



Keith Pressley

Comebacker

Keith dropped out of high school at 16. He was battling mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression. At first, leaving felt like relief. But the reality was years of solitude and difficulty finding a job.



With some career coaching, he eventually did land a restaurant job as a dish washer. But his anxiety was still overwhelming at times.

To deal with it, he fell into a lifestyle that included late nights spent drinking. Alcohol soon became his crutch, and by his own admission, he spent seven years lost to addiction until health problems and despair forced him to choose sobriety.

In 2015, Keith quit drinking.

Ten years of therapy and recovery work followed. But something still felt unfinished.

Then, in a counseling session, a social worker paused and told him words he'd never forget:

“Keith, you deserve to finish school.”

It was as if a lightning bolt cut through the years of doubt. For the first time, Keith saw his unfinished education not as failure, but as possibility.

That sentence changed everything.

He had spent years working for the same restaurant, proving his endurance, but now he saw endurance wasn't enough.

He wanted growth.

He wanted to stop being held back by the voice that told him he wasn't good enough.

Keith soon enrolled in free classes at an adult education center in Indiana.



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“There was struggle and doubt,” he said, “but there was no giving up.”

The academics were challenging.

He went to school twice a week after work, plus hours of private study.

He faced subjects that once felt impossible like math.

Keith watched as many classmates dropped out, but he kept showing up.

In 2022, after 20 years away from school, he passed all five sections of the high school equivalency exam and earned his diploma. Soon after, he landed his first new job as a warehousing professional where his confidence shines.

“When I was granted my high school diploma, it was like being reborn. I was a brand new person.”

Keith says nothing will ever top that diploma. Not because of the paper itself, but because of what it unlocked: his self-confidence and belief in himself.

“I didn’t get my diploma for anyone else,” he says. “I did it for me. And it gave me back my belief in myself.”

Today Keith is also a strong champion for adult education and an award-winning writer.

He’s advocated for continued funding for programs in Indiana, and he won the 2024 Indiana Association for Adult and Continuing Education (IAACE) Essay Contest with an essay about his education journey.



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We all have our own story, and it’s there for a purpose. You don’t know who else you’re going to encourage.

If you’ve been inspired or encouraged by Keith’s story, let him know by dropping a comment.



My career has focused on building systems that make comeback stories possible at scale, and now I’m sharing the education comeback stories of real people.

If this resonates, you’ll find more at BridgettStrickler.com or follow me on [LinkedIn](#).

Looking for more inspiration? [Watch my TEDx talk, If you’re going back to school, community may be the medicine.](#)