

Mr T (Director of Camp Juku) rants daily about “useful” topics to his camp students. This is just another rant, but it is aimed at parents.

Part of an email sent to Camp parents on July 10, 2022.

Sorry, there is not enough interest to conduct a full seminar, but if you read ahead you can find the number 1 tip on how to raise successful academically focused children.

Parenting is tough! You are learning with the kids, and by the time you know all the tricks to being a parent, you have no more kids. You get one chance to navigate your child through the turmoil of making academic decisions. It’s a journey through a one-way tunnel. Grade 2, soon becomes grade 3...which soon becomes grade 12. There is no time for second-guessing, “could of”, “would of”, or “should of”.

Here I am! I’ve weaved through the tunnel for the academic part of parenting. I have brought up my two sons, through public and private schools, through gifted to Ivy League, and through teaching, dental, and medical schools. I have been on the Executive Parent Committee at University of Toronto Schools (UTS). I’ve worked with many exceptional students, parents, teachers, and principals. I’ve judged student debating contests among private schools for the Tory Cup (ya, that Tory). But more importantly for the last 25 years, I have conversed with thousands of parents and children through Juku’s tutoring and summer camps. I’ve climbed the mountain and know all the preparations and pathways to reach the top.

This is where I come in. When I was the owner of a tutoring centre, I met hundreds of parents every week. I would run well-attended information sessions and seminars on the values of tutoring. Maybe the parents attended because they felt obligated or because I gave out prizes and pizza. Parents would listen to me self-indulge in my child-rearing experiences and give them my top ten observations on how to raise successful academically focused children.

Times are changing! With the advent of social media, YouTube, and Tik Tok, who wants to listen to an aging educator who has only taught camp classes for the last few years. I get it. I’m not even sure if I’d be as enthusiastic as I was when I had a large tutoring base of new parents to appeal to. I’m not even sure if my top ten observations are as relevant. Do kids still need to develop their vocabulary, reading, and public speaking skills to be successful?

Cutting to the chase! For those who have read this far, I am going to bypass the customary countdown and drumroll and give you the Number 1 observation on How to Raise Successful Academically Focused Children.

From the seminar, How to Raise Successful Academically Focused Children, here is my number one observation. It is a mantra that I repeat daily to my students.

Be Fearless!

In my experience of teaching the same child for several years, talking to their parents, and in many cases following the child’s success in later life, I can see even in grade 2 who will be successful. It is not the child who is the smartest or hardest working. It is the child who is willing to ask questions, show their work, stand up and read, volunteer to help, try new things, have a sense of humour and mischievousness about them, and is willing to fail. It is the child who has a learning mindset and a willingness to learn, to try, and to be fearless!

I know it is cliché to say, you learn by your mistakes. Edison made 1000 attempts before he invented the light bulb. Some say he failed 999 times, but Edison said it was 999 steps along the way.

The great one, hockey’s greatest player of all time, Wayne Gretzky aptly said, “You will miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” This means there is no chance of success without taking chances.

As US President, Roosevelt said during WWII, “There is nothing to fear, but fear itself!”.

Fear of failure is even worse than failure itself. Fear prevents you from trying. Trying prevents you from learning and learning allows you to make a proper analysis and intelligent decisions that will improve your chances of success.

Examples of Being Fearless or Not

Be fearless! This summer in camp, I dropped in on another teacher’s public speaking class, the teacher was having difficulty getting the kids to just read something they wrote about an item in the room. Some stood up and some refused to read their story. I just happened to be in the room. When this one girl who I knew was a great writer refused to read, I had to step in.

I told the class that, I know that it is hard, it is a major fear for many, but speaking out loud is important, as important as reading or writing. No one knows who you are or how you think unless you express yourself. And, this camp is the best place to start. You just met the other students, your parents aren’t here, there are no grades or marks, and some of your teachers aren’t real teachers. This is the best opportunity to try and even if you fail, who cares? You are at a camp. Everyone is supportive and wants to have fun. Each person here has public speaking fears. I get it. It’s scary, but at some point, that fear will go away. I want everyone to take little baby steps right now.

After my rant, everyone took turns and did well, except for one person. There was a boy who looked confident but was inherently shy. After his opening sentence, he epically struggled, and then he froze for a painfully long time. I was about to intervene, when a student at the back of the class, another quiet guy, started clapping. Then the whole class slowly joined in and started clapping. No comments, just clapping. The student started reading again, even looking up. When he did another awkward pause, everyone started clapping again. It was touching, yet comical and everyone felt it. I give fearless-credit to the student for making it through his writeup, but I give more fearless-credit to the boy who started the clapping. Be fearless!

Be fearless! I was doing my pre-camp marketing by dropping off flyers in the neighbourhood surrounding Beckett Farm Public School. My son, in grade 7 at the time, was with me. After a few hours and just before school was let out, it started to drizzle. He asked, "Why do you do this, does this work, are you doing this for the exercise?" Then he took a stack of flyers and went right into the school's lobby and started handing them out to parents and kids. He got kicked out. He continued outside the front doors. He got kicked out again. He went to the bus lineups. He actually went into the bus. He then went to the parents standing under umbrellas, and then to the cars lined up along the sidewalks. Wow! From my parked car across from the school, I was embarrassed and yet, I was in awe of his "just do it" attitude. He said, "Hey, they don't know me, I'm just a hip young guy doing a job. They should be pleased to get good information." He was right. Be fearless!

Be fearless! A few years ago, there was a student in camp who wanted to get into Unionville's prestigious art program. He prepared his portfolio, wrote a letter, and had references. His unsupportive sister laughed at his lameness because he never handed it in. He never applied because he thought his chances weren't good. He was later saddened to see that some of his less artistic friends got in. Fear of failure got to him and he did not submit his application although he did all the hard preparation work. He showed me his portfolio of digital artwork. It was truly amazing. I was saddened by this lost opportunity. Somewhere along the way, no one instilled in him that if you do not try, you will not succeed. He did not try, so he failed. He knew it, I knew it. I let him know that there is virtue in failing. Learn from it.

Failure builds character. You self-reflect and analyze what you have to do to prevent repeating the mistakes.

Failure builds compassion. You can understand and learn from those who have failed. It makes you a better leader.

Failure builds resilience. It makes you tough and ready to bounce back from any setbacks. You will persevere.

Failure builds creativity. You look for alternative solutions. You think out of the box. Evolve your approach to reaching your goals.

As parents, you should develop a nurturing environment of praise, encouragement, positivity, self-determination, comfort, progress, and a willingness to try. And oh ya, have fun and laughter along the way. No one has failed if they have learned from the experience. Go lightly on the praising and encouragement and equally go lightly on the discouragement in the face of failure. Subtlety is better than a roller coaster ride of up and down emotions.

Let your child make decisions. I used to sit beside a mom twice a week as we watched our children do karate. She was a psychologist who interviewed TDSB students for giftedness. She told me that the ability to make decisions was the best thing you can give your child...well it is number 2 on my top ten. Children who make decisions and are allowed to act on them grow up to be critical thinkers and leaders. The decision can be as small as what cereal to eat or what to wear. Let them make small decisions when they are young so when they are older, they can be more prepared for tougher decisions and their consequences. A child who makes a lot of decisions will be a confident and more fearless adult.

You must be a beacon of positivity and encouragement; it raises the soul. Negativity kills it. Don't let your child live in fear of the word "NO".

You want your child to be that child in Mr. T's class who raises their hand, gets excited about class games, is willing to learn new things, laughs out loud like no one is listening, jumps forward to volunteer, talks to new students, is innocently mischievous and makes a lot of mistakes but learns from them. That's a star in my books.

"There is nothing to fear, but fear itself!"

Be Fearless!

Thanks for reading.

T

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Extra

I have taught for over 25 years in a tutoring or camp environment and I can see even in grade 2 who is going to be successful. This is not a hypothetical gesture. It is a real assessment from knowing students for over 5 years and from following their progression as adults. I am not a teacher that has the one and done experience of seeing a new group of students every year.

With the advent of Covid 19, I stopped running in-person classes or seminars. With generous government grants and a ravenous group of “tiger-momish” parents, I successfully switched to online classes. They were an efficient and effective learning method, with dare I say it, better results. I ran hundreds of online classes including, Math, English, Science, French, Debating, Public Speaking, Vocabulary, Early Reading, and Academic Writing. With the advent of covid restrictions the thirst for online classes dried up. No one wanted the

seasonal summer camps, but I no longer have a weekly connection with the parents. I’ve offered free seminars to camp parents but the registration was sparse...oh well.

I now get enjoyment from entertaining my summer camp students with daily rants that end with a message. Usually, the message is based on one of the ten observations.