

SEEDS OF FAILURE SPROUT IN CHILDHOOD

We recently found a folded paper in an old college textbook. It was a handwritten list, apparently instructions a teacher had once given to her class. The frustrations it expressed were revealing, but how much can a teacher do?

Teachers are trained to impart knowledge, and many excel. Nevertheless, their efforts are blunted when parents send them students with character deficiencies that should have corrected in the home. The teacher who wrote the list obviously cared for her students and wanted them to succeed. But she was seeing the fruit of four deep-rooted attitudes that must have been planted--and flourished--in childhood:

TOMORROW IS AS GOOD AS TODAY.

"If you have six absences, then miss no more. You will be dropped. Assignments from here on out will not be accepted late unless there is an extreme emergency. Pay attention: you have a schedule, so refer to it."

A lazy college student was probably a lazy child.

COMPLETING THE ASSIGNMENT IS GOOD ENOUGH.

"Most of the Shakespeare papers were pathetic. They were too short and said nothing. Put effort into your work. If you want to slap something down, then don't waste my time!"

Going through the motions does not suffice. Just going down a checklist is not enough. Thoroughness and diligence are also required.

IDEAS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN DETAILS.

"Work on how a paper looks. Take a little pride. Work on proofreading. Work on grammar that has been repeatedly marked. Work on development. Take an idea and THINK about it. THEN write so that it is fully developed. Your work must LOOK good."

One of my college teachers set the tone for his course by posing this question: "Is a cow here for herself or for the good of mankind?" Having neither time nor money to waste in such aimless woolgathering, I dropped the class that day. Ideas are important, but there must eventually be enough closure to gather the details into some practical application.

SOMEONE MUST TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

"Journals must have all entries from day one. Do not ask me what should be in there. Put in everything. Get it right the first time; there will be no revisions. If you miss class, get notes from someone so you will know what to write."

Having to be repeatedly told to do the obvious is really no better than doing nothing. Without enough initiative to pick up the ball and run, the best intentions come to naught.

Leaving such attitudes unchecked sets a clear collision course for life. There will be conflicts and struggles in the home, in school, on the job, and in personal relationships. The seeds of success are sown at home... but so are the seeds of failure.