



Smith continues to give back

Counting down to the announcement of the 20th annual All-USA High School Team on May 18, USA TODAY each week will spotlight one student from the previous 19 years with the student's advice for today's high school students.

Robert David Smith, Gilmer High, Ellijay, Ga.

Then:

Worked with two fellow students to test levels of human waste in local creek, launching political effort resulting in a \$500,000 grant to fix the problem; National Seiko Youth Challenge winner for environmental work; helped design a medicine dispenser for seniors, placing second in state National Engineering Design Challenge; used satellite telemetry to map old logging trails for Eagle Scout project; drum major; exchange student to Spain.

Later:

Lectured at the Caribbean Institute of Technology on the Jamaican economy while an undergraduate at Harvard, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 2000. Ran International Recording Corp., an Oscar-winning sound studio in Hollywood. Austin Scholar and winner of the Ford Prize for paper on international business strategy at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management, from which he graduated No. 1 in the finance program in 2005.

Now:

Wealth manager at Lehman Bros. in New York, working with small team of experts managing several hundred million dollars for investors. Mentors and tutors underprivileged children.

His advice:

Being true to yourself is your highest duty and in the end, your optimal path. Throughout life, there are temptations and pressures to join with, ratify, and/or pretend many things that simply are not consonant with the truth of yourself. Let these things pass. There will be moments when you feel as if you are missing out. There will be moments when you feel you have somehow gone astray or fallen behind. But in the end, you will arrive where you are meant to be, and you will know it is truly you who are there, and not some construct you made to accommodate everyone else's opinion of you. Furthermore, you will have had a true and lasting effect on the world around you by your example.

Advice from other 1996 teammates

My advice would be, at some point, in your high school experience to thoroughly absorb yourself in an activity, an idea — or even person — that you're

passionate about. It's a rare period in your life where you can almost costlessly pursue your genuine interests, and as trite as it sounds, I think you'll profit from the self-discovery. —**Saurabh Bhargava, graduate student, economics, Cal Berkeley**

Take classes from teachers who inspire and motivate you. —**Jason Brinton, medical student, Harvard Med**

Know your strengths, but focus on your weaknesses. Challenge yourself by seeking out "stretch" situations that force you to grow, rather than relying blindly on past successes. —**Lina Crowder, consultant, Bain & Co.**

More than any other time in your life, high school is a time to explore yourself through activities. College and beyond will give you plenty of time to develop intellectually and professionally, but never again will you organize activities with your friends simply for the joy of shared pursuits or to hang out. And I believe that the majority of your personal character is developed in high school activities as well. —**Richard Kim, medical student, UCSF**

Learn how to look around you with your eyes open to what there is to see. Question why you and others react to different people and different ideas the way that you do, and challenge yourself to translate that into changing your own preconceptions. —**Lori Rifkin, staff attorney, ACLU of Conn.**

When you feel like you can't do all of the work, take it to God and let God help you out. I did it in high school, I did it in college, and I still do it in grad school! —**Francis Shen, Harvard Law School**