

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

(Original)

Nguyen Thi Van Anh

(Age 22, Viet Nam)

Social Impact, Inc., Hanoi

Dear My Future Self,

I’m writing to you in the hidden corner of the building lobby where I’m working. It’s a beautiful Tuesday morning with white fluffy clouds dotted the azure blue sky, and the sun beamed beatifically, casting a golden glow upon the earth. Two little birds land on the window sill near my spot, singing joyously.

Yet, I’m broken inside.

After my graduation ceremony two months ago, I’m no longer a college student. I’ve been thrown into this “adult world” and working a 9-5 office job.

- “Why are you so quiet? Just say something. Nobody cares about the facts. Fun beats facts, remember!”
- “Why are you only eating fruits and veggies? You will be undernourished if you keep doing that. The vegan lifestyle is unrealistic!”
- “Why are you marveling at the paper shredder? Grow up! You’re not a kid anymore to admire something like that. Ridiculous!”

People keep challenging my values. I feel so strange in this place, like a square peg in a round hole. Is this really how the world works? If so, I’m not interested in living there. I have to do something. I remember the famous Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” This is what I’m going to do. I’ll live my life the way I want the world to be.

I’ll choose to escape the rat race and stay out of the rampant consumerism. I’ll shop at

thrift stores, go vegan and recycle. Instead of driving fancy cars that emit tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, I'll ride an e-bike. I'll cook meals at home with locally-grown food instead of dining at lavish restaurants that source ingredients from all over the world. On vacations, I'll walk in the woods and live in harmony with nature in a small, cozy house instead of flying thousands of miles across the ocean and staying in an extravagant villa. It doesn't matter how others perceive me; I only care about what I can do to slow down global warming and save our planet before it's too late.

I'll choose to hold dear to my honesty and integrity. I'd rather keep quiet than say anything in opposition to what I truly mean to please people. I'll be vulnerable and transparent with my feelings and encourage others to do the same. I've learned that vulnerability is not weakness; it actually takes a lot of courage. In the world of fake news, political propaganda, and deceptive trade practices, being totally authentic is one of the most revolutionary acts I can take to make this world better, gentler, more empathetic, and more humane to live in.

I'll choose to be curious, enthusiastic, and amazed by the world, no matter how old I get. I'll never cease to search for answers to intriguing questions and in-depth knowledge of a subject. I'll never stop appreciating the little wonders in the surrounding world. A fun word-playing. An exotic butterfly. A weirdly-shaped lamppost. Who said that the world would turn doom and gloom as we grow older? My world has always been a vibrant, colorful place full of surprises and beauty because I choose to build it that way.

I'll choose to treat people equally regardless of their race, gender identity, nationality, religion, language, or any other status. Labels don't exist in my dictionary. For me, "human" is the only accurate label we are born with, yet we forget it so easily. People told me to be "sensitive with the power dynamics," in other words, to behave probably in front of superiors but have free rein to treat inferiors. I refuse to do so. In my ideal world, everyone is worthy of love and respect from the moment they are born.

This is the world I'm dreaming of, and I hope that my dream has come true the moment you - my future self - read this letter. You must have tried very hard to create it, so thank you! I'm proud of you, and I love you to the moon and back!

With love,
Me, Your Past Self.