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Consider This: A Successful...Failure?

By *Steven Zhou*

Did you get accepted? What place did you win? Have you been awarded a scholarship?

When it comes to life, we all want to succeed. Competition seems to be the gas that fuels our teenage psyches. As I write this, I'm sitting on the floor at a public speaking tournament hoping to qualify for the State Championships. College acceptance letters are being delivered to friends and many are experiencing the joy of being "chosen." A couple of days ago, our Express Yourself Teen Radio on-air team was notified that our program is the most listened to show throughout the entire world on the Voice America Kids Network. In only three months of broadcasting, we are ranked number one.

One might argue that success is the trophy from the tournament, the acceptance from the desired college, or the status of being the top radio program worldwide. However, these trophies and accolades can only last a maximum length of a lifetime. Miramonte senior Lisa Chang shared her valuable viewpoint. "Learn to find enjoyment even when you don't end up on top. Those who are truly happy are those who love what they're doing." Instead of always trying to win, perhaps the loftier goal is to love the experience and make an impact on the world that survives after we're gone.

High school years are comprised of competition, from coveted positions on sport teams to auditions for the starring roles in school plays, but at what cost? A friend of mine wrote a paper describing the negative effects of over-competitiveness, citing examples of students who get professionals to take the SAT for them, or athletes who use illegal substances to gain strength. When we examine the motives of someone who cheats to get an "A", or a student driven to the point of suicide by the pressure of "not measuring up", there would be little argument that their success equates failure.

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and 20th century psychologist, wrote, "Success cannot be pursued, rather, it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself." While not a perfect definition of success, the quotation summarizes the lives of people who made a lasting impact through dedication to service such as Martin Luther King's work with civil rights or Gandhi's devotion to freedom. As teenagers, our true success could be measured with our efforts to make a positive difference.

As I wonder how to help Express Yourself Teen Radio continue to be number one, it dawns on me that the success of the program is based on these questions: Are we providing a voice to teenagers around the globe and are we enjoying this adventure? How we influence and improve must be the reward. Otherwise, in our pursuit of the physical prize, we may just end up successfully failing.

Steven Zhou, a senior at Miramonte High School, is the administrator and co-host of the international teen radio program, Express Yourself!

Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, Cynthia@CynthiaBrian.com.

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