

# The One Minute

# STUDENT



CAN A SERIES OF ONE-MINUTE  
DECISIONS CHANGE  
YOUR LIFE?

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Co-author of *The Success Principles for Teens*  
and *"Cool Stuff" They Should Teach in School*

presented by

"Cool Stuff"<sup>TM</sup>  
Media  
Inc.

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[www.coolstuffmedia.com](http://www.coolstuffmedia.com)

San Clemente, CA

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The One Minute Student

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Cataloging-in-publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

For more information about this book and other "Cool Stuff" titles, please visit [www.coolstuffmedia.com](http://www.coolstuffmedia.com) or email us at [sales@coolstuffmedia.com](mailto:sales@coolstuffmedia.com), or call tollfree at 1.866.928.2665.

Published by  
"Cool Stuff" Media, Inc.  
San Clemente, CA

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It's our  
**choices**  
that show what we  
truly are,  
**far**  
**MORE**  
than our  
abilities.

– J.K. Rowling  
Best-selling author of the Harry Potter series

# DEDICATION

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO:

- MY REMARKABLE PARENTS WHO HAVE HELPED ME BECOME A CURIOUS "STUDENT" OF LIFE. I LOVE YOU GUYS.
- THE MANY TEACHERS WHO HAVE PERSONALLY HELPED ME SUCCEED IN SCHOOL.
- EDUCATORS WHO ARE BROADENING CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION BY HELPING OUR YOUTH MASTER THE PRACTICAL LIFE-SKILLS NECESSARY FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS.
- LINDA TOTH FOR YOUR PATIENCE, CONTINUED SUPPORT, AND CREATIVE INSPIRATION.

The logo for "Cool Stuff Media Inc." is displayed in a stylized, bubbly font. The words "Cool Stuff" are on the top line, "Media" is on the second line, and "Inc." is on the third line. The text is white with a thick black outline. The logo is set against a background of a green, arched tunnel opening that reflects on a rippling water surface below. The entire image has a monochromatic green color scheme.

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Can a  
**series**  
of  
**One-**  
**minute**  
**decisions**  
Change your  
**Life?**

# INTRO- DUCTION

THERE IS A STORY WAITING  
TO BE FOUND IN EVERY TOWN,  
NEIGHBORHOOD, AND SCHOOL. AND  
ALL THAT'S REQUIRED IS SOME  
CURIOUS PERSON, LIKE ME, TO LOOK  
A LITTLE DEEPER AND DISCOVER  
THESE INTERESTING EXPERIENCES,  
VALUABLE LIFE LESSONS, AND UNIQUE  
INDIVIDUALS. BUT WHO WOULD  
HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE NEXT  
NATIONALLY HEADLINED STORY  
WOULD INCLUDE ... ME?

- BECKY



A  
Bumpy  
Start

CHAPTER  
01

**H**ello! My formal name is Becky, but I've always thought my real name should be Nosey. Why? That's a no-brainer. Because I'm nosey, of course. I want to know the who, the what, the why, and the wherefore of everything that goes on around me. Why does the sun come up? What did Einstein *really* mean when he used the word *relativity*? Why does my next-door neighbor come home really late every Wednesday night wearing a kilt and sunglasses? (That creeps me out.)

My mom calls me curious ... very diplomatic of her. "Snooping" would be a better description. I like to call a spade a spade, and I speak the truth when it is required—that's my motto. Oh yes, I'm a reporter for the school newspaper (as if that should surprise you)—and I am totally suited for the job. If it didn't take up so much time, I would say it's the perfect job for me.

I would love to talk with you in detail about all of my nosey qualities, but I'm late. To be more accurate, I'm deadly late. (This is another strong trait of mine: accuracy. I don't like the *almost*-word, or the *almost*-image. I like the word that hits the bull's-eye.) Anyway, I woke up this morning, opened one eye, tricked myself into thinking it was Sunday all over again, and hit the Snooze button. "Whoops," as they say.

So now I'm getting dressed, brushing my teeth, and trying to tell my mom there's no time for breakfast, while searching for my history book for my major test this week. Oh, and I'm also talking to you ... all at the same time. An expert at multitasking? Not really! If I was to be completely honest, I would have to say that this juggling act isn't working very well.

Can you hold one second? "Yes, Mom?"

Oh, great. My mom just told me that my report card came in the mail yesterday. I have to pause and catch hold of my breath ... I mean that literally.

I pinch my arm. Okay—still alive. I have two words for that news: "*Uh*" and "*oh*." If I were to make a list of what I fear most in life, report cards would easily make the top ten.

I say "Goodbye" as I burst out the front door. I get all the way to the sidewalk before stopping. Who am I kidding? I'll never make it through the entire day without knowing what my grades are. I turn around and walk quietly back to the house.

I open the door and ... there it is: the envelope from my school sitting on the table. I lift the flap and peek inside. I see a *B* ... Okay, not such a horrible start. Then there looks like there is another *B*, or is that a ... no, it can't be. Or can it? No, it *is* a *B*. *Phew!* I thought it was a *D* for a moment. I realize that I don't have the stomach for this academic-high-achievement thing. Fortunately, the rest of the grades don't look too bad.

Now you know: I am not a naturally gifted student and I don't have a 4.0, but I still want to make something of my life. My parents keep telling me to find another extracurricular activity at school that will increase my chances of getting into college. I need to file that thought in this interesting but somewhat scrambled brain of mine. It feels too early in the morning to think about this. I will think about that—and my report card—and my missing history book—and anything else I need to think about—tonight, after first making it through the day.

Out the front door for the second time, I take off racing through streets without looking, cutting over lawns, and jumping over a petrified Chihuahua on his morning walk before making it through the front door of my school as the bell rings. I catch a small glimpse of the principal cringing as he looks first at me and then up at the clock. "Again?" is all he says. I wave a friendly hello and goodbye, leaving him in the dust, sprinting around the corner and sliding into my first class like it was home base.

I slam into my chair and declare myself (complete with umpire

arm movements) “safe.” Mr. Peralta, my journalism teacher, is glaring at me from the front of the room. I think maybe I should try to get to class on time ... *next* time. Always “next time” ...

“Okay, Winston,” he says, calling me by my last name. “You have it all when it comes to being a good reporter. You are determined, you are talented, you are quick on the uptake, but people won’t hire you. Do you know why?”

I consider whether or not I should dare to ask why. But I really have no choice. “Why, Mr. Peralta?”

“BECAUSE YOU ARE ALWAYS LATE.”

I give an awkward smile and sigh. “I know,” I say. “I’m trying.”

“Don’t try,” he says. “Just do it. The first rule of success is knowing that excuses—no matter how clever they may be—will never help you in the real world. The little things *do* count, and people *do* notice them. Being on time is one of them.”

He means it sincerely. I can see it in his eyes. Mr. Peralta—or “Mr. P.,” as we call him—starts the class, and I begin to stress. It seems like all I hear is “Do this ... do that. Plan this ... study that.” Maybe it’s because I feel overwhelmed. I lean over to my friend Carly and whisper, “Do you ever feel like you don’t have one minute to yourself?”

“I don’t have time to answer that,” she says, “not even one minute!”



The  
Project  
Begins

CHAPTER  
**02**

I am waiting for my turn to speak with Mr. Peralta. We are having our weekly staff meeting for the school newspaper where all the assignments and topics are agreed upon. Mr. P. is a very thorough guy. We usually get to choose our own story topics, but he likes to talk with all the reporters before we take off running with our ideas. We have the best student newspaper in the district, and it's because of him.

Mr. P. is a great sounding board. He asks us tons of questions, listens closely to what we have to say, and does not step on our toes. But at the same time, he guides us when we are lost. I haven't even said the best thing about him: He's creative. He comes up with really good assignments when we struggle to find our own topics.

He suggested the profile I wrote about the gas leak underneath the grammar school playground next door. The story was picked up by the local newspaper; then the big newspapers in the state picked it up. Now the local officials are digging up the playground to fix the problem. Cool, huh? The way I see it, I'm not just a reporter; I'm an investigator who will go to any length to uncover the truth. I like to think I am an Erin Brockovich in the making.

As I wait for Mr. P. to get around the room with his questions for the other reporters, I use the time to review my history class notes. I found my "lost" history book in the bottom of my locker. I probably look like I am pondering thoughtfully. The fact that newspaper story ideas are getting mixed up in my head with the Spanish Civil War is a slight problem ... but what can I do? I have NO TIME ... I wish there was something I could do about that. Maybe tomorrow ...

In a deep voice I hear Mr. P. say, "Okay, last but not least, what do we have for Lois Lane?" I feel him casting his eyes my way. "Right," he says. "What ideas do you have?"

After explaining my schedule, and the fact that I have little or no time to think, he kindly revisits the topic of excuses. As painful as

it is to hear, I know he is right.

I watch the wheels inside his head begin to turn as he makes use of his creativity. A moment later, I see the light bulb go on in his head. "I have the perfect story for you, Winston," he says. I take a big gulp of air and wait. "I want you to write a piece about finding the perfect student. The article should explore the secrets of what makes this student so successful."

"Excuse me?" I say, looking up. Maybe I misunderstood him. "Could you say that again, please?"

"I want you to do a story about what makes the perfect student." I can feel my smile fading. Maybe I spoke too soon about Mr. Peralta coming up with good assignments.

In a weary tone I respond, "Umm, okay ... *why?*"

"For the same reason that I assign any story. It will be interesting." He must be reading my expression, which is a sickening mixture of self-pity, boredom, and resentment. "Do I detect some resistance here?"

"Well, help me out here, Mr. Peralta. Didn't you say that reporting means telling people something they *don't* already know?"

"Yes, ma'am," he nods in agreement.

"Well, then, if I do a story about the perfect student, won't I be telling everyone something they know *already*? I'd essentially be ..."

"... restating the obvious?" he says, completing my thought. "I don't think so. In fact, I think you may discover things you haven't even thought of."

"Okay, so help me some more ... What else goes into making a perfect student other than sacrificing everything fun in life?"

Wiley Walker, another writer for the newspaper, sees this as an opportunity to look smart. Before Mr. Peralta even has a chance to respond, Wiley says, "A perfect student is made up of many things. It takes discipline and ..." He stops in midsentence as he accidentally

spills his bright-red sports drink down the front of his shirt. Attaboy ... very smart, Wiley.

“And you have to be a champion memorizer,” Rosa Garcia says. “I should know.”

“The point is ... *Go find out*,” Mr. Peralta says.

Carly, my so-called friend, leans over to me and mumbles, “It might be fun, Becky.” A look of sarcasm spreads across her face as she quietly laughs to herself. I find myself taking large gulps of air. I look to Mr. Peralta. “Be my savior. Can you give me some more direction?” I ask. “I am so slammed this week, Mr. Peralta. Can I maybe take a—” He gives me a look that says “*You don’t want to go there.*”

He starts gathering his papers. “Wait, wait,” I want to say. This is a rotten assignment. I’m the veteran Lois Lane, not the novice Jimmy Olsen. I deserve a better story than this! You have this all wrong ... but my brain stops there. All I manage to say aloud is “Okay, sounds good.”

“Work with it,” he says as he leaves the room. “I think you will be surprised.”

\*\*\*\*\*

What a crazy day. It’s now nearly midnight, and I lie in bed awake and restless as I remember what I still have to do. By lunchtime earlier today, I had four new homework assignments—and three of them were heavy-duty. I still haven’t finished my midterm project for science, which is due at the end of the week. I have tons of work left. And I am too scared to even think about the history test.

I am exhausted and totally wired all at once. All the things I have to do spin around in my head like a Ferris wheel, only faster. Each time a new task reaches the top, I obsess about it, until a new one replaces it. I need to start taking back control of the steering wheel of


my life. I need more control of what I do and how I do it.

I decide right here and now to begin writing down my personal thoughts and discoveries in a notebook that I choose to call *My Success Journal*. This should help me develop better story ideas for the article. In the notebook, I can write down the lessons I learn each day. Maybe I will discover something profound—that wouldn’t be so terrible, would it?

Now it’s *really* time to get some sleep, but instead I just toss and turn as my new writing assignment reaches the top of the Ferris wheel and consumes my attention. Hmmm ... I start to think. What makes the perfect student?

Then it happens ... I become curious ... yeah, nosey. Could this story be more interesting than I originally imagined? The thought calms me down, and slowly but surely, my eyes start to close. Thank goodness.





The  
Search  
Is On

CHAPTER  
**03**

**I** am multitasking right now. (My way of saying that I have too much to do and too little time.) I'm scribbling notes as I finish my algebra homework and scarf down lunch at the same time. I try to keep my head clear and focus on each task as it comes up.

I do a visual survey of all the other students in the cafeteria. On another piece of paper I map out the room and diagram all the groups by table. The perfect student, the perfect student ... What does he or she look like? Hmmm ... I spy on the table filled with jocks, then I scan the table with the cheerleaders. Well, it doesn't hurt to be neat and well groomed, I guess. Are there physical attributes? Is it what they wear, or is it how they wear it? There must be more than physical features, yes? Is it confidence? I write down my thoughts.

I glance at Blake Michaelson. He keeps himself neat and tidy and has a great smile. Everyone likes him. Looks the part, but I also happen to know he is a solid D student. The guidance counselor told him he should consider himself lucky if he is allowed to graduate. He has ruled out college already ... far from a candidate for the "perfect student."

What else? Accomplishments must be high on the list. It's not what we say we'll do in life that matters; it's what we get done that's important. So I keep scanning. Some of the students here are quite accomplished. For example, Chris and Jasmine Blair. These twins are both excellent students. But I think twice (no pun intended) about interviewing them. Chris once told me he and his sister were the coolest people they'd ever met. I had to work hard to keep a straight face after that comment. I think, though, that it can't hurt to ask them a few questions.

I take a seat next to Jasmine and explain the new story I am working on and ask her if she has time for an interview. She smiles and says, "You have come to the right place. I AM perfect." I don't need to hear another word. I act like I am late for an important appointment. "Gotta go," I say.

I notice there seems to be group of students in the back of the cafeteria. Can I find anyone there worth talking to? Maybe. I move closer. Yes, I say to myself, as I find Vanessa Carillo sitting upright in her chair. She's a straight-A student. She's won several academic awards over the past two years. My guess is that this girl comes very close to being the perfect student.

As I walk up to her, I see her fingers flying off the calculator before her. Her lunch sits untouched. "Hi, Vanessa."

"Hold on," she says as she hurriedly jots down figures on a paper with one hand, all the while practically burning up her calculator with the other. I think I smell it overheating. I wait, and wait, and wait. "I can come back another time," I suggest.

"No. Almost done," she says. Finally, she copies the last figures on the paper and then turns to me. "Hi, Becky. What's up?"

"I was wondering if I could interview you for the school newspaper. I am writing an article about the perfect student. I thought you might be a good candidate. A tiny smile rises off her mouth, but then disappears just as quickly.


"I thought maybe you could find the time to—" Before I even finish my sentence Vanessa flips open her calendar and starts rifling through the days.

"I have Wednesday at 10 p.m. free."

"10'clock! ... at night? That's a little late." I say. She sighs impatiently.

"Well, there is no open slot other than—wait ... I just remembered my study group cancelled for tonight. How about 9 p.m. tonight? That's the only time I have available. Take it or leave it."

I figure I should take it. Geez. It seems perfection sure has some rough edges.



Scholar  
and  
Success?

CHAPTER  
**04**

**W**e meet at Vanessa's house because she insists that she cannot afford to take any time to travel. No time off for travel? It seems a little extreme, but I have no problem going to her house.

As we sit in the living room, I notice her hands are folded on her lap. She seems stiff and overly formal. I pull out my notepad and start asking questions. "I understand you are a straight-A student?"

She nods proudly. "I have been for three years in a row."

"What is your G.P.A.?"

"A 4.5."

"Wow. That's impressive," I say. "An A is not good enough for you?"

"It's not that. I appreciate every A I get because I haven't always been a straight-A student. When I was younger, I was never top of my class—in fact, I was far from it!"

"Really? Well, then, what motivated you to become a top student?" Now, we're getting to the good stuff.

"I realized that I was selling myself short. I denied it for a long time, but deep down I knew I could do better if I pushed myself. There was never one single massive change I made ... I just decided not to settle for 'good' grades when I was capable of more."

"Hmmm. Why did you decide to step things up? It wasn't as though you were getting *bad* grades."

"True. But I discovered something interesting about success ..."

I find myself hanging on to the edge of my seat. Vanessa has my full attention.

"I found that I can't have *great* grades when *good* ones are acceptable. I guess you could say that good is the enemy of great. There are a lot of people who have *good* grades—and they are completely satisfied with them. That's okay, but as long as they are

happy with *good* grades, they will never be motivated enough to get *great* grades. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, strangely it does." I notice my brain is in a state of awe. Vanessa is going to think I'm weird looking at her with a blank stare. I better say something. "So ... then what exactly is your goal?"

"I want to get into Harvard, but just getting an A isn't enough. That's why I don't have a life right now."

"Don't have a life?" I ask. "Explain."

"I get up at 5 a.m. every day to study for an hour while there are no distractions. Then I eat breakfast at 6:15 a.m. I give myself 15 minutes to shower and get dressed. And before I head off to school, I finish any other work I have. During lunch I study, and about four afternoons a week I meet with my tutors. After dinner, I review my work. I study more, and then I prepare for the next day. I just don't have any time for anything else."

As Vanessa describes her schedule, I start feeling tired. A feeling of disappointment comes over me. I knew this sounded too good to be true—I knew there had to be a catch. Vanessa has no free time; she has absolutely no balance. See, this is exactly what I told Mr. P. It's all about ridiculous sacrifices. So much for making this a really interesting story. In my last-ditch effort to keep my spirits high and the conversation moving forward I respond, "Wow. That's a tough schedule. Are you tired?" I ask.

"Ha-ha! I have no idea," she says.

"Okay ... well ... So, do you do *anything* besides school work?"

"Nothing," she says bluntly.

I write down *Nothing*, but it still seems strange to me. She must be exaggerating. "Really?" I ask again. "Nothing ... meaning nothing at all? No community service, no hobbies ...?"

"Nope," she says. "Like I said, I just don't have time for those things."

“You must go out with friends and stuff, right?”

“Well, sometimes. Actually, *rarely* would be a more accurate description.”

“Hmmm ... Okay,” I say. “Sounds ... umm ... *tough*, I guess, is the only word.”

“Wait!” She makes this sound like a *Eureka!* moment. “I do something else.” I feel a smile grow on my face as I grab my pen ready to write down what she is about to say.

“Great. What is it?”

“I’m on the school’s Student Academic Commission. We meet and talk about how we can improve academic performance in school.”

“Okay, that’s something.” I write it down in my book. “Any other interests *outside* of school? Are you on a community sports team or club? Do you even think that’s important?”

“No and no,” Vanessa says. “Not unless it helps with my college applications.”

“So,” I ask, “you won’t even participate on a basketball team—even if you enjoy playing?”

“Oh, no. I can’t do it all. I can use my time better.”

What? She leaves me speechless, which is definitely an accomplishment. And almost as though she had planned the entire conversation, I hear the alarm sound on her phone. Vanessa stands up and says in a polite but firm way, “Thanks so much for coming, but I have allotted only 15 minutes for this.”

Her formality takes me by surprise. “Oh, no problem. I think I have what I need. Thanks so much.” As I’m going out the door, I say, “Enjoy your evening.”

“Ha! Well, I doubt that will happen,” she says. “I’m not doing all of this because I enjoy it, believe me. I’m doing it so I will succeed.”

“So when *do* you expect to be happy?” I ask. She is completely caught off guard by the question, and it’s clear she has no answer. Not wanting to embarrass her, I shift gears slightly and ask if she ever worries about burnout. Now, for the first time during our interview, she smiles.

“Oh, my God ... all the time!” she says.

I leave feeling confused, tired, and discouraged all at the same time. It seems that I have a lot more work to do.

Vanessa’s grades are very good; I respect that. She has discipline, focus, and long-term thinking, but there seemed to be something important missing. Although she has perfect grades, I wouldn’t say that she’s a perfect student—but to be fair, I still don’t even know what a “perfect student” is! Is there a perfect student? At this point, I still don’t know for sure. However, I will definitely be on the lookout for one new trait: *balance*. After seeing how stressed out and tense Vanessa was, I’m hoping that true success can be enjoyable as well.

So what positive lessons did I learn from it all? I stop to think for a moment before writing my first *Success Journal* entry:

## My Success Journal

- GOOD IS THE ENEMY OF GREAT. WE CAN'T EXPERIENCE GREAT RESULTS IN OUR LIVES IF WE'RE SATISFIED WITH GOOD RESULTS. VANESSA SURE NAILED THAT ONE! I GUESS THIS ALSO MEANS I SHOULD STOP USING THE PHRASE "IT'S GOOD ENOUGH" BECAUSE GOOD ENOUGH SELDOM IS.

- **SUCCESS IS A CHOICE.** VANESSA DIDN'T ALWAYS HAVE GOOD GRADES; SHE DECIDED TO GET MORE FOCUSED AND DISCIPLINED. JUST BECAUSE SUCCESS WASN'T EASY FOR HER DIDN'T MEAN IT WASN'T POSSIBLE.
- **HAVE A SPECIFIC GOAL.** VANESSA KNEW EXACTLY WHAT SHE WANTED, AND IT WAS CLEAR THAT HER GOAL MOTIVATED HER. SHE ALSO KNEW WHICH DECISIONS WERE POSITIVE AND WHICH WERE NEGATIVE BASED ON WHETHER OR NOT THEY WOULD BRING HER CLOSER OR FURTHER AWAY FROM WHERE SHE WANTED TO BE.
- **ENJOY THE JOURNEY.** DOING THINGS SOLELY FOR A PAYOFF DOESN'T SATISFY ANYONE. VANESSA HELPED ME REALIZE THAT HAPPINESS IS NOT A DESTINATION AND THAT IT IS NOT TIED ONLY TO GOALS AND RESULTS. WORK HARD, BUT ENJOY THE PROCESS AS WELL. THE REAL QUESTION IS "HOW?" HMMM. I BETTER TAKE SPECIAL NOTE OF THAT ...

"Put simply, this book is a brilliant and clever combination of suspense and truth—a real page turner! From an educational standpoint, this book needs to be read by every teenager passing through our public school system today, to teach habits of success and character development."


- Tiffany George

Six-year AVID Coordinator at San Clemente High School  
California League of High Schools, Educator of the Year 2007

"*The One Minute Student* shows readers the "how to" of taking the initiative to be successful as students and in life. Kent's message is so positive and the advice so accessible that it can motivate the student in all of us. I'll be recommending the book to doctoral students in my educational leadership courses."

- Dr. Raghu P. Mathur, Chancellor

South Orange County Community College District



**A**t first, it seemed like a simple assignment given by her journalism teacher, but searching for the "perfect student" sends Becky on a non-stop adventure filled with laughter, empathy, confusion, and some unexpected "Ah-ha" moments. Join Becky on this wild, but intriguing journey and come away with profound lessons about what it takes to succeed in school and create an extraordinary life.

This easy to read story is filled with many surprising life lessons for students of all ages. It's a practical and insightful journey all students—and adults—should read!

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ISBN 978-0-9760258-4-9



\$14.95

9 780976 025849