

David Klinker: This high school course changed my life completely

By
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This commentary is by David Klinker, an entrepreneur and second-year student at Champlain College in Burlington.

I'm an 18-year-old college student, and I have a financial plan for the next decade. I have two businesses, my own apartment, an emergency fund, a diverse investment portfolio, a monthly budget and a healthy skepticism about the speculative nature of cryptocurrency.

Oh, I also enjoy life without having to ask my parents or others for money. Since August 2020, my net worth has nearly quintupled.

Anyone could do what I've done, had they had the opportunity as I did to take Ms. Courtney Poquette's personal finance course as a freshman at Winooski High School in Vermont.

I'm fortunate because personal finance is not a course that you can always find in high school. In fact, [three out of four high school students in America](#) do not have access to such a course. Not only are they deprived of what I consider the most important class in high school, so too are their parents.

My mom and dad, like most people, became financially literate through trial and error. My dad learned by making mistakes and adapting as life challenges came to him. My mom is a bit wary of the stock market. Both wish they had known more about money management when I was born, and they also admit their lack of knowledge was a significant factor in their divorce.

High school personal finance creates a positive trickle-down effect. Some of Ms. Poquette's students have helped their parents increase their credit scores, and understand and participate in retirement plans. Some, from non-English-speaking families, have helped their parents with everything from budgeting to banking and even understanding the terms of their apartment leases.

My dad, a financial expert now, regularly talks to me about the stock market. Today I invest a portion of my monthly income in the S&P 500, CDs, bonds and exchange-traded funds.

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My mom, still nervous about investing, is observing what I do with interest. In fact, it was during the pandemic that I started talking to her about investing. Still unsure, she signed on for me to open my first brokerage account.

My father told me, “Invest what you can after you have food, water, clothing and shelter.”

I feel very fortunate to have taken Ms. Poquette’s class. She made it super fun. She taught us to use spreadsheets, and I still use them today, four years later, when planning ahead.

The class also included an [investing game](#) that I still play. That game helped me to understand how to assess stocks and other assets while avoiding excessive risk, as my dad advised.

I will never forget one video Ms. Poquette showed us. It was about a college student who got into awful credit card debt. She didn’t understand how negatively it was impacting her life. However, instead of telling us to avoid credit cards altogether, Ms. Poquette taught us everything about proper use of credit so we could improve our credit scores and why that is so important.

On my 18th birthday, I applied for a credit card, and I have been using what I learned from my personal finance class to build credit.

I recently signed the lease for my first apartment with my girlfriend. This took lots of time to figure out. We built our budget using the 50 (needs)/30 (wants)/20 (savings) method. The budget accounted for the possibility of one of us losing our job, among other factors. We used the spreadsheet Ms. Poquette gave us in her class.

I bring budgets I’ve developed to my parents to see how they feel about them. They are very supportive of me and want to help me in every way possible. Being able to fluently understand finance and talk to my parents about it gives me a certain freedom that is truly indescribable.

My personal finance class changed my life. It’s learning I use every day. Vermont is not one of those states that guarantee a full-semester course prior to graduation, but many high schools are taking the lead and perhaps change is in the wind.

I’m convinced that this knowledge would improve many Americans’ lives, as well as Vermont’s and America’s economies.
