

Excerpts from Covey, Stephen R., The Leader in Me, New York: Free Press, 2008

Greatness to Match Today's Realities

But something is happening at these schools that I believe is greater than any of the results mentioned above, including the rise in test scores and the smiles on parents' and teachers' faces. Students coming out of these schools are equipped with a type of "greatness" and the skills they will need not just to survive but to thrive in the twenty-first century.

Let me explain.

It is no secret that we are at the forefront of one of the most exciting and promising of all ages in human history. The exploding advances in technology and the globalization of markets have created unprecedented opportunities for growth and prosperity for individuals, families, organization, and society as a whole. Of course, there are also many problems and challenges – there always have been and always will be – but gaze in any direction and opportunities to progress and make a difference are everywhere. Yet amid this climate of opportunity, a question tenaciously nags at the minds and hearts of parents, educators, and employers alike: Are today's young people being adequately prepared to take advantage of the expanding opportunities and duly equipped to deal with the accompanying challenges?

Until recently, we were living in an era known as the information age. In that era, individuals who had the most information – the most "facts" in their heads – were the ones who became the fortunate few to ascend to the tops of their professions. During that era, it only made sense that the primary focus of parents and schools was on pumping as many facts into students' brain cells as possible – assuming they were the right facts for the right tests. After all, "facts in the head" is what allowed students to score high on the right "fact-based" tests, which got them into the best "fact-based" universities, and that in turn set them up for an accelerated climb up the right "fact-based" career ladder.

But that era is now being transcended as the global economy has entered another phase of speed and complexity. While factual information remains a key factor for survival in today's world, it is no longer sufficient. With the massive spread of the internet and other digital resources, facts that at one time were closely guarded trade secrets and only available from the top universities can now be accessed in most every nook and cranny on the globe at the click of a mouse. As a result, many of the so-called elite professions that once required extensive schooling are today being passed on to computers or to people at far lower education levels and wages across the planet. Factual knowledge alone is thus no longer the great differentiator between those who succeed and those who do not.

The last decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind – computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBAs who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands.

--Daniel Pink, A Whole New Mind

Instead, the individuals who are emerging as the new "winners" – the new thrivers – of the twenty-first century are those who possess above-average creativity, strong analytical

skills, a knack for foresight, and – surprise, surprise - good people skills. As Daniel Pink and others are asserting, it is the right-brainers who are taking over the present economy. They are the inventors, the designers, the listeners, the big-picture thinkers, the meaning makers, and the pattern recognizers – those who know how to optimize and creatively maneuver the facts, not just memorize or regurgitate them. All this they do while knowing how to effectively team with others. And, in case you have not noticed, people with such talents are popping up on every continent, even in remote villages. As Larry Sullivan, former superintendent of schools for the Texarkana (Texas) Independent School District, points out, “Today’s students are no longer merely competing for jobs against students in neighboring towns, states, or provinces, they are competing with students in China, India, Japan, Europe, South America, Madagascar, and every island and continent in between.”

Yet while these are the new realities, how often do I hear today’s business leaders grimacing about the new MBA or PhD they just hired who has “no clue” how to work with people, how to make a basic presentation, how to conduct themselves ethically, how to organize their time, or how to be creative – much less how to inspire creativity in others? How many times do I hear executives talk about how their company is poised to pursue a great new opportunity but cannot get out of the starting blocks because they are mired in ethical breeches or infighting between employees or subcontractors? How many times do I hear parents bemoaning the fact that their newly crowned high school graduate excelled on all the college entrance exams yet does not know who to take responsibility for their actions, to vocalize their thoughts, to treat people with respect, to analyze a decision, to empathize, to prioritize, to resolve conflicts maturely, or to plan? If you were to ask these people if they felt students were properly prepared for the present reality, I think you would hear an unequivocal, unified, and boisterous, “No!”

The more I have such conversation, the more my own thoughts turn to my grandchildren, and their future children. I find myself asking, “What does the future hold for them? What can I do to prepare them better for the new reality?” Indeed, in this age, when they read far more text messages than they do textbooks, I find myself worrying less about what facts my grandchildren are studying in school than I do about what their peers – and even their teachers – are telling them about life and how to handle it. I have spent more than half of my career as a teacher and know all too well how a teacher can either cement mediocrity or inspire excellence in a student, regardless of what subject is being taught.

As I struggle to distill the essence of what the new business environment is telling me, what educators are telling me, what parents are telling me, and what my own heart is telling me, the concept that keeps surfacing in my mind is primary greatness. I recognize that “greatness” is a term that is intimidating to many people. To some it is even a negative or arrogant term. I think this is because many people equate it only with what I call secondary greatness. Secondary greatness has to do with positions or titles, awards, wealth, fame, rankings, or rare accomplishments. Almost by definition, secondary greatness can only be attained by a select few, an extremely small percentage of a population. Secondary greatness is largely determined by comparing one person against another.

Primary greatness, on the other hand, is open to everyone. Every single person can have it; there are no bell-curve limits. Primary greatness has to do with a person’s integrity, work ethic, treatment of others, motives, and level of initiative. It also has to do with a

person's character, contributions, talents, creativity, and discipline. It represents who people are – every day – as opposed to what they own or temporary achievements. Primary greatness is measured not by comparisons with other people, but by adherence to timeless, universal principles. It is humble.

If we are putting all of our efforts on the almighty test score alone, I am quite afraid that we are going to create a generation of children who know how to do nothing but take a test well.

--Muriel Summers, Principal, A.B. Combs Elementary

Sometimes, primary greatness is a precursor or companion to secondary greatness. In other words, a person having primary greatness ends up also having secondary greatness. Other times, secondary greatness comes alone. We all know of people, for example, who have secondary greatness but who lack any semblance of primary greatness. At the same time, many people with primary greatness never achieve secondary greatness, and even prefer to avoid the limelight of secondary greatness.

The reason primary greatness keeps coming to my mind is that I sincerely believe it is what business leaders, parents and educators are begging for in their employees, in their children, and in their students. I will lay out why this is so in far more detail in chapter 2, but suffice it here to say that, truly, today's realities present a new and global playing field, one that demands far more than just having a set of facts lodged in one's head. It requires new skills, though in reality some of them turn out to be quite "old" skills. And it requires a new level of primary greatness, with a firm character foundation.

So yes, it is nice that the schools mentioned in this book are reporting improved achievement scores and increased student self-confidence, and, yes, it is good that parents and teachers are reporting higher satisfaction ratings. But higher test scores and happier parents are now what is going to enable students to survive and thrive in this new reality. They need more. And that is what excites me most as a grandparent, as a business leader, and as a member of society about what you will read in this book. Students are exiting these schools far better prepared with the mind-sets, the skill sets, and the tool sets they will need to meet today's new realities.

Covey, Stephen R., The Leader in Me, New York: Free Press, 2008, pp. 6-10.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

As Muriel sat among business leaders, she could not help but think, “If children learned the 7 Habits at an early age, how different their lives might be and how different our world might be.” Read the following synopses of the 7 Habits and see if you come to the same conclusion.

Habit 1: Be Proactive

I am a responsible person. I take initiative. I choose my actions, attitudes, and moods. I do not blame others for my wrong actions. I do the right thing without being asked, even when no one is looking.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

I plan ahead and set goals. I do things that have meaning and make a difference. I am an important part of my classroom and contribute to my school’s mission and vision, and look for ways to be a good citizen.

Habit 3: Put First Things First

I spend my time on things that are most important. This means I say no to things I know I should not do. I set priorities, make a schedule, and follow my plan. I am disciplined and organized.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win

I balance courage for getting what I want with consideration for what others want. I make deposits in others’ Emotional Bank Accounts. When conflicts arise, I look for third alternatives.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

I listen to other people’s ideas and feelings. I try to see things from their viewpoints. I listen to others without interrupting. I am confident in voicing my ideas. I look people in the eyes when talking.

Habit 6: Synergize

I value other people’s strengths and learn from them. I get along well with others, even people who are different than me. I work well in groups. I seek out other people’s ideas to solve problems because I know that by teaming with others we can create better solutions than any one of us alone. I am humble.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

I take care of my body by eating right, exercising, and getting sleep. I spend time with family and friends. I learn in lots of ways and lots of places, not just at school. I take time to find meaningful ways to help others.

Covey, Stephen R., *The Leader in Me*, New York: Free Press, 2008, pp. 21 & 22.

In short, what these educators are doing is teaching basic leadership principles to young students – as young as five years old. They are teaching oft-neglected skill sets for making good choices, for getting along well with others, and for managing time wisely. In addition, they are providing authentic opportunities for students to apply them by giving students leadership opportunities in the classroom, in the school, and in the community. All this they are doing in a way that is improving student achievement and restoring discipline and a character ethic in the classrooms and on the playgrounds. What delights teachers is that they are doing it in a way that does not create “one more thing” for them to do, but rather offers a methodology that many describe as “a better way of doing what we were already doing.”

“This is not a school that is about making nine hundred little business leaders. This is a school about creating a well-rounded student who knows their strengths. We are here to help them find their strengths and unleash their potential to influence others.”

-Michael Armstrong, Magnet Coordinator, A.B. Combs Elementary

Covey, Stephen R., The Leader in Me, New York: Free Press, 2008, pp. 4.