



## Chris Hadfield

**This is the transcript of our interview with former astronaut Chris Hadfield. In it, he offers some inspiring advice and talks about how life skills have helped him to succeed in his career. Plus, he reveals the one thing he wishes he could do but can't!**

**Henry:** Thanks for coming to see us today, Chris. Last time you dropped in and paid us a visit, you helped launch our life skills campaign. Why do you think it is that people should try and develop everyday life skills, even if they're aiming for a career in an extraordinary environment like the one you've work in?

**Chris:** I've been lucky enough actually to work 'off the planet' which you'd think you'd need a very esoteric set of skills in order to be an astronaut or to fly a spaceship, but of course your entire life isn't holding the controls of your ship and no matter what life you choose, the vast majority of your life is involved with dealing with other people, and with taking care of yourself, and the day-to-day demands just of being a human being. And eventually, of course, taking care of family. And so the skills that you need – some are very technical, some are very specific – but in order to be successful in life in general, you definitely don't want to be just some specialized 'insect' of a human being. You want to be as good at as many things as you possibly can, including life!

**Henry:** Very true! Let's go back now to your time as an astronaut. Can you tell me what were the life skills when you were on the International Space Station that helped you get by, helped you survive?

**Chris:** Life skills help you in a community. And even on board a spaceship, it's a small community of human beings. There are six of us living up there and so the interpersonal relationship that we had – how you treat other people, how you take care of yourself so that you don't become a burden to other people, self-management, self-reliance is a very useful skill. Also the self-discipline that underpins it, the recognition that you are responsible for your own actions and the decisions in your own life, and the discipline that's necessary to pursue those. And the type of crew mate that you want on board a spaceship are really... like if you and I were to spend the next forty years together, the type of skills that each of us would want: I would want you to be very good at the things that will keep us alive, you know, whatever your profession might be. Or if there's a fire, I'd want you to be able to do the right things, but I want you to be an interesting person as well. What other things do you know? How do you pay attention to the things that are important to me? And how do you take care of yourself so that what you're doing doesn't become a burden to me? I think all of that fits into life skills but it definitely improves our chances of succeeding no matter what group of human beings you make, even if it was just us.

**Henry:** Wise words! This year we're going to be focusing on employability as a life skill and it's our major campaign. So let's imagine now you're hiring in the system, OK, now you're an author, now you have this huge social media presence online, and he's going to, or she's going to help you do this. What qualities would you be looking for in that person to come and work for you?

**Chris:** So I did hire someone to be my executive assistant, or personal assistant, and the skills that I was looking for, of course, were someone I could trust, and so when you're meeting someone, how do you let someone know that you're trustworthy? How do you project that? How do you make that part of who you are so that someone else can see that you're trustworthy? It's going to be through the actions, through the things that you've done. These are the things I've done so far in my life; I chose to be part of this organization; I took care of my grandmother; I ran a garden; I did whatever sequence of things that obviously showed that you can take responsibility for something and then finish it. And then your interpersonal skills, of course. Are you a difficult person

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to deal with? Are you a pleasant, a funny person, a person that, you know, you kind of wish that they weren't right next to you? You know, there's all sorts of people in the world but if you're looking to be employable, especially as in most jobs where you're going to be working closely with somebody else, what type of skills do you have but also what type of personality traits, what type of combination between what you are and who you are have you evolved? Because that is really going to determine whether you're going to get hired or not.

**Henry:** Absolutely! Now moving on to your book, we've seen some of the pictures; we're very impressed by them. What gave you the inspiration to take those and share them with the world?

**Chris:** Each of us sees the world differently. Our eyes are all structured slightly differently. We all have our own biases, things that are important... You and I could walk into a room, and you'd notice one thing, and I'd notice something else, just because of who we are and what we've grown up with. So if the two of us were at the window of a spaceship, watching the world pour by at 28,000 kilometers an hour, you know, 8 kilometers a second, the richness of the horizons that you're seeing – it's overwhelming. There's the entire continent of Europe underneath you and you have to choose what part of it you're going to look at, or focus on, or notice, or allow to impact you, and so if you have or we're both given a camera with a long lens, and we were looking at the same thing, we would take different pictures. And if we went around the world again, again we would take different pictures. And I felt myself up on board the spaceship trying to be not only my set of eyes, but your set of eyes, and everybody's set of eyes, and trying to not miss something and try and capture it, and I went around the world 2,650 times, and in those orbits I did my absolute best not only to see and appreciate and record the world for myself, but for as many other sets of eyes as I possibly could.

**Henry:** It's a great responsibility and it's quite a creative project. How else do you like to funnel your creativity in life?

**Chris:** I try to enjoy every single day which ... and a day, of course, is just a sequence of moments strung together, so I try and deliberately enjoy what I'm doing and it's almost always a choice. You can hate what you're doing; no matter what you're doing, you can hate it – it's easy, or you can be frustrated by it, or you can not even notice it. But you can also enjoy it – no matter how mundane the task, there's always some part of it that's funny or humorous, or where you can learn something, or you can get better at it, or you can converse with somebody else, and I've done a lot of different jobs: I was a farmer and a downhill ski racer and an engineer and a fighter pilot and a test pilot, and as an astronaut you kind of... you're the cook and the bottle-washer and the toilet-cleaner and all of those things. But there is almost always something interesting in what's going on around you, and so that's the attitude that I try to stay all the time; I try and make a deliberate, conscious effort to enjoy what's going on because it's really up to me. No one's going to tell me whether I hate or love something. It's totally a personal choice so why not personally choose to enjoy what you're doing? I think at the end of the day you look back and go "Huh, that was a pretty good day, I did some cool things today!" and if you could string enough of those days together you've enjoyed your whole life.

**Henry:** A good message for our teachers, I think! You've touched on it just then in your answer, and the next question I have is... you're many different things now, so you're an author, a musician, an ex-astronaut and a social media star. I've looked at your Facebook page! How do you manage to be all of those things at once?

**Chris:** I'm not trying to be anything beyond what I am. All of us are multi-faceted. I mean, you don't always wear this shirt. Some days you probably wear some outlandish T-shirt; some days you wear a beautiful tuxedo; some days you wear a Halloween costume; and that's still all you. It is totally your choice. You could choose to wear a Halloween costume every single day if you wished. The outward appearance of who you are can be interpreted in a lot of different ways, and each one of those is kind of a reflection of who you are. And it's always been that way locally, I think, but now if I took a picture of you in this shirt and put it onto social media, suddenly a billion people could see you this way, and then tomorrow if you're standing in front of a lecture hall wearing a suit talking about plutonium, a billion people would see you that way. It's still you, but who you are becomes much more impactful,

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or at least more people know about it. And so, reflecting back on your question, I haven't changed who I am, but some of the things I've done, I think, are interesting and definitely some of them are still quite rare – to have commanded a spaceship is still a very unusual event. And so each of us chooses how often we're going to wear that Halloween costume. We really do – we choose how often am I going to project to the world something different, deliberately be something slightly different for the other people to see. And if you're doing something that you're proud of, that you think is worthwhile, and that is rare, then how do you share that with the world? What do you choose to do? And with social media now, I can notice something, or think about something, or remark on it, or want to accentuate it, or write a book about ideas or a book of photographs, or record some music and make it available to anybody in the world who can log in. And not force it on anyone, but just the idea of using technology to share my particular perception of the world. I think it's a wonderful invention, social media and the internet, and I think it enriches us all. It's like a democratization of thought which is new, and so if you're one person, way out on the edge somewhere in a remote part of the world, you now have access to all of the libraries of the world and all of the current thinking in the world and your own thinking joins in as one of those voices. You still stay true to who you are, but I think we all do better as a result of sharing the things we've learned.

**Henry:** Absolutely. But is there one thing that you want to do, you wish to do, and you just can't?

**Chris:** Oh, I wish I could dance! I'm a terrible dancer. Every time I dance, people go "Oh, he's not a very good dancer!" No, I can see it in my own uncoordinated movements, you know, and I'm not a good painter or drawer. I watch someone else pick up the same pencil that I'm holding, and they can, somehow, by moving their hands roughly in the same way I'm moving my hands, they can create something on paper that is wondrous, and I'm incapable. And if I said "OK, I'm going to become a better artist," and [if] I took all the classes and did all those studies, there are probably a few things that I could draw better, but I recognize also that I sure can't do everything, and I shouldn't rail against the things that I can't do, or that I'm naturally bad at, and instead – to me – it seems more logical to try and focus on the things that I'm really interested in, that I want to get better at that, that hopefully I have some native talent at, and with that I've sort of mapped out and drawn the life that's happened for me so far. And it becomes more satisfying. I don't forever feel frustrated by my inability to do the things that .... that is the only thing that matters to me. Instead I'm happy to change direction and choose the things that are important to me but that also I have enough of a knack for that they give me pleasure.

**Henry:** That's a nice way of thinking. And don't worry, I have the same problem with dancing. I think it comes with being a man!

**Chris:** Perhaps!

**Henry:** So before I let you go, what one piece of advice would you give our teachers or the students they're dealing with on how to become the person they want to be or get that career that they want? What's your piece of advice there for them?

**Chris:** Actually, I think a wonderful place to begin, oddly enough, is in a bookstore. If you walk into a bookstore... I bet when you walk into a bookstore, you do not go to every single shelf and sub-shelf with exactly the same amount of focus and time. When you walk into a bookstore or library, there are certain sections of it that you want to go to. Right? This part interests me, this part doesn't. I think it's worth actually stepping outside of yourself slightly. Let yourself walk into a bookstore, and then see where you go. Which parts of the bookstore do I always go to? And then say to yourself: "Huh, that's what I'm actually interested in. I'm really interested in..." You know, whatever. "I'm interested in how fiberglass is made, I'm interested in how the heart works, I'm really interested in horse's hoofs," whatever. Doesn't matter, right? That was three things. But then say to yourself: "If those are the three things that I'm interested in, fiberglass and how the heart works and horse's hoofs, well who could I be? I might be a cardiac surgeon... I might be someone who makes pumps for hearts... I might be someone who builds airplanes that can fly all the way around the world... I might be a veterinarian... I might be someone who designs a horseshoe made out of composite material," doesn't matter. But if you then start pursuing those areas that you're naturally interested in, becoming more competent,

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read about those things, think: “OK, if that’s who I’m trying to be, what should I do next? What should I do this weekend? What books should I read? What course should I take? What should I do? Maybe I should go to a farrier and watch him put some shoes on horses or I should go to the hospital, ask them if they’ll let me observe a heart operation” or whatever. And even though you may never be that person that revolutionizes the area that you’re interested in, each of those little steps you’ve taken, your pursuit of sort of a big, long-term idealised dream of yourself, each of those little steps actually turns you closer into someone that you’re dreaming about. And life is not about the big, dramatic long-term dream goal. Life is about the sum total of each of the little steps that you took. That’s all your life really is: “What did I do next?” and “what did I do next?” and as soon as you’ve got a thousand of those overall, you’re kind of who you are. And so I think it’s worth doing that experiment with yourself – really identifying it, and then starting to make deliberate choices in your life that shift you and evolve you ever closer into the person that you really want to be.

**Henry:** Excellent. Thank you, Chris, I think that’s a good place to end the interview. Thanks so much for being here today.

**Chris:** Nice to talk to you today.

**Henry:** Thanks.

**Chris:** And I like your shirt!

## Interview: Chris Hadfield



Watch the interview again on our YouTube channel: [Macmillan Education ELT](#)



Here are some suggested activities and discussion questions you could use alongside the interview video and transcript:

- ▶ Vocabulary search: Circle all the words and expressions you don't know in the transcript. We've underlined a few which you may not be familiar with. Use the Macmillan Dictionary to find the definition/s. Re-read the word/expression in context to reinforce understanding.
- ▶ Chris talks about day-to-day demands of work. Identify some of yours and discuss with others. Write a list of different jobs and consider what the day-to-day demands of these might be – e.g. Politician, Driver, Salesman, Chef, Celebrity, PA, Doctor, Teacher
- ▶ What are interpersonal skills and why are they important?
- ▶ Chris says that self-discipline and self-management are important to success. How disciplined are you? Do you take care of and organise yourself well? What could you do to improve this? E.g. could you be healthier? Get organised? Study more? Stress less?
- ▶ What qualities would you look for in a Personal Assistant if, like Chris, you could employ one to help you? And what skills would you need to be a good manager to them? What tasks would you delegate to them and how would this help you?
- ▶ Chris can't dance. What is the one thing you aren't able to do but would love to?
- ▶ Chris offers advice on identifying the jobs that you are most suited to and would enjoy doing. Write lists of your:
  - ☆ Personality traits
  - ☆ 'Native talents'
  - ☆ The topics/types of books you like reading

**Now reflect on your lists and look for common themes. Are there any jobs you could do that combine these traits, skills and interests?**

- ▶ What is the one thing that you would love to be paid for doing? What steps could you take in order to get one of these jobs or make that 'one thing' a reality? This week? This month? This year? In the next 5 years? Set some clear goals and milestones to get you closer to a job – and life - you will love.