

Five entrepreneurs and CEOs who didn't do A-Levels but made it to the top

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oing well in your [A-Levels](#) can feel like everything. [Parents'](#) desperately hopeful faces as that envelope is opened, or that [screen](#) refreshed, will be forever seared in the [memory](#) of millions.

[Exams](#) are important, but they are not the be-all and end-all. Not getting the [grades](#) you hoped for, or not doing A-Levels at all because you left school at 16 to get a job or take up an apprenticeship, does not mean you won't make it to the top in [business](#).

Many CEOs who are [millionaires](#) and billionaires today, who sit in charge of companies with huge budgets, shareholders and responsibilities, never took a maths A-Level and definitely didn't go to university or business school.

Here we round up just five of the CEOs and business leaders who dropped out of school at 16 and found their own way to riches...

Pimlico Plumbers founder and CEO, Charlie Mullins

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Dragon's Den star Deborah Meaden left school before taking her A-Levels

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Dragon's Den star Deborah Meaden left school before taking her A-Levels, and set up her own startup business aged just 19.

The entrepreneur, who is thought to be worth in excess of £40 million today, went on to study at a business college, rather than going back to school to complete A-Levels. Her first firm, which imported glass and ceramics, ended up supplying household name stores like Harvey Nichols.

Meaden went on to have decades-long career in business, including creating and eventually selling a multimillion pound family holiday business.

Meaden now has three honorary degrees, and invests in aspiring [entrepreneurs](#) through the hit BBC show. Her portfolio of investments ranges from Dock and Bay, ultra fast drying towels, to Hope and Ivy, which makes fashion items inspired by nature.

Virgin Group founder, Richard Branson

Mike Ashley is a billionaire who left school at 16 without any A-Levels

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Tracksuits and trainers tycoon Mike Ashley is a billionaire who left school at 16 without any A-Levels.

He has been one of the High Street's most colourful figures

for decades, but he started out building his empire in 1982 with just ambition and the help of a £10,000 loan from his parents.

After leaving education the retail magnate worked in the fitness industry, taking on a job as a squash coach before trying his hand at retail. He opened his first high street sport shop, Mike Ashley Sports, in Maidenhead, Berkshire, and by the early 1990s he was expanding in London following an injection of private money.

There was not a degree or a business management course in sight, but his chain of stores (by then rebranded as Sports Soccer) had grown to an estate of around 100 locations by the turn of the millennium.

Wit and Wisdom from Mike Ashley:

“I like to get drunk, I’m a power drinker”, he told the High Court in 2017

“I won’t listen to them because I can’t be house trained,” he has said on PRs’ advice

“I’m not Father Christmas. I’m not saying I’ll make the world wonderful,” Ashley, on appearing before MPs in 2016 to be grilled over working practices at Sports Direct after a series of allegations.

On running a big firm: “It’s like going out one day and you’ve got a tiny little inflatable, and you’re in control. And the next, you wake up one morning and you’re on an oil tanker.”

His views on corporate bonding time? “I dunno what you call it. Fun day? Corporate day? We call it Sports Direct day.”