

[Home](#) » [Life at Hodges](#) » 4 Types of Adult Learners Who Have Found Success After Going Back to School

Search

Recent Posts

- » [Preparing the Next Generation of Health Care Professionals](#)
- » [Using MySSA to Prevent Identity Theft](#)
- » [Getting to Know You, Understanding Consumer Reports](#)
- » [Who is Responsible for Unauthorized Charges in a Bank Account?](#)
- » [The Best Computer and Information Systems Managers Have These 5 Things in Common](#)

Categories

- » [Business](#)
- » [Design](#)
- » [Healthcare](#)
- » [Justice & Law](#)
- » [Language & Media](#)
- » [Life at Hodges](#)
- » [Technology](#)
- » [Uncategorized](#)

Welcome Students!



Interested in learning more about Hodges University? Visit our website at www.hodges.edu or [Email Admissions today and begin Building the Future You.](#)



4 Types of Adult Learners Who Have Found Success After Going Back to School

19 Jun, 2017 in [Life at Hodges](#)

Share this:



Investing in higher education can seem like a no-brainer when you're fresh out of high school and given clear guidance on college applications. Adult learners, however, struggle with an entirely different set of challenges when considering education later in life. Too often, personal and professional goals end up on the back burner while struggling to maintain the status quo.

Choosing to enter a degree program — even a flexible or self-paced program — can be overwhelming for adult learners who face time management obstacles, familial obligations, financial hurdles and workplace demands. To top it off, the fear of not fitting in, forgetting how to study or just not knowing how to use necessary technology keeps adult learners from realizing their goals.

If this sounds like your situation, do not lose motivation or give up on your degree. There are a number of programs out there that can be tailored to your situation. On top of it, studies show that the [benefits of adult education go beyond the workplace](#).

Many adults who don't fit the profile of the traditional college student have found success after going back to school.

Hear from adult learners who have been there, achieved their goals and can now look back and share insight pertinent to your journey in career advancement.

4 types of successful adult learners

1. *The heavy lifter: The working adult learner*

If you are juggling multiple part-time jobs or have a highly demanding full-time job, it can be [difficult to carve out time for your education or personal goals](#). The last thing you want to do is wake up years from now and wonder what could have been had you pursued your passion (or a more lucrative career option) early on.

This sentiment rings true for Erin Goodnow, the founder and CEO of [Going Ivy](#). Eight years ago, she started her own business, helping students through college admissions counseling. She helps students write their own admission ticket to their dream schools. Recently, she decided to go back to school and understands what it feels like to see a course syllabus and wonder how she could ever find time for it all.

"As a millennial," Goodnow says, "it's important to me to be satisfied in my job, feel like I'm helping someone and, yes, I like a trophy." To her, that trophy is the acceptance letter or the degree credentials. Her own desire for progress helps her connect with the families she works with at Going Ivy.

That balance is key for working adults like Goodnow. From her perspective, balance is about being honest with yourself and those around you so everyone can get on board to help you achieve your goals. "I'm in my second quarter toward a post-master's certificate, juggling my college admissions business, two kids and husband," she shares. "On the first day of my online class, I read the syllabus and had a minor anxiety attack at how I would do it all. My husband took the kids to the park while I absorbed what I really needed to do. After an hour, they had fun and I felt eager to take it all on."

Goodnow's advice to other adult learners is to realize that finding a balance does not mean everything has to be equal. "If you're going back to school, sometimes that comes first, and you'll have to tell your employer that. Ask for some understanding as well as flexibility with scheduling," she says. "Thank goodness for online classes — I can still help my clients and watch my kids' swim lessons. It's all about the balance."

2. *The money juggler: The adult learner with debt or financial obligations*

Meeting your monthly budget is hard enough without having to worry about [financing your degree as an adult](#). Many people are already working multiple jobs to piece together a livable income. The idea of adding in more work while further draining limited financial resources can seem unthinkable.

That's what life was like for Laura MacLeod, who went back to school to get a master's degree in social work (MSW) after working many years as a professional actress and dancer in New York City. "While I was relatively successful and loved performing, I was still waiting tables and bartending to supplement income and get health insurance," she explains.

For MacLeod, the alternative to going back to school was continuing to accept a career with no stability of a steady income and little sense of progress to feed her ambitions. "I was tired of the uncertainty and the lack of opportunities and jobs I truly wanted to do," she confesses. That's when she began looking for another career, having only a vague notion of what would be a good fit for her.

While in school for social work, MacLeod discovered a particular interest in group work where she could facilitate interaction and support among people with a common issue. "I took my group work experience into the workplace — improving employee relations and company culture by problem-solving and resolving conflict in small groups."

While financial uncertainty gave her pause when considering her decision to pursue a degree, she found that shifting her focus to one goal helped her to uncover unique skills, ultimately leading to a career that put her work experience to good use (and helped her begin paying back the debt she incurred from going back to school).

By drawing on her ability to resolve issues and get people back on track, MacLeod found she could improve attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. She is now the creator of [From The Inside Out Project®](#), an organization that addresses employee relations issues.

3. *The caretaker: The adult learner with kids*

Enjoying your family time and caring for your children should be a top priority if you have kids at home. They need your attention and guidance, and you should be able to spend these meaningful years with the ones you love rather than [staying late at the office or spending every waking moment studying](#).

Still, time passes quickly. Before you know it, years will be behind you, and the professional or personal progress you put on hold will need some attention as well. For Tracey Cheetham, that time came when she was 30 years old. She built a successful career in engagement and customer care and reached a senior level in that arena, but felt like she still had more to learn.

"I love learning and hope I inspire that in my own children," she says. Now, she is a 45-year-old mom with children aged 18, 15 and 12 — but at the time she was returning to school, she was pregnant with her daughter, and her eldest son was 3. "I began working part-time on weekends to support my studies and was fortunate to get grants to help with some of the fees," she explains.

Her daily life was a balancing act. "I had a family to support, both financially and as a mother and wife," Cheetham says. "I would spend my evenings with my family, bathing and putting children to bed and then get my books out and work on assignments and study until I went to bed — often in the early hours of the next morning."

While it was a lot of work, she is sure that being an adult returning to school helped her focus. "As an 18-year-old, there's no way I would have worked as hard as I did as an adult learner," she says. "I would have gotten distracted by the social aspect of university life and while I may have graduated, it would not have been as successfully as when I did at 34."

Returning to school awakened a sense of lifelong learning that motivated her studies as well as her own personal potential. "I learned an awful lot during my time as an adult learner — not just the academic aspects, but it was hugely beneficial to my confidence, too. It also made me realize that I am capable of more than I thought I could achieve and helped me to eradicate some of the self-doubt that often creeps in as we get older and begin family life."

Now, as the owner of [iChee Ltd](#), Cheetham specializes in engagement and communication, helping her clients connect with customers, influence stakeholders and impact the wider community. She also helps clients understand how government and politics affect them and their businesses. She maintains that her career growth is directly related to the choice to go back to school.

At some point, investing in your own education becomes the wise choice for the whole family. It can give you the credentials needed to build a strong financial foundation for your family, even if there are challenges along the way.

4. *The head-starter: The adult learner with a partial degree or ample work experience*

Work experience, or even a partially completed degree, speaks volumes about your ability to commit to your career path and deliver real results. Unfortunately, such experience can be overlooked when you lack an actual degree.

As you look through job descriptions for open positions or discuss upward mobility in your current workplace, you may fit all the criteria except for one: that educational credential. Furthermore, the positions you held early in your career may start to wear on you. You may wonder if you can continue down that path, or if you need to shift in order to stay in the workforce.

For John Locke, this was an issue that spurred his return to school at age 37. "When I decided to go back to school, I had already spent 19 years working in commercial and retail bakeries," he says. "Part of my decision was the fact that my body was wearing out from repetitive motion injuries. I had always been healthy but in 2009, time was catching up with me. There were several days where I would have to leave work early because my back was in spasms."

Locke was still a long way off from retirement. There was no option to leave the workforce, particularly since he and his fiancée had just purchased a house and each had a teenager to take care of.

Beyond the physical limitations, he also was analyzing the baking industry as a whole. "I had been a union guy for almost 20 years," he explains, "with constant notices that the pension fund was in critical condition." Add to that a looming bankruptcy at his current job, and Locke knew he had to do something.

The choice was to struggle in a position that caused him physical pain and financial worry or to take some initiative that would allow him to shift focus. "I decided that I had to go back to school and learn some new skills," Locke recalls. "Later, I saw one other person at the bread factory doing the same thing. Everyone else was in denial, and many people ended up out of work for a long time when the plant finally closed."

An even bigger decision at that point was what to study. By the time he earned his associate degree, he would be close to 40 years old. He knew he had to make a wise decision as this may very well be his last opportunity to earn a degree. He had gone to a community college when he was younger, but where he grew up, the pressure to work and earn a living was ever present. He ended up dropping out in his second semester.

As an adult learner with a better understanding of his long-term needs, he decided to study web design and programming. "My logic," he says, "was that I could do this into my golden years, and my body would have time to heal. The internet gave me some flexibility to take classes in between shifts. I continued working 50+ hour weeks, and graduated in 2010 with a 3.8 GPA."

As of 2017, Locke owns and operates his own web consultancy, [Lockedown Design](#). He feels beyond hopeful about his golden years and credits that confidence to his decision to go back to school as an adult. "The one decision to go back to school in my late-30s set me down a path that allowed me to reinvent myself. It is a decision I will never regret," he says. "I will earn more this year than I've ever earned in one year in my life, and the future looks even brighter. The sky's the limit."

Which type of adult learner are you?

Whether you are driven by a desire for personal fulfillment, or to secure long-term financial stability, your status as an adult learner does not have to hold you back. Hitting a plateau in your career does not mean you'll be in that situation forever, and being an adult does not mean you have to give up on lifelong learning and professional advancement.

Regardless of your situation, there are ways to continue your path forward, and higher education could be a means to that end for you.

No matter what stage you are at in life, going back to school could show you a new perspective on your career. If you need help planning for your education, check out our article, "[The Adult Learner's Ultimate Guide for Going Back to School](#)" where you can discover answers to your most prominent questions and get the tools you need to enroll and complete a degree that can change your professional future.

Post navigation

[← An Advocate for the Arts](#)

[Removing the Stigma Surrounding Mental Health →](#)

Search