

Life and Death are in Your Words

(Written by Professor Jeff Willie)

In life, you don't get what you want, you get what you expect. The key word is "Expectations". Your word choice (verbals), your nonverbals (body language) determines your expectations. What do you want out of life, do you want to leave a legacy that you are proud of, a legacy that's carried on by your children and grandchildren. What do you expect from your children? What are the modeling behaviors are your children seeing? What are the words are speaking into your children's life? There is life and death in words.

I am reminded of my eighth grade math class a few years ago (1972) in a small school district in East Texas. This was the second year this small school district was integrated; blacks and whites attending school together. Myself, plus four other 13/14 year old African American boys were behaving inappropriately in class. Our math teacher needing to get our attention and he did get our attention in a very inappropriate way. I quote, "You boys are STUPID, you are never going to amount to anything and do not take algebra in the ninth grade". Yes, the teacher's word choice was totally inappropriate, wrong for him to speak those words to students or to anyone. Our teacher was operating from a low expectation paradigm for African American boys. His expectations of African American boys or your expectations of your children become your self-fulfilling prophecy. What are your expectations for those in your circle of influence, what are the expectations for yourself?

Most of us are familiar with a common childhood chant, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me". Obviously, we know that is not true. Words can cause long term emotional harm that may impair an individual from reaching his or her full potential. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble. Considering the powerful of the words we utter, we must discipline ourselves to speak in a way that conveys respect, gentleness and humility. Before speaking take a few moments to contemplate what you will say and how you will say it; while considering the impact your words will have on the listeners. Be kind to all and speak words that are beacons of inspiration, enthusiasm and encouragement to all. Kind and sweet words are always music to the ears of the listeners.

"Low expectations from teacher will cause a child to fail, low expectations from a parent will crush their soul" (Author Unknown). My expectation of parents and educators and I hope these are your expectations also. Educators/Parents are; (1) enthusiastic about their children and particular subject and see the connections to everyday life (2) model expectations in language and actions (3) have a commitment for continuous learning (4) believe all children can learn at a high level (5) values the many ways children/students communicate and engage and encourage different combination models (6) respect and develop a productive relationship with students, parents and guardians from different socio-economic backgrounds and diverse communities.

I agree with Madeline Hunter when she stated, “Kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!” All students can achieve at a high level. Caring, belief, encouragement and unconditional “Positive” regard are the keys that unlock the heart and mind; “Maslow before Blooms”. Hearts and minds are opened in the home, in the classroom, in your circle of influence when there is love and caring parents, guardians, and educators that model and teach with passion and manage with compassion.

Fast forward to 1995. College algebra was a prerequisite for obtaining an associate degree from the Community College of the Air Force. Because of the destructive language spoken to me by my 8th math teacher (you are stupid), college algebra was extremely difficult. I prevailed after four attempts, completed college algebra because I refused to allow negative words spoken into my life to defeat me and handicap my full potential/future. I served 26 years in the United States Air Force, have three associate degrees, bachelor’s degree, master degree, graduate certificate in conflict mediation, and perusing my doctorate degree in educational leadership. I am College Professor, Internationally Certified Leadership Coach, Leadership Trainer, Certified Educational Consultant, Conflict Resolution Trainer and Motivational Speaker. I’m an Honorary Colonel in the Arkansas State Police, Honorary Member of the Arkansas Highway Police, and a Certified Arkansas Law Enforcement Instructor in Rapid Response, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). My wife (Pat) and I have been married over 42 years, raised two highly successful beautiful daughters. Our oldest daughter is a Pediatrician and our youngest daughter is an Attorney. Your past do not determine your future, you determine your future. Dream big, take action and put your dreams to the test.

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