

The Best Students Stopped Trusting Their School Teachers

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Christopher Kalitin Blog (<https://ckalitin.github.io/posts/students-trusting-teachers/>)

Written in the style of [George Hotz](https://geohot.github.io/blog/jekyll/update/2026/04/24/positivity.html) (<https://geohot.github.io/blog/jekyll/update/2026/04/24/positivity.html>)

I'm currently reading Kelly Johnson's biography - the man who ran Skunk Works and designed the most advanced planes America, and hence the world, ever saw. As he grew up he jumped between many different things including being a football player, another thing, etc. but throughout his entire adolescence he always aspired to be an engineer. After an injury (explain more), he completely bought into university and seemed to completely trust his teachers and professors to shape him into the best engineer possible. He worked in the University of Michigan's air tunnel and ended up being hired at Lockheed due to his work there.

In contrast to this experience of trusting professors to put you on the best possible path forward, my elementary and high school friends never really trusted our teachers.

When I was in grade 7, I began to realize that I didn't believe my teachers were teaching me in a way that would maximize my future potential. A couple friends and I came to this conclusion around the same time. Some of our theories was that we wouldn't use most of what we were learning (not quite precise enough a statement) and that we were far better off learning things on our own that would be more directly applicable to our future careers (extremely corrent).

I've realized that what we really meant back then was that we didn't trust our teachers to teach us the most useful things for our future. Furthermore, sitting in a classroom all day surrounded by students capable of far less than us was certainly not the right path. This led us to the conclusion that we should not be optimizing for school at all. If we would optimize for school, we would end up in a suboptimal place in the future and not be maximally useful.

I'm not sure it was [always this way](https://x.com/keithwalkiewicz/status/2048405501948420501?s=20) (<https://x.com/keithwalkiewicz/status/2048405501948420501?s=20>). In the past students did seem to really trust their teachers - as Kelly Johnson seems to have done.

Interestingly, later in life Kelly Johnson seems to not have been a fan of "textbook theories." As Ben Rich was developing the A-12 under Kelly Johnson, he suggested using black paint (high emmissivity) on the exterior of the plane to reduce equilibrium temperature by 35 degrees. Kelly was against adding 100 lb more paint to the plane and dismissed this as "textbook theory." I read this and obviously throwing out emmissivity and energy balances is quite a stupid thing to do, run the trade instead. The next day Kelly realized he was wrong and Ben got a quarter from Kelly.

This is to say, maybe my understanding of education in the past is incomplete and it was always this way. However, it sounds like people like me used to have far more trust in their teachers than I do now.

Note that I'm optimizing for me. In the past I've said I'm optimizing for 'people like me' far too much. I'm actually just optimizing for me and everyone should be like me because I'm better than everyone.

I'll raise my kids to be exactly like me because I'm a great man to aspire to become. My kids will never have to question their faith in their teachers because I'll be their primary teacher and they'll always have faith in me, deep down if nothing else.

My kids will never be in some public school where the teacher is optimizing for the lowest common denominator student. My kids will never stoop so low as to be in such a situation, they'll learn from me and who I know is best to teach them.

Anything else is wishing a worse life on my children. If my parents pushed harder for me to learn more useful things from a young age I would have ended up a better man. They didn't and the only thing I can do now is to make sure my kids don't have the same experience. My sons will learn chess at 2, they'll learn assembly at the same age I was struggling with long division. What amazing things they'll do.

*"The greatest blessing a man can receive in life is to have a great father
And whether or not he has such a father, the greatest gift he can give to his own children is to be one for them."*

- Ancient Greek Philosopher [Athenian Stranger](https://x.com/athens_stranger/status/2047147794885120498) (https://x.com/athens_stranger/status/2047147794885120498)
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I'd like to make sure I really make this point. I'll attempt to describe it in a more complete way here.

If everyone in the world was like me we would all get far more done and build a far more beautiful and successful future. This is a fundamental axiom.

Furthermore, because the space of ideas is a free battleground where anyone can enter as they please, saying this doesn't mean I will succeed.

If everyone was like me, many beautiful things in the world would cease to exist. Luckily, it's impossible to make everyone like me, but it is possible for me to have my marginal contribution towards the mean of humanity's personality distribution.

[I don't actually trust anyone who hasn't studied economics](https://x.com/CKalitin/status/2051461735811305828?s=20) (<https://x.com/CKalitin/status/2051461735811305828?s=20>). Marginal contribution towards a result is an extremely important concept. In general you should all study economics so you at the very least understand opportunity cost. How many of my friends don't understand opportunity cost makes my blood boil. Some people you just can't get through to, and other will read all of Casey Handmer's blog posts after you suggest they do (Guys I'm not actually crazy just read Basic Economics and listen to every Casey Handmer and George Hotz podcast and you'll see why I'm like this).

I imagine some see me say I am the best person people can aspire to be and are taken aback by this. "Oh no what about all the other cultures of the world!" First, most cultures of the world I don't care for, I care for my culture (as they should care for their culture). Second, understand that saying I'm the best person to aspire to be doesn't make everyone aspire to be me! It just means I have extreme self belief. Recently I haven't had enough which is part of the reason for writing this.

Now, back to education.

I previously wrote about my thoughts on education in [Optimize For Exceptionally Competent Small Teams](https://ckalitin.github.io/ideas/2025/10/13/managing-technical-teams.html) (<https://ckalitin.github.io/ideas/2025/10/13/managing-technical-teams.html>). What I am extremely against is optimizing for the lowest common denominator. I don't care if some students drop out of school because they aren't smart enough to keep up, or if some kids lose a finger in the machine shop. The important thing is that we optimize for the best students that will have the greatest impacts on our future.

No child left behind is a horrible idea. Here's a better one: no exceptional child forced backward. As I said in the previous post, I have far more sympathy for smart kids surrounded by a slow classroom and dumb kids than the dumb kids. Luckily my kids won't be the dumb kids, and if they are I'll have failed as a father.

The male idea of conquest and exploration is far more appealing to me than the female idea of safety and security. I've seen a few people on the internet attribute this as the reason schools are becoming the way I've described above (too lazy to find links now, see the quote at the bottom of this blog post). I don't mind this explanation as why men who seemed to be like be 100 years ago had more trust in their teachers than men like me today. If schools were previously a place of competition and striving for something greater, it makes sense why men like me would have more trust in their teachers. In contrast, most teachers today would read everything I've said and be extremely troubled! If I said these things to my Dad, George Hotz, Casey Handmer, or Andrew Carneige they would all immediately understand.

What prompted this post was studying for my Mech 260 Mechanics of Materials final and realizing I might have missed out on some things by skipping so many classes. I trust Graham Hendra to teach me some useful things, maybe I made a mistake. I do trust Casey Handmer more than

Graham Hednra to make me an exceptionally competent engineer and have extreme belief in myself so everything will work out. You just have to have faith!

"People who are meant for you, hear you differently. Stop explaining yourself."

- [another philosopher](https://x.com/rumilyrics/status/2045672729756709261?s=20) (https://x.com/rumilyrics/status/2045672729756709261?s=20)