced alike.

To all those people who told Jill you're not interested in her ideas because she has no experience, may I remind you, that's not her job...it's yours. Your job is to hear the ideas you don't have and figure out how to make them happen. That's the value of experience. And, in the process, you may just achieve something great...just like you dreamed of when you were young.