

HOW TO OWN ONE'S SELF

By Bernard Rapoport

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In a recent morning Waco Tribune-Herald, the headline was, "WISD Promotion Rules Worry Some." Now, to begin with, I'm not an advocate for or against school boards (yes, I have reservations here and there, but that's not what we'll be talking about in this essay), but I want to commend the action that minimum standards should be adhered to before promotion of students to a higher grade.

I think it is to their credit that the school board says, "We want to set high standards before a child can be promoted." There is testing that is involved in making this determination. Now, it appears that there are some who object to this. There are a multitude of reasons why our youngsters are not getting a proper education. The one for which I have the most concern is lazy parenting. Obviously this is just one of the reasons, but it is one that a parent can correct. When my parents were concerned about a report card from the school, they would always ask one simple question: "Can you do better?" In order to sustain my commitment to high moral standards, I had to say, "Yes, I can do better." I knew for certain that their questioning was a demonstration of their love. What followed was a discussion of what education really means. They explained in simple terms that without education you cannot own yourself. As a result of this kind of parenting, I really always strived to be the best I can be. Yes, I wanted to own myself!

The schools can't do this for us. The first requisites, of course, are good teachers. I've met some of the wonderful teachers in the Waco school district and I think that they are tops in every way, and especially in their commitment to educating our kids. They cannot, however, do it alone. If your child is one who is not passing, before you start blaming others, look into yourself to see if you are one who is guilty of lazy parenting. It's nothing to be ashamed of if you correct the situation and get involved in making certain that your child does the studying and the homework that is required if he or she is going to be a passing student. As a parent always remember that you want to create within your youngster an understanding of what it is for him or her to own themselves.

One thing is for certain; we're not all equal. Thank goodness! What would we do in a world without plumbers and carpenters and computer experts and the list is so long and the possibilities in various areas are so large that it is beyond comprehension? We all have our best subjects—those in which we are better and the ones in which we are just average. I think that whether it is the school board, national standards, or what have you, just as in any situation, leaders have to lead. So it is with parents, vis-a-vis the education of their children. The parents have to lead which then gives the teacher an individual who has been exposed to an interested parent who has a deep concern for the education of their child! They prove it by affirming their interest in the child's education. Yes, let the child know that you are not only interested, but that you want to help him or her to become the best that they can be. Involved parenting is essential to this becoming a reality.

I think the members of the school board recognize that if the child can't pass the third grade how can he or she be expected to do the work required in the fourth grade? If most of us can't do something that we want to do, we become frustrated. When we put a youngster in a position where he or she is expected to achieve what is not possible for him or her to achieve, the frustration becomes a deterrent to the child's development.

What I've been trying to say in the above is what I believe Jean Jacques Rousseau, one of the greatest philosophers in the history of mankind, had in mind when he shared with us with these words:

“Everything is good when it leaves the creator's hands; everything degenerates in the hands of man.”

Our challenge is to slow down the degenerating process.

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I made a mistake. I talked with my granddaughter, Abby, and read her what you see above. Her reaction was, “Grandpa, you're wrong. Holding kids back can be too discouraging. You can't always blame parents. So many children have just one parent who has to work all day and then come home and fix supper. So in deference to my granddaughter, I would have to say that there are exceptions to what I cited above. This is the last time (I really don't mean this!) that I will ask my granddaughter, Abby, for advice.