

Want to Raise a Doctor or Lawyer? Don't.

Doctors and lawyers have long been synonymous with “success” in America. Legal and medical dramas cycle on our televisions 24/7, highlighting the allure of power, status, and excitement. More fundamentally, many parents of children considering a college major appreciate the employment security, professional respect, and financial stability that come with these professions. So it might surprise you to know that as an attorney married to a physician, my husband and I do not direct our children to these professions.

When professions are ranked by rate of substance abuse, doctors and lawyers are on top. Lawyers are almost four times more likely to suffer depression than the general public, and physicians have the highest suicide rate of any profession, more than twice that of the general public. These truths caution us against pushing our kids towards a particular profession. Instead, let us recall 1 Peter 4:10, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

We each have unique gifts, unique ways that we can serve God and humanity. Indeed, the greatest honor of parenthood is to watch and encourage our children as they identify and cultivate their particular gifts.

In our professional experience, my husband and I have observed two qualities that, without fail, make a person successful: emotional intelligence and attitude. These are what we attempt to foster in our children.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, both our own and those of others. As to ourselves, we understand that our innate value as a human is unchanged by our worldly successes and failures. We remain humble in the face of success and teachable in the face of failure. We accept constructive criticism as a learning opportunity, rather than taking offense, and we are resilient and persistent in our efforts. We don't expect immediate results. EI encourages us to prioritize our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. With EI, we can more effectively define and live our values and purpose.

In dealing with others, we are not threatened by or spiteful towards those who are different. Instead, we recognize them as valuable humans and their differences as learning opportunities. We are unselfish and compassionate team members. EI fosters healthier relationships and a desire for improved communication—verbal, written, and listening—which are essential in any career. In short, EI benefits both our personal and professional relationships. Win-win.

Attitude

Attitude is everything. Whether we are coaching a sports team, working with a paralegal or nurse, or teaching university students, my husband and I would rather work with someone who has lesser skills but a great work ethic and attitude than someone with superior skills but a poor attitude. Because the right attitude opens the door to limitless potential. The wrong attitude is like a brick wall. And each of us can choose our attitude!

If someone has a good attitude, they will have a good work ethic. They will always be motivated to do their best work and continually improve. They will be the ultimate team member,

and that is essentially what a work environment (and even a family) is—a team.

How Can We Foster EI and a Positive Attitude

We can only teach what we know, so parents must take a hard look at themselves and ask whether they embody these characteristics. If so, they will naturally teach their children by modeling. If not, parents must either set out to develop these skills, or find other resources for their children.

There is no shame in admitting that even as adults we still have some personal growth to undergo. More often than I'd like to admit, I do not exhibit either EI or a positive attitude. But the thing is, we don't have to be perfect to be good parents. Instead, we can turn our own shortcomings into teaching opportunities.

When I fall short, I admit it. I take intentional, visible steps to improve, whether by seeking counseling, reading articles, meditating and praying on it, or simply taking a deep breath and circling back to apologize. Per James 4:6, God gives grace to the humble. This too is an important lesson to pass on to our children.

So I would suggest that instead of asking, "How can I raise a doctor or a lawyer?" ask, "How can I help my child make the most of his or her gifts?" The answer? Give them the right tools—EI and attitude—then watch as they forge their own path.

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