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What They Don't Teach In Even The Best Schools

by Peter McWilliams

Our high school and our college meant well, but they drilled into us huge quantities of information that we promptly forgot ... and neglected to teach us some of the most fundamental skills for living well. Key things that they left out:

- The purpose of life.
- The importance of forgiveness.
- The need for balance.
- How to figure out what we want.
- The usefulness of mistakes.
- How to love ourselves.

Fortunately, our education doesn't end just because we leave school. Life itself is a classroom, and our teachers are everything that happens to us — both positive and negative.

In addition, each of us has our own Master Teacher P that voice inside us that seems to be making calm, sure comments in the midst of mental chaos. In a sense, it's life that teaches us how to live.

Why Are We Here?

We can't know for sure if there's meaning to life. But it makes great practical sense to at least assume that there is. I believe that life's purpose has three parts:

- **Doing.** Human beings are busy creatures. We do far more than simple survival would require. This suggests that we thrive on doing. All this doing leads to ...
- **Learning.** The more we do, the more we learn ... and the more we learn, the more we do. It's a continuing cycle. But it would quickly become tedious without the 3rd element ...
- **Enjoying.** Some people complain about being on a treadmill. Others pay hundreds of dollars for the privilege of going into a gym and running on one.

Joy can exist no matter what else is going on in your life. There are lessons to be learned even from confusion and pain ... and learning is enjoyable, even if the events themselves aren't.

The Attitude of Gratitude

The human brain evolved to take familiar things for granted, allowing our ancestors to sit up and take notice when a saber-toothed tiger approached. That means we need to be *consciously* grateful for the good in our lives, or we may not notice it at all.

You choose your attitude at any given moment. *Ask yourself:* Do I focus on the good in my life or on the bad?

We all have plenty of both, and the mind can concentrate on only a narrow spectrum at any one time.

It's a simple formula. If you focus on the good stuff, life is enjoyable. If you focus on the bad, life is miserable.

That doesn't mean we should never feel bad. Pain and loss happen to everyone from time to time, and sometimes feeling bad is precisely the appropriate response to a situation.

But it's more often the little, day-to-day occurrences that make or break our happiness. You can focus on the guy who cut you off in traffic on the way to work this morning ... or on the one who kept the store open a few minutes late just to accommodate you.

(cont'd. page 25)

(What They Don't Teach cont'd.)

Think about all the little miracles of life. Oxygen, for example — we've never been without it.

You Can Have Anything You Want

The Puritan ethic tells us: *It's wrong to want things. Life is nothing but sacrifice and duty, and people who have what they want are wicked.* That belief leads to frustration.

In recent decades, the popular philosophy sifted to *I want it all!* But that philosophy also leads to frustration. If you have it all, you don't have enough time to learn how to use it, much less enjoy it.

The truth: *You can have anything ... but not everything you want.*

Sure, there are limitations, but not as many as most of us believe. It's just that you may have to give up some things you want less for things you want more.

Don't be ashamed of your desires. It's great to want noble things (world peace, good health for all), but it's okay to want mundane or self-focused things, too — a red sports car, great sex, etc.

Respect the whole range of your aspirations. You can't get what you want unless you know what it is. And you won't figure out what it is unless you're willing to accept it.

Love Your Mistakes

One of the most destructive things we learned in school is that mistakes are bad and should be punished.

If you avoid mistakes, you avoid accomplishing anything.

Without failure there's no experimentation ... no learning ... and no growth.

It's by finding out what doesn't work that we learn what does. James Joyce wrote, "Mistakes are the portals of discovery. Makes excellence, not perfection, your goal."

Forgiving is For Giving

Nursing a grievance may make us feel righteous ... but it doesn't make us feel happy. Forgiving and forgetting makes you available for giving and for getting.

When you forgive someone, you give not only to that person, but to yourself. Instead of focusing on hurt, anger and betrayal, you open yourself up to love, joy and adventure.

When we judge others, we also judge ourselves for being judgemental. Deep down we know that we're inhibiting our happiness.

Say to yourself; *I forgive (name of person) for (perceived offense). I forgive myself for judging (person) for (offense).*

It's simple. Try it.

Life Is a Balancing Act

Another incorrect thing that school taught: *There's always a right answer.* Life is one contradiction after another ... and most contradictions are valid.

We need to be vigilant to sense when we should rest and when we should act ... when we should be flexible and when we should stand firm ... what we should accept and what we should change.

When in doubt, consult your Master Teacher — that quietly confident and sensitive inner voice. Ask: *What would a Master do?* Then do it.

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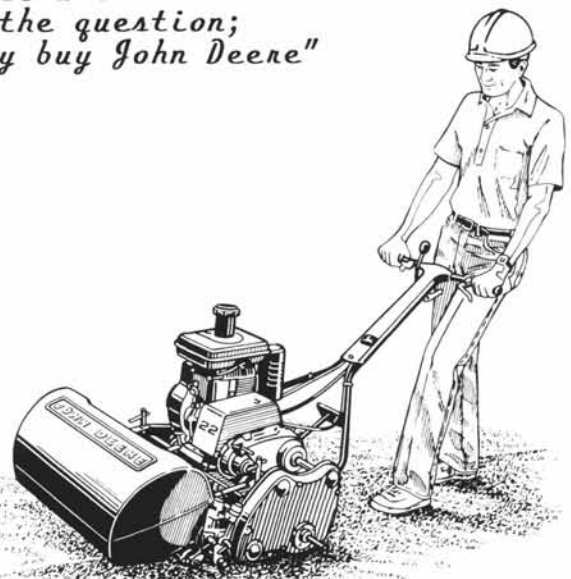


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