Everyone has experienced regret. You may think you haven’t, but you have. A regret can be small or large. It can be about something you did, or something you didn’t do. You may be one of those people for whom regret vanishes instantly (thus, the naysayers). Or, maybe for you, it lingers. Or, worse, haunts.

Regret can leave you feeling exposed and perhaps vulnerable. But on the flip side of regret resides reflection—taking that experience, albeit negative, and turning it into something useful. Regret serves us best when it leads to such reflection and, even better, growth.

We asked the Babson community to share some of their regrets. Here are their stories.
I wish I hadn’t avoided outdoor and camping activities during my youth. Born and raised in New York City, I had no interest in or experience with them, and I was somewhat afraid of the physical challenge. Then at 55, I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. My middle child, Emily, wanted to do it, so my wife, Phyllis, and I went with her. I learned how glorious it is to connect with nature and challenge my capabilities. I also saw firsthand what you can miss out on when you self-edit your actions for no good reason. Since then, I’ve gone on a lot of other adventurous trips.—Len Schlesinger, president

I wish I had realized before my late 30s that I didn’t have to learn life’s tough lessons by making my own mistakes. I could have learned some of those lessons by listening to people who had already made the same mistakes. But at least I learned that your mistakes build character, perseverance, and wisdom.—Susan Cooke ’87, co-CEO, Circle+Bloom

I wish I had interacted more with the Notre Dame faculty during my undergraduate days. I seldom visited them in their offices or stayed after class to chat. After graduating, I quickly realized how much more I could have taken out of the experience if I had connected with my professors—they had so much to offer. As a result, I reach out to as many students as possible on a personal level, encouraging them to get to know me and their professors. Connections are a huge part of the college experience. I want to help our students see this.—Dennis Hanno, dean, Undergraduate School

I wish I had not written that English literature paper for my college roommate. He was having a tough time with the course, getting Ds and worse. Out of impulsive kindness, I cranked out an essay for him one night and went to bed. The next morning, it finally dawned on me that I had committed an act not only of kindness but of cheating. Worse, my roommate already had left for class.

I’m sorry to say that I was concerned less about being guilty of academic dishonesty than of being caught. I like to think that now I would try to rectify such a situation. But at that time, I did nothing except sweat bullets. Surely the professor would see that my pellucid prose was not my roommate’s. A week later the paper came back with a C-! Maybe the professor was a dullard, unable to recognize a brilliant essay. Or maybe he had not read it and had given it a C- out of his own immoral kindness to my roommate.

I learned a little about moral complexity—i.e., that people can act badly while believing they are doing good. It’s the only time, I think, that I have been guilty of academic dishonesty. That doesn’t justify my not coming clean at the time. This is my confession, almost 50 years overdue.—Jim Hoopes, Murata Professor of Ethics in Business

I wish I had not flunked my undergraduate finance course. Or maybe it’s that I wish I had not chosen to study more for cost accounting than for my finance final. Or maybe I regret writing letters in class when the professor was beyond my comprehension. But I learned that my college adviser was a wonderful man and that you need to have the right tools (I did not own a financial calculator). I also learned compassion. Today, I teach personal finance, and the experience makes me appreciate others and their struggles.—Christine Moriarty, MBA ’92, president, MoneyPeace Inc.

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I wish I hadn’t spread myself so thin my freshman year. It seemed like I was always sick or stressed because I had so much to do. But I learned just how much work I actually can handle and was able to figure out which activities I was really passionate about.—Rayshaw Whitford ’12

I wish I hadn’t given up so easily when I was younger. I was always so eager to sign up for all kinds of lessons—ballet, tap, guitar, piano, volleyball, horseback riding. After the first several classes, though, I became bored or felt I’d never be good enough—and quit. Now, wishing I had the body of a dancer, or could play the piano, or wasn’t so afraid of horses, I wish I had persevered. I’ve learned that only those who work hard at something succeed, a lesson I have passed on to my daughters.
—Tere Bolivar ’84, sales and marketing director, Plaza Provision Co.

I wish I hadn’t waited until my senior year to join the student government. As an eager first-year student, I sought to impact the Babson community in numerous ways. But when I looked at the leaders of the Student Government Association, I felt so inexperienced—so I deferred and participated in other organizations. Finally, on a whim to better my community, I joined the SGA and became recharged with a newfound appreciation of governance and the possibilities of leadership. Through reflection, I believe certain experiences by sheer nature make you reel in unpreparedness. However, the courage to engage in such opportunities reveals the capabilities of your true inner potential.—Nick Bawa ’11

I wish I hadn’t heeded certain advice when starting and scaling my startup. At the same time, I wish I hadn’t ignored some advice. But at least I learned that as an entrepreneur your tenacity and passion will continue to drive you and your business forward. Your initial venture will be full of many firsts—lessons, triumphs, challenges, and failures. These experiences will help build the skills and relationships necessary to start and grow a successful venture.—Megan Shea, MBA ’09, founder and CEO, RetireLife

I wish I hadn’t been so stubborn about my internship search last year. Although tenacity is a skill I’m glad to have, the walls around my target companies grew tall and thick, shutting out tangential possibilities. For entrepreneurs and savvy business folk, this kind of focus is gravely misguided. As we know, nothing ever shows up just how we expect, and my holding on so tightly to a single ideal sapped me of vital time and energy. I am learning to practice open curiosity and to balance focus and awareness. It’s true, though, that you don’t fail until you give up.—Rachel Greenberger, MBA ’11