

The Power of Earning a B ... or a C ...

by Chuck Smith – TCA Middle and High School Principal

Sadly, I was not shocked when I read the following story by Adam Grant, Professor and Psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania:

“A decade ago, at the end of my first semester teaching at Wharton, a student stopped by for office hours. He sat down and burst into tears. My mind started cycling through a list of events that could make a college junior cry: His girlfriend had dumped him; he had been accused of plagiarism. “I just got my first A-minus,” he said, his voice shaking.”

Adam Grant comments in his NY Times article, “Year after year, I watch in dismay as students obsess over getting straight A’s. Some sacrifice their health; a few have even tried to sue their school after falling short. All have joined the cult of perfectionism out of a conviction that top marks are the ticket to elite graduate schools and lucrative job offers.”

Therefore, what is the value of earning a B, or a C, or ... ? What lessons can be learned from a B?

1. Students develop “grit” and perseverance, learn to deal with setbacks and disappointment (especially before leaving home and going off to college), and to creatively stretch themselves and take a class that may not be a “sure-thing” with the end result being an A.
2. Students learn to manage a school-life balance and not pursue academic “perfection” at all costs.
3. Students learn to be independent, problem-solve, self-advocate, and make meaningful mistakes while taking calculated risks. Thomas Edison once stated, “I make more mistakes than anyone I know. And eventually I patent them.” (Edison has been described as “America’s Greatest Inventor.”)

Ultimately, students having all of their problems solved for them before college – is an invitation to disaster in college. Jessica Lahey, author of the NY Times Bestseller, *THE GIFT OF FAILURE*, writes that overprotecting “undermines children’s competence, independence, and academic potential.”

On a personal note, I asked my middle son, Joseph, how many B’s and C’s he earned on a Report Card in high school and college. He replied by saying that he earned at least five B’s in high school and five B’s and two C’s in college. It is interesting to note that Joseph will be graduating from U.T. Medical School this June and beginning his career as an E.R. physician. Upon applying for Med School several years ago, he scored in the top 10% in the nation among applicants – and recently scored in the top 20% of all Med School students nationwide on the Board Exams. My limited perspective, as his father, tells me that the B’s and C’s didn’t seem to sink his

education and career plans - - - and may just have shaped him into the successful student he is today.

Let me conclude though by saying that none of this is an excuse for the pursuit of mediocrity. Christians are commanded, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men" (Col. 3:23). Yes - we should *sweat* to pursue progress - but not perfection. We are called to strive for a work-life balance that embodies a Biblical mindset and Christian character. We should pursue "Balance with Excellence!"