

# The LADDER



Supporting students  
towards successful  
futures and confident  
career choices

**Andrew Bernard**  
Foreword by Colonel Dame Kelly Holmes

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# FOREWORD BY COLONEL DAME KELLY HOLMES

I wouldn't be who I am unless my PE teacher gave me the opportunity to change, by telling me that I could be good at something – running – and encouraging me to pursue that as a sport.

My teacher really supported me and continued to push me to focus on my sporting goals during my school years. I wasn't really academic at all and being in athletics gave me a sense of identity and purpose. This helped me to set my dreams and formed the basis of my career.

I always believe that if you can help someone to change by giving them an opportunity to see for themselves that they can succeed, then that will never be forgotten by them, or by you. This, I suppose, is the essence of what every teacher and adult can do to support young people to develop their vision of themselves in the future.

I know that sport has a wonderful ability to unite and bring people together, especially if they believe their only avenue to self-expression is sport. This gives people the opportunity to develop a variety of skills: interacting and socialising, communicating with others and taking part allows you to learn life lessons. Failure isn't the end, it's the chance to translate a negative into wanting to change, improve and better yourself.

Whatever it is you go through in life and whatever it is you want to achieve, I believe you should try to find your diamond – the skills or quality that sets you apart - then you can go all the way. Sometimes it's harder to find that diamond within yourself, but those who do will find they are able to push through to another level.

Whatever you do in life, we all need a champion – someone to help us try to find our diamond. Will you join me and Bernie to help young people find their diamonds?

**Kelly x**

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# GLOSSARY

7SAS	Seven Skills Assessment Sheet
ACEs	adverse childhood experiences
BAME	black and minority ethnic <sup>1</sup>
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council (UK qualification awarding body – awarding HNCs, HNDs and other diplomas of a technical nature)
CASK	continuum for the acquisition of skills and knowledge
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEIAG	careers education, information, advice and guidance
CIC	community interest company
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
CSR	corporate social responsibility
CV	curriculum vitae
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
EAL	English as an additional language
EHCPs	education, health and care plans
FE	further education
HE	higher education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency

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<sup>1</sup> During the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, sparked by the unlawful killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, USA, there has been much debate on this side of the Atlantic about the catch-all/shorthand term 'BAME'. Many people who could be described as such feel it is a demeaning term, a term that 'others' people of colour. My use of the acronym in this book reflects its use in many pieces of research or projects from organisations which support people of colour. It is not for me to challenge or debate the use of this label in the course of this book. I have also reflected on changing the descriptor to 'people of colour' or 'non-white', but again these are problematic terms – especially non-white, which I feel is even more 'othering'.

The slightly uncomfortable compromise I have reached, therefore, is to maintain the use of BAME where relevant but to acknowledge that it will jar with some readers. For this I apologise.

## The LADDER

HNC	BTEC Higher National Certificate
HND	BTEC Higher National Diploma
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LMI	labour market information
MAT	multi-academy trust
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme (UK university scheme)
NCS	National Careers Service
NCW	National Careers Week
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
PCA	parent careers association
PESTLE	political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors
PSHEE	personal, social, health and economic education
PTA	parent-teacher association
SEND	special educational needs and disabilities
SLT	senior leadership team
SME	small and medium sized enterprise (in the UK, less than 250 employees and under £50 million turnover)
STEAM	science, technology, engineering, arts, maths
STEM	science, technology, engineering, maths
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UTC	university technical college

# NOTE FOR TEACHERS, MENTORS AND ADVISORS

Life is short and moves quickly. Decisions (or the lack thereof) can affect you for many years, and in the context of careers we often don't realise what we 'should have been' until it feels like it's too late. When reflecting on the life paths we've chosen, we will often realise that random opportunities lead to interesting journeys and, in the end, make us who we are. But what if we had had help in making better decisions earlier on?

Using the mantra that 'every adult is a careers teacher', this book aims to inspire and support educators and education leaders to explicitly link their subject area(s) to students' futures in and outside school. There are plenty of free, effective and easy-to-use ideas to help you to support them in this book and referred to or signposted throughout it.

## Who should read this book?

Adults who were helped by someone when they were younger, whatever their position now. (So, everyone then.)

More specifically:

- Teachers: secondary heads of year and subject leaders.
- Secondary school head teachers and members of the senior leadership team (SLT).
- Careers leaders and guidance professionals.
- Employees, managers and directors in businesses and other organisations.
- Further education (FE) and higher education (HE) lecturers and tutors.
- Governors.
- Parents.

This book supports educators to empower students in another crucial dimension: attitude. I want to help you to support children

## The LADDER

through changes in their beliefs about themselves and what they're capable of. The journey looks something like:



It's important that teachers support students' aspirations and help them with future thinking (tempered with, but not crushed by, realism). Do you know anyone who won't sing in public because 'someone said I was tone deaf', or someone who gave up on their ideal career because a teacher said 'you'll never make the grades for that', or someone who didn't go to university because a parent or family member said 'that's not for people like us'?

So, here's what we can do instead: help them to bring the future to life. This book contains all you need to know in order to be an advocate for young people and their future aspirations, pathways and career aims.

## Chapter 1

# YOU ARE HERE



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*The longer I live, the more convinced I become that life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it.*

**Charles R. Swindoll<sup>1</sup>**

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How did you get to where you are today?

Did you have a clear plan for your schooling, work, career, family and relationships?

Did everything go to plan?

Did life take a few turns you weren't expecting?

Perhaps there were a couple of 'random occurrences' you couldn't have planned?

Did you do it all on your own?

I'm willing to bet that your life has been defined by a series of decisions (some more considered than others), a few periods of comfort, a couple of sparks of pure chance and some drifting, as well as some support from others when you needed it, even if that was unsolicited because you didn't realise you needed it. Sound familiar?

This book is an exploration of the positive effects of random occurrences and how they can shape and change the direction of our lives. More importantly, it's an exploration of how we can use our positions and experiences to create more, seemingly random, such occurrences to support young people as they explore and progress their education, careers and lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p. 206.

## My journey

Officially my name is Andrew David Bernard, but to be honest I don't really like the name Andrew. At school, where all my friends had a nickname, I was called Bernie. Seeing as everyone who knows me calls me this, and I reckon it suits me, I call myself Bernie. Hello.

I was brought up in Buckinghamshire, England, where I lived with my dad, David, mum, Jean, and sister, Sarah Jane. I went to a grammar school where I was one of only two boys from my primary school to get a place. (My parents moved to a new house to be in the catchment area.) They said I was 'lucky'; however, it didn't feel like it. I wasn't particularly happy there – especially as all my close friends had gone to the secondary modern nearby. I grinned (mostly) and bore it.

During my early teens I was becoming an accomplished cyclist, winning the chance to compete in a national competition. I did not, however, end up riding in the nationals, because my bike was stolen. Well, that's the reason I gave to anyone who asked; on reflection, I think I was looking for an excuse not to be humiliated on the national stage, so used this one. It has always been a huge regret.

Alongside my sporting endeavours, my O-level (as they were in those days) results were OK – 9 in total, all Bs and Cs – but then at 16 there was another choice: sixth form, college or work? By this point I'd made some good friends at school and they were pretty much all going to the local college to study A levels. Me? Well, my parents decided that I would 'do better' if I stayed at the grammar to do mine. As you can imagine, this wasn't what I'd hoped for, but there was no winning mum and dad round to my way of thinking. Unfortunately, like many teenagers who don't get their way, I decided that life was not fair and embarked on a full-blown two-year tantrum fuelled by machismo, anger, testosterone and entitlement.

It did not go well and after two years of coasting, arguing, showing off<sup>2</sup> and generally being angry, results day arrived. Many of my schoolmates were jumping around shouting happily about how they'd got into Oxford, Cambridge, Durham or LSE. I slunk off home with the unopened envelope containing the results for the two A levels I had completed. When I opened it, after a minute of disbelief, I experienced

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2 'For every boy who tries to succeed, there is another boy who tries to fail. [...] Sometimes, they try too hard to impress popular peers and forget about trying to impress their teachers.' Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts, *Boys Don't Try? Rethinking Masculinity in Schools* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 1.

the first genuine emotion I'd felt for years, maybe ever. I started bawling my eyes out as I realised that I'd wasted the past two years, with only an E in sociology and a U in business studies to my name. Well, despite *thinking* I knew it all, I honestly had *no* idea what to do.

In the end, I did something I'd not done for years – I asked for help. Specifically, I asked my mum for help in trying to find a course that would take me – I didn't care where or doing what, I just needed to break the toxic chains I'd wrapped myself in, go away and grow up. Despite my U grade in business studies, I decided that a course in business, or business and finance, would be a good one for me as a broad-brush approach to future career options. I couldn't face exploring other subjects at this low point, and business was something I already knew a little bit about.

There were two BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) business studies courses on offer that I could apply for: at Huddersfield Polytechnic and North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI). I was offered an interview for both, but the one at NEWI happened to be first. When the letter arrived offering me a place I said, 'That'll do.'

'That'll do' is *not* what you usually (or, indeed, should) say when you're deciding on the next steps of your education or career, but I'd left myself with very little choice. Still, I never even went to Huddersfield for the interview. Fast-forward 20 years and, after leaving north Wales with a distinction in business and finance and a career path which was anything but logical, I was living in Lancashire, married and with a young family. I had a single thought as I left work at Lancaster University one winter's day: the doors slid open and the cold air hit me in the face and I thought, 'That's the best part of my day.' That's when I realised that I was *very* unhappy with the work I had been doing. My role in business development was an extremely important part of the university, but it wasn't something that made my heart sing. In fact, it made me stressed, anxious and unhappy.

At 38 I had my first serious thoughts about what I wanted to do ... 20 years after leaving school. My doctor signed me off work due to stress and my wife Val (a counsellor and therapist) got to work. We used the Wheel of Life (which we'll learn all about on page 40) and instantly saw what was wrong – it was work and career plans and how they impacted on my happiness and feelings of usefulness. She asked me when I was last truly happy. Bear in mind Val's my wife so I needed to think carefully. I took a full 10 minutes to sheepishly (and honestly) reply with: 'On that French campsite in August when we had that big mad game of football with those 30 kids.' She smiled and

said: 'I knew you were going to say that. You need to work with young people.' A week later, Innovative Enterprise was born.

It had taken me 38 years to find my purpose! *Thirty-eight years!*

Simply, this led me to become the person I most needed when I was younger, and so enterprise, attitude and aspiration became the themes around which I built and designed workshops. Fifteen years on and we've worked with more than 150,000 young people and hundreds of businesses.

So what? So, I want to distil what I've learned, what's worked and what has helped young people, teachers, schools and businesses and bring together those insights for you to put into practice. I want to show you how you can help the young people you teach, mentor, support, parent and guide to find skills, attitudes and purpose that will bring them success and happiness.

I grew up in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, a time of Thatcher, the closure of the pits and steelworks, strikes, and yuppies and 'big business' making millions at the expense of 'ordinary jobs'. The last thing I wanted to be was an entrepreneur, an owner of 'the forces of production', yet here we are. I have run my own business since 2006.

Chance, opportunities and openings aren't always predictable. When I was asked to do a TEDx Talk, I decided to call it 'Engineering Random Opportunities to Succeed'.<sup>3</sup> If we can create random opportunities (meaning occurrences that young people would never or hardly ever come across ordinarily) then there are more chances for sparks of inspiration and interest to be created and new directions to be pursued. I believe that it's *essential* that we create as many random opportunities as possible for young people at all stages of their journeys of personal discovery – in and out of educational settings. Just one of these experiences can change and improve someone's vision for themselves, their direction, their goals and, ultimately, their life.

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3 Andrew Bernard, 'Engineering Random Opportunities to Succeed', *TEDxWhitehaven* (14 October 2016). Available at: <https://youtu.be/BILhkke2sfQ>.

Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, said:

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**You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something – your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.<sup>4</sup>**

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I see it as my place in the world to inspire and create the dots, the chances, the new and different opportunities to help young people discover themselves: what makes them tick, what makes their hearts sing and what helps them to stand out in a world that is trying to make them fit in. Because I wasted (invested?) 17 years in the wrong jobs, I've made it my mission to support young people in whatever way I can, and that's why I wrote this book. Wherever you are now, you probably took a long time and a circuitous path to get there. I'm hoping that you too will want to help young people take a more direct path to their future success and happiness.



### Self-reflection task

Think about your career path.

Was it all planned?

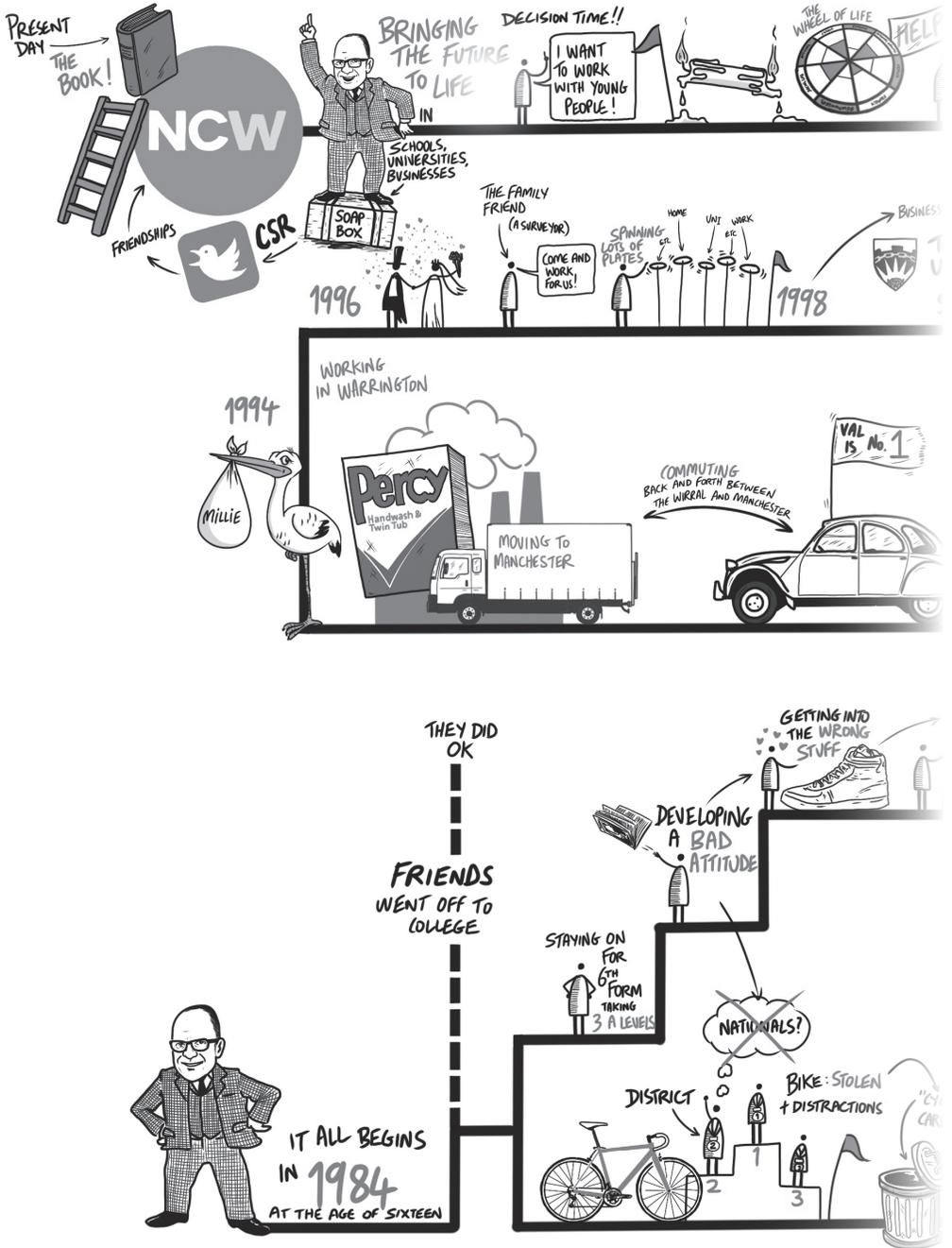
Was it affected by 'life getting in the way'?

Draw out your career path on a large sheet of paper. Start in the bottom left as you leave school and aim to finish in the top right, with any changes of plan or direction reflected in your pathway. If you like you can draw images to illustrate your journey. You can share these on Twitter and Instagram when you've finished, using #SetUpTheLadder.

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Jobs, Stanford University Commencement Speech, 12 June 2005. Available at: <https://news.stanford.edu/2005/06/14/jobs-061505/>.

Here is a representation of my career path, designed by the wonderful Simon Heath.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> @SimonHeath1 on Twitter.

## Contains everything educators need to know in order to be effective advocates for young people and their future aspirations, pathways and career aims

Using the mantra 'every adult is a careers teacher', *The Ladder* will inspire teachers to explicitly link their subject area to students' futures, both in school and outside its walls, and support them in doing so.

Andrew 'Bernie' Bernard draws upon his 30-year career in education and business development to bring clarity, focus and ideas to educators as to how they can best start students on their own ladders to success.

In doing so, Bernie provides a range of user-friendly and engaging materials for teachers to use with the young people they work with to help uncover their talents and link those talents to opportunities for growth. He also shares invaluable advice on how best to reach out to local businesses and external organisations to support your students' careers education.

**Suitable for all teachers and educators, particularly those with responsibility for career guidance, wanting to help their students on the path to a successful future**

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*The Ladder* is a must-have manual for all who wish to help students make confident career choices.

**Tony Robinson, OBE, author of *The Happipreneur: Why #MicroBizMatters?***

A brilliant user guide for educators and employers invested in providing young people with opportunities to succeed.

**Sharon Davies, CEO, Young Enterprise**

A great read full of practical tips for both students and their teachers.

**Lee Jackson, award-winning motivational speaker and author of *How to Enjoy and Succeed at School and College***

Life is like a game of snakes and ladders – this book helps students not only to find their ladders but to climb them too.

**Professor Paul McGee, motivational speaker and *Sunday Times* bestselling author**

Bernie has compiled a wealth of thorough research and draws on his years of experience working with young people.

**Gemma Hay, Principal Teacher of Citizenship, George Heriot's School**

*The Ladder* is a fantastic resource that I wish my teachers had read when I was in school!

**Gavin Oattes, bestselling author and international keynote speaker**

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**Bernie** is an entrepreneur, a TEDx speaker, a director of both Innovative Enterprise and National Careers Week, and a Fellow of the Professional Speaking Association. Bernie has, since 2006, worked with schools, businesses, charities, universities and colleges to help over 150,000 people bring their future to life through enterprise and careers workshops.

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