**23 things I understand better at age 23**

*The past year has taught me much more than I imagined. It came with starting a first job, moving to a new place, and making new friends. Today I want to articulate some of those experiences.*

*Many of the things I've learned are not values or lessons. They are just ways of being. They help me go with the flow and accept the world for what it is. A few weeks ago after my 23rd birthday, I listed 23 things that I better understand a year later. Here they are.*

1. We carry ourselves alone through life. We are born alone and we die alone. Being alone is one of the strongest states of being. If you are comfortable being alone with yourself, you have won one of the toughest battles in life. There will be people who help and guide you along the way (friends or family or strangers), but they are not permanent. It's up to each of us to learn from them and move on.
2. Every conversation has something to teach us. Whether it is knowledge or just a test of patience. No one is a waste of time.
3. What you cannot control, you are better off accepting. Sometimes we find things about people that rub us the wrong way. We talk about them, make fun of them, or penalize their personality. What happened to understanding that every person is different? I've found myself happier when I observe their behavior, understand what I found annoying, laugh, and appreciate them for it.
4. People won't change 1) because you want them to change or 2) in the way you want them to. They will change when they realize. Until then, you may have to watch them trip over their own feet.
5. Working on yourself because then you don't have to work to accommodate other people. Once you learn what you like, what you want, and what you deserve, people with similar interests will gravitate towards you. Work on yourself and you won't have to work on meeting people that appreciate you and support you.
6. All feelings are temporary; good and bad feelings can be equally embraced. Good feelings remind you why you're here. Bad feelings want to teach you something. It's important to observe them, figure out why they are here, accept, and modify. The more you push them away, the faster and harder they come back. Instead of a "fight-or-flight" mechanism to the body's personal and very real feelings, try to "care-and-learn."
7. Showing someone you care could seem like a sign of weakness, but really, it makes you stronger. I tend to be guarded with my feelings. I don't want to intrude on another person's life with my affection. I don't like to be an inconvenience. But over the past year, I realized otherwise. I've been around people who care more about others than themselves. They compliment others and shower them with love. They also tend to be people who went through tough personal situations in their past. These people had the courage to survive because of how much they gave to others. In times of difficulty, the world around them came back to help. I'm not saying it is tit-for-tat, but sometimes it's how the world works.
8. There is a balance between in giving inwardly and outwardly. Care about your own thoughts, ideas, struggles, and happiness the way you'd care about your best friend's. Often we give and give to others and don't always give as much to ourselves. In other situations, we give to ourselves and neglect our friends. The lives of others affect and shape ours. Discover how to care for yourself and use that energy to care for others.
9. Cultivating honesty. It saves time. It applies to you, your personal relationships, and to your workplace. Albeit sometimes the truth must be communicated as a joke, it goes a long way to get it off your chest. If you can't provide the truth, give space between you and the situation. It feels amazing be just yourself in all your relationships. No hiding and no faking. It allows your mind to focus on other things.
10. Doing one thing at a time. This will forever be a piece of advice from my father. I struggle with single-tasking. Being on Facebook, Instagram, ThoughtCatalog.com, and a work email at the same time does not work. The email at work takes 20 extra minutes and I forgot why I was even writing it. Now, my goal has been to spend extra attention on one task for smaller amounts of time. It might take longer but at least my heart went into it.
11. Asking yourself how you feel (i.e., being your own therapist). Appreciating your mind and your body for what they provide and where they hurt. You need to live with you for the rest of your life. The least you could do is touch base with your feelings.
12. Becoming aware of possibility. The people you meet and the opportunities they provide can go a long way. Last week I met a financial adviser because it was a free service at my bank. Now I understand what all of that mail regarding my 401K is about. Put in the extra minute to take the small opportunities that come your way.
13. Enjoying the moment. This is a tough one. It's easy to always think about all the other things you have to do. Instead for a minute, enjoy the flavors of lavender and honey and coffee in your latte. Listen to your fingers tapping on your laptop keyboard. Notice the wrinkles in your friend's eyes when they laugh. Be present and attentive in the moment you're in. It'll be a lot more fun when your mind has some empty space it doesn't need to process.
14. Taking a minute to understand why you compared yourself to someone else today. It is a challenge to live up to the mantra of "don't compare yourself to others." So, don't. I think it's more important to understand why you did it. Does your friend look beautiful in a dress and you look average? Is your coworker a master in web development and you struggle with basics? I've compared myself to others without consideration to my feelings or to their story. It's quite possible that your friend picks dresses that suit her after years of trial-and-error, and your coworker spent months of practice on web development. Comparing yourself to what you see at face-value doesn't always make sense. Once you take a step back to ask yourself why, it's a step towards not comparing at all.
15. Living alone can teach a lot. The noises of others lessen and yours get louder. You get less caught up in the moment and learn how to within your means. You define how to spend your time and money. It's a process (sometimes you overshoot and other times you don't) and the freedom of consistent paychecks is liberating. But take a moment to be thankful, get the excessive spending out of your system, and start being reasonable. It's a learning process.
16. Being curious and asking questions can get you ahead in life. If nothing else, ask questions that challenge the status quo. Provide answers where you can, but asking can help others figure out why too.
17. Learning how to tend to basic necessities. I got a 10 min lecture from my coworker the other day on simple maintenance tips for my MINI Cooper. It was probably the best 10 minute lesson I've received. There will be times when my car scares me because I don't know what fluid I was low on. But it came down to checking the level of oil, coolant, and air in the tires every time I filled gas. It was that simple. Learn how to take care of the items you routinely use and they'll last a lot longer. Now I also happen to know more about tires than I'll ever need.
18. Laughing and not being afraid to tell your own jokes. Ask my friends and they'll tell you how unabashedly I tell mine. Laughter can cure things. I take the risk of offending someone every time, but I count on the fact that it brings joy, relieves stress, makes people feel better, and allows us to appreciate the world around us. A little bit of laughter can go a long way.
19. Expectations push you away. Expectations demand that you control the situation to reach the outcome you want. When you begin to let go of expectations for people and experiences, you try new things, appreciate all things equally, and connect to things that felt distant before. That said, setting goals can lead to expectations for your future. But put them aside until it's time to evaluate. Until then, explore, keep your options open, and stay free.
20. I believe we fall into tough situations to learn something about ourselves. Things that we were never forced to explore or uncover. Let me give you a small example. In the past few years, living in a different country from my family has put me in situations that were usually taken care of by my parents. Living alone, I am pulled down to the basic challenges that come with building a home and career for myself. But you know what, being by myself wouldn't have felt as complete and real if it weren't for the challenges. I am facing situations that I took for granted growing up. I believe each one of us faces mental, emotional, or physical challenges in life that no one but we can solve. At some time, we are meant to face the unanswered questions that we pushed away for later. All of the smaller obstacles along the way are preparation for the bigger questions.
21. Family (whether it's 2 parents, a spouse, or just yourself) might feel far away but they will be there when you need it. My parents live thousands of miles away but they are happy to wake up at 2am to talk about challenges I'm facing or what coffee to buy. They help me take care of myself. A small thank you to technology for making it possible.
22. I am getting better at appreciating the accomplishments of others. It feels great to see people close to me achieve their goals. It challenges me to set goals for myself in my professional and personal life. It makes me happy to see them happy.
23. Being 23 feels fantastic. I'm becoming open to new experiences, new people that teach me things, new wardrobe styles that make me look like an adult, and new ways to understand myself every day.

I think my cue to say goodbye, because 1) that was #23 and 2) Taylor Swift's song *22* just came on my speakers.