

Settle or Excel? We reap what we sow in life

I came across a story recently which got me to thinking. Then today my wife's business received an email from an upset mother who received a math book in which the answer key is now in the back of the book. She wrote, "I wish I had known that before ordering. I've got one kid that is lazy and looks up answers instead of doing the work."

First the story, then the lesson.

In 1991 Anders Ericsson, Florida State University psychologist, conducted the most extensive investigation ever undertaken up to that time into the source of outstanding musician performances.

The subjects of the study were violinists (from the renowned Music Academy of West Berlin in Germany). The violinists were divided into three groups.

The first group consisted of the outstanding students who were expected to become internationally renowned in their field.

The second group was made up of musical students who were extremely good, but did not quite have enough skill to take them to the very top.

In the third group were the least proficient of the musical students. They were probably destined to become music teachers, but not star performers in their own right.

The ability levels of the three groups were based on individual assessments by musical professors and corroborated by success in open competitions. After lengthy interviews, Ericsson found that the biographical histories of the three groups were very similar and showed no remarkable differences. On average the students began practising the violin around eight years of age. The average age when they first decided to become musicians was just before they turned fifteen. Most students had four teachers throughout their training. But, there was one difference between the groups that was both dramatic and unexpected. This was the number of hours the students devoted to serious practice.

By the age of twenty, the best "super-talented" violinists had practised an average of ten thousand hours. This was about two thousand hours more than the good violinists and about six thousand hours more than the not-so-good violinists.

Ericsson found there were no exceptions to the pattern of hours devoted to serious practice and the talent level of the violinists within the categories. Those who were willing to put forth the effort to put in the practice needed for excellence usually did so from an inner motivation, desire and love for what they were doing. External force rarely produces long term persistence and excellence. What is the lesson in this for us? What does this study say about the future of the child who is "lazy" and looks up the answers in the back of the math book? What does it say about the parent who views this behaviour as acceptable and blames the problem on the layout of the book?

If true success is connected to the willingness of an individual to commit and apply themselves honestly and contentiously to a task, why is there not more emphasis today placed on the value and benefits of such living? Why do so many people choose the easy way out and expect to have life handed to them on a silver platter without their own creative initiative, contribution and commitment to life?

Proverbs 21:5 tells us, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Perhaps it would be a good thing if we understood we are responsible and accountable for the choices, attitudes and actions we choose in our life AND just maybe we might be benefited if we followed the advice of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." From a Biblical perspective we will ultimately be accountable to Him.

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