

Kobe Bryant's 'Letter to My Younger Self' Holds a Lesson for Us All

After his storied NBA career but before his [tragic death](#) at the age of 41, Kobe Bryant wrote [a letter to himself](#). His 17-year-old self, to be precise.

By this time, Bryant had accumulated five NBA Championship rings and a net worth of \$680 million. But it wasn't just material things Bryant had acquired. The Black Mamba had also collected a lot of wisdom, which was evidenced in his letter, titled "Letter to My Younger Self."

Here is what the former Laker star wrote:

Dear 17-year-old self,

When your Laker dream comes true tomorrow, you need to figure out a way to invest in the future of your family and friends. This sounds simple, and you may think it's a no-brainer, but take some time to think on it further.

I said INVEST.

I did not say GIVE.

Let me explain.

Purely giving material things to your siblings and friends may appear to be the right decision. You love them, and they were always there for you growing up, so it's only right that they should share in your success and all that comes with it. So you buy them a car, a big house, pay all of their bills. You want them to live a beautiful, comfortable life, right?

But the day will come when you realize that as much as you

believed you were doing the right thing, you were actually holding them back. You will come to understand that you were taking care of them because it made YOU feel good, it made YOU happy to see them smiling and without a care in the world – and that was extremely selfish of you. While you were feeling satisfied with yourself, you were slowly eating away at their own dreams and ambitions. You were adding material things to their lives, but subtracting the most precious gifts of all: independence and growth.

Understand that you are about to be the leader of the family, and this involves making tough choices, even if your siblings and friends do not understand them at the time.

Invest in their future, don't just give.

Use your success, wealth and influence to put them in the best position to realize their own dreams and find their true purpose. Put them through school, set them up with job interviews and help them become leaders in their own right. Hold them to the same level of hard work and dedication that it took for you to get to where you are now, and where you will eventually go.

I'm writing you now so that you can begin this process immediately, and so that you don't have to deal with the hurt and struggle of weaning them off of the addiction that you facilitated. That addiction only leads to anger, resentment and jealousy from everybody involved, including yourself.

As time goes on, you will see them grow independently and have their own ambitions and their own lives, and your relationship with all of them will be much better as a result.

There's plenty more I could write to you, but at 17, I know you don't have the attention span to sit through 2,000 words.

The next time I write to you, I may touch on the challenges

of mixing blood with business. The most important advice I can give to you is to make sure your parents remain PARENTS and not managers.

Before you sign that first contract, figure out the right budget for your parents – one that will allow them to live beautifully while also growing your business and setting people up for long-term success. That way, your children's kids and their kids will be able to invest in their own futures when the time comes.

Your life is about to change, and things are about to come at you very fast. But just let this sink in a bit when you lay down at night after another nine-hour training day.

Trust me, setting things up right from the beginning will avoid a ton of tears and heartache, some of which remains to this day.

Much love,

Kobe

There's a lot to analyze there, but the message is simple: Giving people things might make you feel good, but it doesn't always help them. In fact, Bryant said, it can *hurt* them.

Bryant's struggles with his family, of course, are [well documented](#). His parents, Joe and Pam Bryant, famously did not attend his 2001 wedding in Dana Point, California. Neither did Bryant's sisters Sharia and Shaya.

Over the years, there was a lot of family friction in the Bryant family, and a lot of it stemmed from money squabbles. This included efforts to [auction off](#) Bryant's personal memorabilia after the NBA star had withdrawn his financial support.

"When u give Give GIVE and they take Take TAKE at [what] point

do u draw a line in the sand?" Kobe Bryant tweeted at the time, using the hashtags "hurt beyond measure," "gave me no warning," and finally, "love?"

Many people might contend that Bryant had a responsibility to take care of his family members. He was wealthy, after all. Why shouldn't he give back to them?

Economics and Human Action

There are those who contend that economics is best understood through the lens of human action, and human action is best understood by studying [incentives](#).

Incentives, to quote the authors of the best-selling book *Freakonomics*, are "the cornerstone of modern life." They constantly shape our thoughts and behaviors in both positive and negative ways.

Bryant's greatness was a story in good incentives. Those "nine-hour training days" that Bryant referenced didn't happen by accident. He was driven by numerous incentives: wealth, fame, rings, and a hunger to be the best.

Bryant's letter to his younger self was in a sense a warning about creating *bad* incentives.

Early in his career, Bryant began giving his family large sums of money. He had been blessed with great wealth, and it made him feel good to share it with his loved ones. However, he saw it was having unintended consequences. He saw that for some family members, this generosity was "eating away their own dreams and ambitions." The money had become an "addiction" to them. Bryant appeared to believe that by making his family too comfortable, he was actually inhibiting their growth.

Wise Generosity

Writing to his younger self, Bryant said he'd do things differently. He would not cut off his family, but he'd give to them more intentionally, more *wisely*. Human beings are called to grow and create, not merely consume. It wasn't that Bryant didn't have enough money to give; he did. But he came to believe his money was having a corrosive effect, not a healthy one.

There's a fine line between giving to the needy or those you love and making others too comfortable in their station. This is one of the reasons some of the Founding Fathers were skeptical of government handouts to provide for the poor.

"I think the best way of doing good to the poor is not making them easy in poverty," Ben Franklin [once observed](#), "but leading or driving them out of it."

Those who have much are called to be generous, but we must also give wisely lest we rob people of the dignity of work and human growth.

Kobe Bryant understood this better than most.

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