

PREMIUM EXCLUSIVE

Billionaire Ken Griffin talks to teens about ‘Call of Duty,’ what he looks for in a job candidate, and bombing his chemistry exam

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- Billionaire Citadel founder Ken Griffin returned to his Florida high school on Tuesday.
- He spoke about playing “Call of Duty” and bombing his chem exam.
- He also gave them advice on getting a job, learning to communicate, and much more.



Ken Griffin speaks with Boca Raton Community High School senior Renen Antonacci during a recent event with students at his alma mater.

Billionaire Ken Griffin has been raising the profile of Florida since 2022 when he announced plans to move his hedge fund and trading empire to Miami, where they are now headquartered.

His companies, Citadel and Citadel Securities, are building a new 54-story headquarters building in Miami’s Brickell neighborhood. Last year, the Citadel CEO donated \$50 million to the University of Miami’s Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer. He’s also been making political allies in the state.

In the latest show of his dedication to the Sunshine State, Griffin on Tuesday went to Boca Raton High School, his alma mater, to speak to students about his education and career journey. The roughly one-hour conversation was moderated by Renen Antonacci, a senior who reached out to Ken with the invitation.

With his mother and sister in the audience, Griffin shared some of the lessons he’s learned as a businessman and leader, as well as the top qualities he looks for in entry-level employees. He advised young people to put down their phones and learn to communicate. He also got personal, opening up about the teacher who helped him improve his writing and the “thousands of hours” he has spent playing the video game “Call of Duty” (he blamed the habit on his sister).

Here are the highlights of the school’s wide-ranging “fireside chat” with Griffin, according to a transcript of the conversation obtained by Business Insider.

Ken’s early years

When asked if he would have done anything different with his high school career, Griffin recalled the time he bombed on his organic chemistry exam, and the teacher gathered the students around his desk to use it as a teaching moment.

“I had to work through some emotional damage from that,” he joked.

“In all seriousness, though, you don’t want to go through life thinking about regret,” he said, adding, “If there was a challenge where you fell short, learn from it, but don’t dwell on it.”

He credited his mom, who was sitting in the front row, with demanding that he finish college, and he gave a shoutout to his high school English teacher, Kathryn Lindgren, for tutoring him in writing.

“She was an incredibly important part of my life story. I was a freshman, and after several weeks, she took me



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During his visit to Boca Raton Community High School, Ken Griffin stopped by a biology class and met with students.

aside — she was my English teacher — and said, ‘I’ve heard from the other teachers that you’re pretty good at math and science, but you don’t know how to write.’”

Griffin said Lindgren took it upon herself to tutor him in writing for the next two years, he said, adding, “It changed my life.”

On technology

At one point, the moderator asked Griffin about his love of the popular video game “Call of Duty,” and he acknowledged that he’s been a fan for 15 years.

“My sister is in the front row of this audience, and she is the one who convinced me to play the game. She was a diehard, and she told me, you’ve got to play this game and it has now taken up thousands of hours of my life,” he said.

At the same time, he encouraged the students to put the technology away so they can practice their interpersonal communication skills.

“You’re not going to find many successful people in politics, public service, or business who are masters in text messaging,” he said, adding, “It’s the person who can command a room — that can lead a conversation and comfortably engage with someone in front of or behind a desk. Interpersonal skills are very important, and they have been deemphasized in the age of technology.”

“Turn your phone off. See your friends, don’t text your friends,” he said.

Getting an education

Griffin advised students to use their college years wisely, saying that higher education is where you “learn how to learn.” He also suggested they use college to broaden their horizons.

“What’s amazing is many of you in this room are certain about what you’re going to do. And I’m going to tell you this, you’re almost certainly wrong,” he said before sharing his own experience.

“In college, I was planning to go into private equity,” he said.

He also suggested they give back by tutoring less advantaged students, which he said he did in his 20s in Chicago.

“Everybody in this room should tutor a young man or woman, and in particular, in an inner-city school, to see the education crisis we have in America,” he said.

What he looks for in Citadel applicants

Griffin said communication is key for any job candidate.

“When I started my career, the person who was my primary provider of capital had a plaque in his office that said, ‘If we’re all going to eat, someone has to sell.’”

“Number one, we look for intellect, aptitude, and communication skills,” he said. Grit, perseverance, and determination are among the other traits he mentioned.

“The bottom line is that no matter what you do, you’re going to face setbacks. People who are resilient and learn from those setbacks move forward. People who are not fall by the wayside.”

He also spoke about the importance of problem-solving.

“It’s important to recognize that society rewards problem solvers. If you want to have a set of skills that you’re really good at, solving problems should be high on the list,” he said.

“Let’s be clear, raise your hand in this room if you have a smartphone. Are you angry at the companies that created that technology? No. Great businesses create products that consumers value. This is often lost in the anti-capitalist rhetoric in America,” he said, adding, “I enjoy living a life where there are great companies run by teams of people who enjoy solving the problems that I face in day-to-day life.”