

## Resisting Tomorrow and Choosing Today

“Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” Benjamin Franklin, that wise man of yesteryear, left this wisdom to be used today. It echoes down the halls of area high schools each day, catching the dust of young men and women’s shoes as they run to the next thing calling for their attention. Surely they can worry about that assignment tomorrow, right? It’s not due until at least tomorrow anyway, right? Time, that ancient thief, turns tomorrow into today. And just as time has stolen society’s reverence for the wise men and women before us, it has also stolen the work ethic of today’s youth, leaving schools to battle procrastination and effortless work from students (and their parents), who feel entitled to passing grades for shoddy, last-minute, thoughtless work. Tomorrow has proven to be an untrustworthy foe, rather than a faithful friend. Society would do well to embrace this age-old adage, encourage students to develop a work-ethic through natural consequences, and raise up a generation that we can be proud of (not afraid of).

How does one embrace this wisdom today? A young man or woman will have to reject the panultimate value of their peers: Today’s youth have crowned happiness as the ultimate goal in life. Many of them mistakenly believe that happiness is attainable every moment of every day, and strive for it through various means. Students want ease. They want laughter. They want “good vibes.” What they don’t want is to have to do hard things. Hard work does not always make one happy. Play makes one happy, so work is put off in favor of play. If a task or assignment can’t be put off, it is done as quickly as possible. As simply as possible. With as little thought as possible. A student who wishes to embrace the wisdom of his or her forefathers will have to reject the notion that rushing through work to get to play is a good way to be happy. Because students are rarely happy when they fail, and so many of our students are failing. The only way to change the trajectory for this generation is to encourage students to develop a work ethic through natural consequences.

The natural consequence for students who are lazy is a failing grade. Why should teachers have to spend countless hours tutoring kids who refuse to pay attention during regular instruction, put off their work until the last possible minute (if they turn it in at all), and make every excuse for turning in

assignments they couldn't be bothered to read the instructions carefully for? Why should teachers then have to contact parents about their child's lack of effort or interest, or respect ... this list is days-long. Why are teachers doing so much for students who do so little? Is data more important than teaching students how to care by allowing them to experience the natural consequence of a failing grade? A failing grade often leads to parents taking an interest in their child's school life. Isn't that a good thing? A failing grade says to a student, "There is a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things." A failing grade teaches young adults that there are firm boundaries in this world. Society's lack of respect for others, and for authority, might be fixed in one generation if the authority in our schools grew a spine, stood by their own guidelines and gave zeroes when kids deserved them. Only then might the next generation be a group of men and women we can be proud of.

To think that the students who sit in class mindlessly staring at a phone screen when given the opportunity (or sneaking it out like an addict who can't say no to their fix) will one day be entrusted with the welfare of society at large is absolutely paralyzing. Classwork seems to be the worst inconvenience. The anger and frustration over having been asked to put their phones away and do something productive and educational is palpable. How can society become hopeful instead of hopeless about our youth? By raising the standards instead of lowering them. By holding our students accountable, and teaching them how to be held accountable by *being* accountable ourselves. By choosing today instead of tomorrow, shunning the temptation to procrastinate and doing today what needs to be done.

All hope is not lost. What remains of it might be miniscule, but even a sliver is enough to consider significant. The only way to revive and rekindle the hope for America's future is to encourage students to do hard things, to put forth their best effort, and to reject the notion that happiness and good vibes come from the easy path in life. They will learn best through natural consequences. Once they have embraced this wisdom and developed a good work ethic, society will be proud of their youth again. Today, not tomorrow.