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## *The Formula For Success*

Poet and author, Laurie Beth Jones wrote, "The key to success . . . find a niche and scratch it." We need to do what we can to help each child find his niche, give him support, and provide opportunities for him to scratch it. The following is a simple formula that will help you guide children on their way to success.

### THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

**Gift + Passion + Personal Strengths + Support = SUCCESS**

We must help each child find his GIFT. Then, there has to be PASSION. The child must enjoy utilizing his gift. Next, a child has to use one or two of his PERSONAL STRENGTHS to help him get the most out of his gifts and talents. Personal strengths include such characteristics as determination, compassion, patience, or perseverance. Finally, each child needs SUPPORT from teachers, parents, and other caring adults.

### **GIFT . . .**

Once again, we must believe that every child has a gift. Quite often you can spot a child's gift by just quietly observing. Be sure you let the child know that you recognize her gift. "Ericka, you sure can run fast." "Alex, I've been listening to you and I'm amazed at how well you sing. You have a great voice." Many children never hear such positive comments about the things they do well. They usually feel fantastic knowing that an adult recognizes them and their abilities.

Remind each child that he or she is unique. Encourage children to do their best with the gifts that were given to them. Runner and author, Kevin Nelson tells children, "No one else has your unique gifts. You possess talents and capabilities that other people, including the ones you admire, can only dream of. And those unique gifts are what you must bring to the world." (p.13) Also, let children know that they should not try to be someone else, and they should not be constantly comparing themselves to others. Baal Shem Tov lets us know, "Everybody is unique. Compare not yourself with anybody else lest you spoil God's curriculum."

Here are two examples of young people who possess unique gifts: *Chris* was a troubled middle-schooler. He seldom did his homework and most teachers believed he would eventually drop out of school. Instead of listening and doing his work in class, he would draw. His artwork was very good, but it always centered around violence. He would draw guns, bullets, blood, and sharp knives. The eighth grade language arts teacher needed someone to draw pictures for the school's annual publication of student poetry. One teacher suggested *Chris*. Other teachers thought that was a terrible suggestion, but the language arts teacher invited him to do the artwork for the book. *Chris*, the boy who drew violent pictures, could also draw puppies, butterflies, and flowers. His artwork proved to be the highlight of the book. Was that special invitation the spark that motivated him? It could have been, because he did eventually graduate and now works as a graphic artist for a small newspaper in New England.

*Jill* was a waitress I observed in a Denny's restaurant in Orlando, Florida. My guess was that she was about 16-years-old. As I sat in my booth, I watched her. Even though things got hectic and she had a couple difficult customers, she never stopped smiling. She was so pleasant and did her best to assist co-workers and customers. Her personality and temperament were amazing. Although I never did talk to her, I could see that she had several gifts. My guess would be that *Jill* was going to be successful in almost anything she tried.

## PASSION . . .

Some children have special gifts but are not moved to build on them, or they appear totally uninterested. They can be apathetic. Shea might say, "Sure I'm good at volleyball, but who cares? Big deal! I've got better things to do." Jenny is a great bowler, but seldom gets

excited about it. Mark is the best piano player at school, but his mom has to force him to practice. Rhonda's father wants her to play ice hockey. She hates hockey and always makes excuses to miss practice. Probably none of these children will be very successful in their venues, because they lack passion.

Passion is a must. As mentioned before, I am passionate about running. I love to run. No one has to push me out the door everyday to run. When a child has passion, he seldom has to be pushed.

Let's see what others have to say about the importance of passion:

**Martha Graham:** choreographer and dancer, "Great dancers are not great because of their technique; they are great because of their passion."

**Joan Benoit Samuelson:** marathoner and Olympic gold medal winner, "If there isn't passion, there isn't fire."

**Evgeny Kissin:** pianist, "It makes no sense to work hard if one has no love for it. So it's hard work, love, and a gift."

**Dick Vitale:** basketball analyst, announcer, "Everybody must be passionate about something in their life."

**Lance Armstrong:** world famous bicycle racer, "Cycling, for me, is a great passion . . . I'm passionate about training and racing . . . I'm passionate about Luke (his son), about my family . . . I'm passionate about the fight against cancer . . . Passion separates the ordinary from the extraordinary."

**Kenesi:** age 6, from Kenya had these comments written about him under his picture in the Fall 1999 issue of *Spirituality & Health* magazine. Now, this is a boy who is passionate about learning!

Kenesi often helps his older brother take care of the family goats. He is the only one of seven children who was selected by his parents to attend school. Since his family is semi-nomadic, sometimes he must walk alone - nearly four hours - over terrain populated by baboons and leopards - to get to the only school in his district. His mother says that Kenesi runs most of the way - not from fear of predators, but from the excitement of attending school. (p.23)

## PERSONAL STRENGTHS . . .

Many gifted children can be passionate about something, but still lack certain personal strengths that could elevate them to a higher level. For instance, there are hundreds of extremely talented young basketball players showing off their skills on the playgrounds of New York City. Many have the ability to play college or professional ball, but they lack such personal strengths as self-discipline, determination, or patience. They may lack the commitment it takes to be successful, or they always find excuses for not practicing. Others may lack character and sacrifice their future for drugs and alcohol.

Gifts and passion are not enough. Children have to rely on some personal strengths to keep them on their roads to success. Alonzo likes playing the violin and he is obviously gifted in music, but does he have the necessary personal strengths to keep him going? Is he persistent? Is he responsible enough to make himself practice everyday? Does he have a sense of humor to deal with the football players who call him "Sissy" because he plays a violin?

Just as we recognize children's gifts, we should also recognize and acknowledge their personal strengths. Help them set goals, write plans, and eliminate excuses. Let them know that they have the necessary "tools," but they have to be determined and optimistic. Remind them of M. Basil Pennington's words, "The Lord prepares us so well for the tasks he has for us - if we can only see what they are and stick to them."

Here are a few mini-stories about successful people who were gifted, but who also possessed valuable personal strengths that helped them fulfill their dreams:

**Who:** Dr. Peggy Rummel

**Gift/Talent/Occupation:** Well-respected doctor in Colquitt, Georgia

**Personal Strengths:** Compassion and determination

Dr. Rummel moved to a small town in Georgia to practice rural medicine in 1983. She worked long hard hours and everyone in the community loved and respected her. In January of 1999, she was diagnosed with liver cancer at the age of 43. Although she knew she would soon die, she started a nationwide search to find a doctor to take her place. Before she died, she wanted to make sure the people

of her community would have the services of a doctor, and it was not an easy task finding someone else to practice rural medicine in Georgia. Just a week before she died, she found a replacement. Talk about compassion and determination! Wow!

**Who:** *Chris Rock*

**Gift/Talent/Occupation:** *Humor, comedian, actor*

**Personal Strengths:** *Patience and having "tough skin"*

Chris Rock today is considered by many to be one of the best comedians in the country. His gift of humor has made him a wealthy and successful man, but life wasn't always easy for him. When he was young he got teased a lot because he was skinny and he had to deal with being called racist names because he was one of only a handful of black children bused to an all-white school. He eventually dropped out of school and worked at various jobs that paid minimum wage. He knew he could make people laugh, and that comedy might be his avenue to success. He worked during the day, and then in the evenings he would perform at night clubs and comedy clubs. Most of the time he performed for free. He was willing to do it in hopes that one day he would be recognized and hopefully get a contract from television and movie producers. By successfully handling adversities early in life, and because he was willing to work for free, his dream finally came true.

**Who:** *Lance Armstrong*

**Gift/Talent/Occupation:** *Great athletic ability, bicycle racer*

**Personal Strengths:** *Optimism, self-discipline, ability to overcome adversity*

Prior to 1996, Lance Armstrong was one of the top bicycle racers in the United States. But in October of that year, two weeks before his 25th birthday, he was diagnosed with testicular cancer. The disease had spread to his lungs and abdomen. Surgeons removed the cancerous testicle, and Armstrong started chemotherapy. Then the doctors were telling him that the cancer had reached his brain. They had to slice open his skull and remove two marble-sized tumors. The survival rate among men with testicular cancer that advances that far is only 40-50%. Thanks to the great work of his doctors, the support of his wife, and mostly because of his belief that he could survive and would race again, he did recover. In July of 1999, he won the most prestigious bike race in the world: The 2,288-mile Tour de France.