

Immediate Gratification

by Dom Testa

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When I was ten I held a grudge against my father. The neighbor kids were allowed to run wild outside until late into the night on weekends, yet I had a strictly-enforced curfew. Lying in bed in my darkened room, I could hear the whoops of joy and laughter through the window, and only imagine the fun I was missing out on. I fumed, and wished all manner of misfortune to fall upon my father's head.

More than thirty years later, I worship the memory of him, and consider him an amazing monument to parenting.

There's a lesson in here, of course, and it applies to you, to me, to our children, and to society at large. It winds through the fabric of parenting, of education, and countless other institutions. It's a lesson on resisting immediate gratification.

To use parenting as an example is easy. A dwindling number of people have the vision – or exercise the patience – required to instill long-term beneficial qualities in their children. To put it simply, many parents are motivated by securing love and friendship from their kids, not by developing or teaching them. The lure of immediate gratification from the parent, not the child, is the root of the problem. Mommy and Daddy want to be loved by their child, and if that means foregoing discipline in order to achieve it, then so be it.

My father could have easily given in to my desires to break his rules and, in the process, won a momentary – and shallow – victory of sorts when I cheered. He would have been a temporary hero. Instead, he chose the longer, more difficult route of raising me to respect values and boundaries. I couldn't stand it then; I appreciate it now, and love him even more for it.

He resisted the immediate gratification.

Things are not much different in our current educational system. The elimination of letter grades, the abolition of valedictorians, and the refusal to hold children responsible for poor performance are just three examples. There are countless others. One school reportedly held graduation ceremonies where 81 percent of the graduating class made the Honor Roll. 81 percent!

It's another form of immediate gratification. Nobody gets their feelings hurt, everyone is happy – student and parents – and we can wipe our hands and move on. Forget the future consequences as long as nobody squawks today. It's the school system's way of saying, "Love me, please!"

I learned so much more from the teachers who pushed me, who corrected me, who weren't afraid to decorate my papers with – gasp! – a red marker. I'm pretty sure that my sophomore English teacher, Mrs. Hanks, did not toss and turn at night, worrying about my delicate self-esteem. She taught me to write properly over a long, protracted year that saw me receive my share of poor grades. She stuck with it, and so did I.

The raising of children – both at home and in the classroom – is an investment in their future. Winning a popularity contest serves no one except the parent, teacher, or school administrator, and is that the ultimate goal? Really?

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