

Fear of Failure
by
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The Apollo Area Economic Development Council (AAEDC) is a unique model that brings together business, church, government and school. Apollo Ridge school superintendent Dr. Bill Kerr deserves enormous credit for orchestrating this 4-part harmony that can be heard throughout the valley. He also deserves credit for constantly involving school students in the process. They are not only the source of enormous energy and inspiration, they are the source of the future success of the AAEDC.

A couple weeks ago, I was included in a meeting with 10 Apollo-Ridge school students, Bill Kerr, director of technology Chris Suppo, world cultures teacher Bob Fello and Pitt Professor, Dr. Maureen McClure. We discussed how to use the recently awarded \$1,500 grant for the Apollo/Bosnian home page over the Internet.

While receiving this grant was a remarkable, if not unlikely achievement, it paled in comparison to what transpired that morning. Bill began the meeting in the usual way making introductions and then he began speaking to the students saying "do not be afraid to fail". I immediately looked up and I could see the wheels turning in the eyes of every student. It was like turning a herd of thoroughbreds loose on the open range. It was exactly what these kids needed to hear. Not being afraid to fail is a recurring chord resonating within many who achieve greatness.

It was refreshing to hear anyone let alone a school superintendent encouraging students to dream. Original thoughts and ideas were nurtured that morning. Instead of finding the "right" answers, we were destined to find new answers, perhaps better answers. Encouraging creative thought, risk taking and group problem solving was alive and well at Apollo-Ridge. This was education at its best. Being afraid to fail is what sometimes prevents good students from being great ones.

For adults that lesson is equally applicable. I've learned a lot from students. The AAEDC has helped to evoke a mindset that constantly challenges the way many of us have traditionally thought. That mindset includes imagining new possibilities, taking risks and most important, not being afraid to fail.

The group that met that morning will stumble and fall many times. It may even look foolish attempting to do something no one else has done. But it can never give up or it has ultimately failed.

When I speak of failure, I do not mean failing in the moral sense. There is nothing gained and everything lost by taking drugs, being dishonest or growing up to become a slum landlord or deadbeat dad. In fact, overcoming the fear of failure has a very positive moral influence. Giving students permission to try, to fail and to get back up again forms

leadership. When that sense of leadership is formed, there is no going along with the crowd to look cool. At the core of virtue is having the courage to stand for one's convictions. There is no better training ground than taking a risk and looking foolish while trying to succeed at something worthwhile. And there is no better example than watching a parent willing to take a stand alone for something he/she believes.

I have been asked to speak about Apollo Trust Company's technology accomplishments at many banking functions across the country. It is something impossible to do without speaking about the Apollo community. It is something impossible to do without talking about what we really imagined would happen. It is something impossible to do without talking about how many times we stumbled and fell.

At the heart of taking risks and not being afraid to fail is a belief in something bigger than ourselves. That is why I continue to believe that education with faith forms the underlying foundation for true progress. Hope turns stumbling blocks into stepping stones. And it is that mindset that bodes well for the future of the AAEDC.



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