
— **Opinion**

Jack Cowin's 13 lessons for life

Jack Cowin is 79, has made \$5 billion and has no plans to retire. Here are his 13 lessons for life.

October 10, 2021

Jack Cowin spoke to Rich List co-editor Julie-anne Sprague.

1. If you lose your health, nothing else matters

How much money would Kerry Packer have paid to get a new kidney? Include techniques such as meditation or physical training into your life to maintain your mental and physical health.

2. If you lose your integrity, no amount of success will be meaningful

Success will produce a hollow feeling when you look in the mirror. What would Alan Bond, Brian Quinn, and Laurie Connell say on this subject? What would they say is important to them today if they were around?

3. Control your own destiny

Most satisfied people I know have control over their lives and affairs. We are probably all seeking the independence to do what we want to, when and where we want to do it.

Ninety percent of the population are in jobs, activities or relationships out of economic necessity. They stay in a job they hate. Have a vision or dream of where you want to go. Develop your passion.

4. Be prepared to take some risks

Life is an adventure and a challenge. When you are young, you can afford to fail because you can start over again. When you are old, you need the stimulation.

5. But there are caveats to risk

Don't bet the farm Things go wrong with the best-laid plans. Spread the risk. In cricket terms, you don't have to swing for a six on all occasions. Singles and doubles will get you there. Don't underestimate the power of compound interest.

There is no shortage of good deals or ideas Don't fall in love with a business. Don't put yourself in peril chasing something.

The number one priority is survival The first job of a CEO is to make sure that the company stays in business and survives. Understand what threats can take you out of the game, and what decisions, if wrong, could be terminal.

Think through the worst-case scenario action plan Accept that without risk, and the possibility of failure, maybe success will be limited.

Don't wait until the dogs are barking at the door to do things Banks don't give out umbrellas when it's raining. When they pass around the bickies (\$) take some, as they probably won't be passing them when you want or need them.

6. Counterbalance the risk

Get some money out of a business that is risk or market adverse. Counterbalance the existing investment in your business. You will sleep better at night.

7. Keep some powder dry

Make sure you have an opportunity fund, or the capacity to raise money when the right deal presents itself. Be prepared to model, test and prove that people will pay real money for the product before a boots-and-all commitment. Take a step-by-step approach rather than putting it all on the nose to win.

8. Find a tolerant partner

You need a partner who can appreciate your search for success and fulfilment. Be good to your kids as they will be the ones checking you into the nursing home. It can be very unfulfilling trying to enjoy yourself when nobody else likes your company.

9. Never ever give up if you think you are right

Big companies operate on the basis that the little guy will fold. Showing up eliminates 85 per cent of the competitors who won't go the distance. The flip side of this is don't die on your sword in pursuit of mission impossible. Be prepared to cut your losses. As Kenny Rogers sang – you got to know when to hold them and when to fold them.

10. Laugh at yourself

Don't get caught up on your self-importance. Try to be humble even if you don't believe it. Be able to laugh at yourself.

11. Life is about dealing with people

You can solve the biggest problems if you can maintain a smile and a sense of humour. Try and surround yourself with smart people who complement your skills. Pay attention to the big stuff. Delegate the mundane. Delegate, but don't abdicate.

12. Focus

Learn to focus. Take a lesson from Warren Buffett and Bill Gates. Get a mainstream business that produces cash flow; be a rifle not a shotgun; the tax man helps share in losses instead of capital; beware of new girls, prettier theories and diversions.

13. Understand the business

And understand the fundamentals including market cycles. There have been three great bubbles: The paper deals of the mid-80s; the dot.com boom; and mid-2000 US housing fiasco.

And in the end, life is an adventure. It's all about the journey, not the destination.

“Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain but all the happiness and growth occurs while you are climbing it.” - Andy Rooney

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skin in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming ‘Wow! What a ride!’” - Hunter S. Thompson, *The Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman*.