

Paul Peavy: Motivating Kid\$! (9/28/2007)

“Mommy, Mommy now you have to get me a TV!” squealed the little 8-year-old as she ran back to her mother after picking up her trophy for finishing second in her age group at a recent triathlon.

“Hmm... a TV for finishing second in your age group in a kid’s triathlon,” I thought to myself. My, how times (and parents) have changed. \$100 for good report cards, a car for just having lived for sixteen years, new swim suits for personal best times. Wow! Whatever happened to just teaching a kid simple pride in an accomplishment?

What’s funny about this little girl’s adventure is I remember her mother trying to attempt the triathlon last year and the girl would not give in until she found out she got a free swim cap just for entering. Yes, a free swim cap!

I think therein lies a big part of the problem in giving material rewards for achieving goals. Once it’s offered once, it becomes the expected. And each time the price goes up a little bit more.

Call me old-fashioned, or just call me a mental health therapist, but I think kids (and adults) need to get back to the basics of working hard and achieving just for the basic need to, well, work hard and achieve. I still think kids have that glow when they climb out of the pool and know they have dropped time.

When the other parents and kids share in their sense of accomplishment, you can tell the swimmers are proud because of that non-stop, ear to ear semi-circle under their noses. Yeah internal pride has a way of beaming through with that primitive, “Aw shucks” smile that you had when you were a kid.

I am going to say something that may shock you or make you a little embarrassed or just make you think I’m crazy. I think kids (and adult humanoids) are still primarily motivated by pride in accomplishment. We as adults want to get involved in somehow thinking we are involved in our kids accomplishing their goals. Trust me, the fact that you get them out of bed every morning, drive them to practice and feed them is a pretty good bit of involvement.

I loved what I overheard at a swim meet recently. A man came up to the merchandise tent and was buying some goggles and was talking to the owner. The man purchasing the goggles was complaining about how much he was spending on his daughter.

The owner replied that he also had a 16 year old daughter also and he felt his pain. The goggles purchaser then went on to vent about how much he was spending on his daughter’s car. He then went on to ask the owner what kind of car his daughter had. The merchandise man caught his customer off guard when he simply replied, “None.”

I bet \$100 if that little girl was given a choice between taking her trophy or her TV to show-and-tell at school, she would have taken her trophy because then she could have talked more about her hard work and how good it felt to accomplish something. On second thought, let's just make that a handshake bet, you know, for pride.

Paul Peavy is a Licensed Psychotherapist and former stand-up comic making him, well, a very stand-up therapist. His personal competitive swimming experience entails coming out of the water near the end of his age group in triathlons. He and his wife, Sherrie, have completed one Ironman together, in which Sherrie barely nudged him out by only 2 1/2 hours. Despite her parents' inexperience and lack of talent in swimming, their 10-year-old daughter, Lauren, is a happy and even very good swimmer.