
Dunces who have changed the world

Report cards are not always the final score ... winners often come from behind

“You will never amount to anything!” said the teacher to the boy with the unruly hair and even more unruly attitude. And the teacher was partially correct. The boy didn’t amount to much—as a student that is.

When he applied to the Swiss Polytechnical Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, he failed the entrance examination—not just one subject, but several. After studying further, he passed the exam and was allowed to pursue his education, but he remained an unexceptional student. Upon graduation he landed a second-rate job.

Then, free from the tyranny of his teachers and no longer restrained by inflexible institutions, Albert Einstein, yes, Albert Einstein blossomed! Five years after graduating, he contributed three papers to the *Annals of Physics*, a German scientific journal. One was on the quantum theory, the other two presented and confirmed the theory of relativity. These papers, the result of deep philosophical thought and complex mathematical reasoning, revolutionized science. At age 26, Einstein had become the father of the atomic age.

So much for pessimistic prognostications about students. Being an inferior student does not ensure failure as an adult, because school and life are different from one another. They have common elements, but for the most part are dissimilar.



“Although our behavior may not change after high school, the setting does,” writes Ralph Keynes, author of *Is There Life After High School?* “Those qualities that can lose you status in high school—aggressiveness, imagination, and an independent turn of mind—may be just the qualities needed to make it in the larger setting.”

Parents and children should remember this, lest they mistakenly presume their “ship” is sinking while still in the harbor. For many young people, school is not their finest hour. They don’t become valedictorian—they might not even win a piddling good-posture award in grade school! But they still can do well in life. Examples abound.

Cartoonist Charles Schulz was a promising student and skipped two grades, but then did poorly. At Central High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, he flunked algebra, physics, Latin and English. He showed no athletic ability and was too shy to ask a girl for a date. The school yearbook even rejected the cartoons he submitted! But Schulz continued drawing and eventually created a comic strip called “Peanuts,” the main character of which is Charlie Brown, a



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born loser whom Schulz modeled after himself. But Schulz was no longer a loser. “Peanuts” appeared in more than 1,200 newspapers in the U.S. and Canada, as well as in newspapers in about 60 other countries.

Mark Twain, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway never graduated from high school. Neither did Pulitzer Prize winner Art Buchwald or inventor of the Lear Jet, Bill Lear.

Werner von Braun developer of the ballistic missile and pioneer of space exploration, was considered a mathematical dunce in school.

World-renowned French chemist and biologist, Louis Pasteur, was labeled just “mediocre” in chemistry. And Sir Winston

Churchill twice failed the entrance exam to military school, but his father insisted he go because soldiering was considered the only career for a boy of such “limited intelligence.”

School *can* be—for a young person with the right temperament and interests—what fertile soil is to a germinating seed.

But not all young people resemble germinating seeds. Some are more like spores. They sail through the air, in what appears to be an abnormal and haphazard manner, beyond our understanding and sympathy.

Only when they land and come to fruition do we appreciate their uniqueness. Meanwhile, all of us—students and parents—need to be patient!

Stop pushing!

The fine art of leadership

With a piece of ordinary string, General Dwight D. Eisenhower once illustrated the art of leadership to a group of his advisors. It was probably one of the simplest and most memorable lessons they ever learned.

Laying the string on a table, Ike said: “Pull it and it’ll follow wherever you wish. Push it and it will go nowhere at all. And it’s just that way when it comes to leading people.”

Here’s what you can do:

1. *Stop pushing. Encourage your people to follow willingly.*
2. *Give your people the credit they deserve.*
3. *Be honest. Never rationalize or tamper with the truth, even when things are not as you wish they were.*
4. *Be considerate of your people’s feelings, interests and circumstances.*
5. *Be generous. Keep in mind that the members of your team are the pillars that support your position as a leader.*

Do you feel branded?

Two brothers were once caught stealing sheep. They were arrested, tried, and found guilty. As punishment, their foreheads were branded with the letters ST for “Sheep Thief.”

One of the brothers was devastated by the experience. He fled his home, but everywhere he went people asked him what the letters signified. After several nervous breakdowns and years of aimless wandering, he died—a pathetic stranger in a foreign land.

The other brother, however, knew he had made a mistake, but refused to see it as more than that. He learned by it, remained at home, and gradually regained the respect and friendship of his countrymen again.

Eventually, he became known as an extremely honest and reliable man—a model citizen. Then one day a passerby noticed the letters on his forehead and inquired about them.

“Oh, that happened a long time ago,” the brother replied. “I don’t recall the exact incident but I believe the letters are an abbreviation for Saint.”

Here’s what you can do: *If people seem to have you branded a certain way, it may be because you permit it. Other people generally accept your own estimation of yourself. To change their opinion of you, change yours first. Begin by acting like the person you wish to become!*

Who's the best coach?

Is it Vince Lombardi? Bear Bryant? Don Shula? Phil Jackson? Casey Stengel? Knute Rockne? Red Auerbach? It's none of the above!

Those seven coaching legends include both pros and college teams. They include football, baseball and basketball. Yet none of them is "The Best Coach Ever."

Recently *The Sporting News* selected a panel of 118 distinguished coaches from all sports. Their assignment was to rate the 50 greatest U.S. coaches from all sports.

They selected as "The Best Coach Ever" a 98-year-old whose mind is still sharp and whose wit is still intact—UCLA Basketball Coach, John Wooden!

In his acceptance speech this great man, this living legend, the Wizard of Westwood, this greatest coach of all time, said the kind of thing you'd expect from a man who spent his entire life focused on others—teaching, correcting, caring and yes, coaching them.

Who was **your** best coach ever? Your Uncle Bob? Neighbor Jones? Your Mom? Your Dad? One of your teachers? A Scout leader? Come on, think—who was the best coach you ever had? Now think back—**why?** What did they do to help you become better, and how did they do it?

Coach John Wooden said, "No one is deserving of being called the very best! No one!"

Then he pointed to the dozens of middle age men (50 to 60 years old) surrounding the stage. These "old" men had been his players at UCLA. "They're the ones who make coaches," he said. "Coaches help—but if you don't have the youngsters you're not going to do the job. All my former players are still in my heart and they always will be . . . the most important things in the world are family and love. The most important word in our language is **love!**"

Coach Wooden is loved by all of the 180 players he coached. Most call him regularly and many stop by to see him. Even after 30 to 40 years his influence on their lives continues. That's why Coach John Wooden—contrary to what he said about himself, is the best coach ever!

We can all read his books and catch his wisdom and love in his own words. Yet what's most important for all of us is to help, teach, coach and love others.

Here's what you can do:

You can mentor and help someone be better than they thought they could be. Yes, you can! Maybe someday your family, friends and associates will gather in your honor and say, "thank you" for all you've done for them. Hopefully you'll be 98 years young and sharp as a tack when it happens!

To the early birds, life's a hoot

Do you consider yourself a "morning person" or are you more of a "night owl"? In the ongoing rivalry between morning people and night owls, it looks like the a.m.'s just might have an edge.

A recent Gallup poll found this: 56% of those polled said they are morning people—and another 25% would like to be.

It's no wonder. Those who call themselves

morning people also seem to share these traits:

- They have more energy than most people (53% vs. 39% for night owls.)
- They eat well (55% vs. 39%.)
- They lead an active lifestyle (74% vs. 64%.)
- They are more optimistic than most (66% vs. 56%.)
- They exercise more than most people (45% vs. 37%.)

A winning ticket

Believe in your own potential, and you've always got a winning ticket

Wise people have stated this truth in many ways: "The only real security you'll ever know, must be found within you." But many people haven't learned this, like the man who recently bought a ticket in his state lottery. Not expecting a winning ticket, he didn't recognize it as such, and he threw it away.

A few days later, he saw a television advertisement that showed a close-up of a winning ticket. Suddenly, he was overwhelmed with fear that the ticket he had thrown away was in fact a winning ticket. He jumped into his car and drove straight to the city dump, where he spent days—literally days!—grubbing through tons of garbage, hoping to recover his ticket.

Of course, he never found it. His search was futile, and he eventually dragged himself home, a sad and defeated man. He had wasted his time. He had endured the humiliation of having photos of himself—wild-eyed and frantic, wading knee-deep in filth—appear in the local newspapers. But worst of all, he berated and belittled himself. "I could never *earn* that much money, because I am not worth it. I don't have enough skill, or enough ability to develop a skill. I have no hope, except that I'll get a lucky break someday. I do not believe in *myself*. I believe only in *fate*, and fate has always been unkind to me."

This man's vision of his own potential was obviously dark and narrow. In this respect, you might even say he was blind. Had he glimpsed even the slightest potential within himself, he would have directed his time and energy toward improving his skill in his present job, or educating himself further, or thinking of creative ways to earn the money he desired.



But no, he spent more than a week burrowing through garbage and ended up even more frustrated and discouraged than when he started.

How sad. Had he known the truth, he might have spent his time digging through research material, on his way to a Ph.D. or perhaps even a Nobel Prize—because the truth is, every human being has *vast reserves* of untapped potential.

Experts disagree on exactly how much of our mental potential we actually use, but all agree we use only a small fraction of what's available to us. Some experts in the field of human potential estimate that we use less than 5% of our mental capacity, and that even the great Einstein used only 10% of his!

Here's what you can do: *Remember that statement about finding real security within you. You DO have vast potential, just as everyone else does. All you have to do is acknowledge it. So whenever you're alone—say, in the shower, or while driving to work—repeat aloud such affirmations as, "I have the ability to earn whatever amount of money I desire. I can develop any skill I choose. I have more than hope, I have the conviction that I will be led to the opportunities I need, whenever I need them. I believe in myself, and that belief will always be rewarded."*



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Editor: Judy Weldon. Executive Assistant: Debbie Giebelhausen. Cartoons: Brad Hall.
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