

All About Attitude

What do successful students and successful parents have in common with “the little engine that could”? According to University of Manitoba psychologist Ray Perry, they all think they can do it.

Recently, a parent sent an interesting article to the Elgin Park Learning Center. In it, Dr. Perry says, “How well you do in school may have as much to do with how well you think you are doing, as how smart you are”. Dr. Perry has led a six-member group of researchers on a three-year study of why some students excel at learning in the face of obstacles, challenges, and setbacks. The findings point directly at the critical role that attitude plays. “It’s not that successful people don’t fail, but when they fail, they think differently about the failure,” he says. “The successful person might blame the failure on lack of effort or poor study strategy, while the unsuccessful person might attribute the problem to lack of ability.” In short, they have different attitudes. According to Dr. Perry, the difference amounts to a sense of control. If students believe something more can be done, they can overcome all kinds of difficulties. If, on the other hand, they become convinced of an inherent lack of potential, even the most favorable teaching conditions will not benefit them.

What can parents do to give their kids this sense of control? We believe it starts with the firm conviction that letter grades are a measure of performance, not talent or ability. Having said that, help your students see the link between their attitudes and their success. Try this. Write A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E on a piece of paper. Point out that A is the first letter of the alphabet, and write a 1 under it. Ask your son or daughter to determine the value of the other letters. For example, T is the twentieth letter so it has a value of 20. Next, add up all the numbers. The total is 100! Attitude means committing yourself 100% to success. Point out that attitude is a personal choice that each person makes each day. We are in charge of our attitudes.

Charles Swindoll says, “The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life...the remarkable thing is we have a choice each day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.”

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