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Brick Walls

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I recently read the book “The Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch and realized the lecture was not as expected about his demise. The lecture he gave—“Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams”—wasn’t about dying. It was about the importance of overcoming obstacles and enabling the dreams of others. As I sat in my office recently with a tearful teen discussing an encountered obstacle, I realized that this book could be an inspiration not only for me but for others. I listened as this young lady laid out for me all the reasons that her dream had been crushed. And they were numerous, until I finally drew on “The Last Lecture”. As I described the book, its contents and meaning to her, I could see the change in her attitude toward me, her parents, her friends, and most of all her obstacles. I used Mr. Pausch’s statements about brick walls as my ally for the next few minutes. “Brick walls are there to see how bad we want something”. Brick walls let us show our dedication and separate us from those who do not want to achieve. This teen and I continued to discuss the setting of goals and stumbling of obstacles, as well as the need to sometimes alter the path we follow. During this conversation I realized that I was echoing sentiments I had heard many times from my father by encouraging her to never give up her goals.

As I was working a few days after that appointment a colleague related a story of a parent meeting she recently attended for students who are in an advance placement class. The concern of many parents was not how challenging the class would be but whether it would ensure placement of their child on the honor roll. Some parents wanted their child moved from advanced placement to a regular class in order to maintain their honor roll status. Parents help children to develop resiliency by allowing them to struggle and overcome obstacles. Children need inner strength to deal competently with the many challenges and demands they encounter. This capacity to cope and feel competent is called resilience. The word resilience most often refers to those who have overcome stress and hardship, but should be understood as vital for every child. Even children fortunate enough not to face significant adversity or trauma experience pressures around them and have expectations placed on them.

Parents can teach many skills that develop resilience by being empathetic and communicating effectively and listening actively. Parents can love children in ways that help them feel special and appreciated and accept them for who they are by helping them set realistic expectations and goals. More importantly, adults help children experience success by reinforcing their strengths and helping them recognize that mistakes are experiences from which to learn. Adults should teach children to solve problems and make decisions by dealing with them in a way that promotes self-discipline and self-worth. A child builds self-confidence by setting high standards and striving to achieve those standards. One final statement from

“The Last Lecture” keeps echoing in my head, “Experience is what you get when you do not get what you wanted”.