

There's no substitute for experience

by BRIAN LOCKHART

A few years ago I was party to a conversation between a woman with a young child, and another woman who was around 30 years older.

I wasn't part of the conversation, I was an innocent bystander who happened to be in the same room. Although I did laugh out loud when the zinger was spoken.

The younger woman's baby was around a year old at the time.

In the course of conversation, the younger woman was explaining different things about being a parent and what you had to do for your child, as if the older woman had no clue what to do with a baby.

The older woman just smiled and nodded.

As the younger woman attended to the baby, she explained the proper way to care for the child, and why other things were important.

Finally the older woman, I guess, had enough, and politely said, "Yes, I know, I raised three of them myself."

For some reason, we all think we are the first to do something.

How many times has a teenager said, "You don't understand?" to a parent, when the teen is having a major crisis, like finding out a boy she likes talked to another girl?

Well, yes, the mother does understand, because the mother already went through all that when she was in high school.

How many times has a father discouraged his son from doing something, or at least issued a caution, because the father is thinking back to the time he did the very same thing ? and it could have ended in disaster?

Every generation thinks they are the first to do things.

Several years ago, I was working with a guy who had just graduated film school ? which, of course, meant he knew all there was to know about making a film.

For some reason, he felt the need to explain to me the proper technique for editing film, even though I had graduated film school 25 years earlier.

I resisted the urge to smack him across the head, and explained I did indeed know editing techniques.

There's no substitute for experience.

During the Vietnam war, when the U.S. military rotated personnel in on a yearly basis, a new Lieutenant who arrived to take over a platoon, was advised very strongly to listen to his experienced Sergeant. Even though the Lieutenant was an officer and in charge, it was the experience of the Sergeant that would keep them all from getting killed.

A smart new officer would follow that unwritten rule and take advice from the lower rank. A new officer who though he knew it all,

would likely end up dead and take some of his men with him.

I once met a triage nurse who had spent 30 years in the emergency room of a hospital. She had seen pretty much everything when it came to medical emergencies.

She explained that something as simple as a sore throat could actually be a symptom of something more serious. With all her experience, she knew the symptoms that would refer that person to the front of the line. A new doctor, fresh out of medical school, may think he knows it all, but in fact they would be wise to listen if that nurse made a suggestion.

Experience is something that can only be attained, by doing and learning something.

That's why you hire an experienced and qualified electrician when you need work done on the fuse box in the basement. You can try doing it yourself, with no experience, but you will most likely find yourself in real trouble, and end up calling a qualified person anyway.

Our society tends to see older people as no longer contributing to society. Yet, in the group of older people you see in the coffee shop you have no idea what they have accomplished in the past, and the knowledge they have.

Maybe one once ran a Fortune 500 company, while another spent 40 years as a merchant seaman, while another was a professional boxer.

I saw an interesting question on a web forum I frequent that asked, "If you could go back in time and give your younger self, some advice, what would it be?"

There were plenty of answers ? all from people who realized the experiences they have had in the past 20 or 30 years, would have greatly impacted their own future, if only they had known it at the time.

There's no substitute for experience.