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Self-confidence leads to students becoming high achievers

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Today, the culture of college admissions is driven by results, which have consequently affected student motivation and self-confidence.

The way we measure student success is through high achievements, and we determine this as we engage and interact with society using quantitative terms like GPA (grade-point average), test scores, and the number of years students are involved in activities (two years are better than one). In addition, higher-education marketing strategies have flooded students with high (and often misleading) expectations they need to reach a certain number or percentage to be accepted to their institutions. Whether a student is high-achieving or not, our lacking to see the journey before the result has created a young robotic generation whose members can compete but who risk failing to know who they are. As a college admission adviser, I see many students who expect to become the top student but whose self-confidence and motivation are not developed and who reach burnout; hitting the wall leaves them lost in defining who they are, what they like, and what they need to do to be a happy, functioning individual.

It is time to redefine how we measure success and establish the foundation of the journey to becoming oneself. To reach this redefinition, we must help our children develop awareness, give them tools to help them become aware, and ultimately watch them become intrinsically motivated to fulfill goals with their self-confidence in the driver's seat.

In presenting solutions, many authors and articles address self-confidence from personal, emotional, and social standpoints; however, I present the academic perspective that we as educators, parents, and role models can take to our students. There are basic skills we should ensure our children understand and develop by the time they are high school students:

- Learning style: When students understand how their brains absorb information, they can make better decisions on how to learn. Each type of learner - whether visual, auditory, and/or kinetic (or any combination of these) - will have different ways to acquire information. One student may need to hear music while studying science (e.g. auditory), yet another may need to walk around the house while thinking about the outline to a Shakespeare paper (e.g. kinetic). There are numerous assessments identifying a student's learning style that offer specific tools and resources, including a comprehensive assessment called The Self-Portrait at <http://www.aselfportraitonline.net>.
- Observation and inquiry: We must ask our students questions about what they are thinking. Although it's typical that my 5-year-old daughter asks curious questions like "Why is the sky blue?," a not-so-typical response we need to do more often would be "Why do you think?" Helping young children to develop inquiry from their observations is to help them become critical thinkers. My daughter's answer was not right; however, I gave her the time to be creative and trust herself to take a risk of finding solutions, directly relating to her self-confidence. With older students involved (or who have a lack of involvement), we need to ask, "What do you get out of your involvement?" or more bravely, "Does this involvement make you happy?" When we consistently check in with our students, we can find out what kind of support they need from us to increase their motivation and nurture their confidence.
- Study habits and time management: After our students develop the art of observation and inquiry, combined with understanding their learning style, we can provide specific tools and resources to develop healthy study habits; these study habits can incorporate time management and a great balance between work and play.
- We need to ask our children two questions: What makes them happy and what will they do about it? The combination of reflecting what ideas and interests make them tick while giving ownership to that idea and interest creates something spectacular: a motivation to be happy, a drive to fulfill that motivation, and a result of achieving "happiness" that only draws out the successful student.

- Sonja Montiel is founder of College Confidence, a Westlake Village-based college counseling firm. Montiel serves on the executive board of the Western Association of College Admissions Counseling, is active with the National Association of College Admission Counseling, serves on the planning committee for Ventura County's National College Fair and is a member of the Higher Educational Consultants Association. For information, call 407-7023 or visit <http://www.collegeconfidence.com/>.

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