

THE EIGHTH RULE OF LIFE

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Rule 8: by Bill Gates to teenagers.

'Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life HAS NOT. In some schools they have abolished failing grades and they'll give you as MANY TIMES as you want to get the right answer. This doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING in real life.'

What a shock it was to discover this very thing in our school system when we moved to America nearly 18 years ago. I was employed to set up an alternative school for students who had committed zero tolerance infringements so they could continue their education for a year, but not in the regular public schools. Extra credit questions, Summer school, an after-school makeup for students having too many absences or tardies. I wasn't used to this. In every other country I know of, if you fail you fail and you get over it.

Our two children went immediately to College on their arrival. A few weeks into his study I asked our son how he had done that day. His reply floored us. "I got 110 out of one hundred." I asked him how he could possibly get 110. He told us that he had 'aced' the main test and that there was an extra credit question worth 10% as well, and he had aced that. We sort of snickered at this incredulous situation. I then began to learn that failure here was a 'No,no!'

"We can't afford to let children fail. It might hurt their self-esteem!" Self-esteem has been so overrated! How precious are we to think we can, or should, shield our children from failure. The brightest and biggest Biblical characters all failed miserably at some time through their lives. Most of the world's renowned leaders, inventors and entrepreneurs failed many times in their lives before becoming great. In New Zealand, when I was in High School, the last three years had national exams set by the Department of Education. Only 50% were allowed to pass to keep the standards high. They scaled the results up or down to attain this percentage. My two brothers and I worked very hard, but we all failed one of those sets of exams and had to do the whole year over again. It hurt at the time, but we got over it. We all ended up with degrees and have all been school principals!

Life is not like we experience in our school systems here. Life is tough and you usually have only one shot at things. So why do we give our kids false hope and not prepare them for the real world? We have become far too soft and pamper our children. Many employers tell me that the young people they hire today are poorly equipped for employment and they give up so easily. They are not used to high expectations. Focus is pitiful. Poor work ethic is rife and we

wonder why our economy is in such poor shape (apart from the political reasons!).

Let us, as parents, raise our kids to be equipped for reality, not fantasy. Teach what it means to fail and how to recover from the experience. Look up stories on the Internet about the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Winston Churchill and J.K. Rowling. You will find they all failed many times before achieving greatness. At the same time demonstrate tenacity, focus and courage in your own life. These three character qualities and a positive work ethic are learned when your children see them operate in your life.

Failure is an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. You only fail if you quit trying to reach your vision or goal. We owe it to our children to demonstrate that hard work, being smart and making wise choices will equip us to succeed in life. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians 4:13-14 "Brothers and sisters, I know that I have not yet reached the goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God has called me through Christ to the life above."

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance