

Dear children,

I have a colleague who recounts the story of his lawyer daughter with much pride today. A few years back his daughter was taking the board exams. Like many other parents these days, he had several sleepless nights and stress-torn days, for he would sit with her and make her revise. When her results came out, my colleague was disappointed, because according to him she had performed averagely. When his daughter showed up bright-eyed at his office later that day with her report card, and saw her father's crestfallen face, here is what she had to say: "Don't feel bad Papa. You did your best"! I can't but help appreciate the gumption and spirit of this rare kid, for it reflects a true understanding of how board exams do not and cannot rule your life!

Schooling is not only about board exams. Now that I look back, I often wonder what I really took home from my school studies. I remember the picnics, the yearly fairs, sports and annual days, the friends and the fun, the sharing and the caring, the laughter and the tears. But in studies, I remember vague things, like in History there were loads of dates which I had memorized then, but really cannot recall today. I would time and again tell my friends, "Do anything in life, but refrain from creating history. Kids of the next generation will never forgive you". In geography, I would often curse the Americas for having a completely different set of flora and fauna as compared to Africa. Why could the world not be uniformly simple? With Mathematics, I was like an Alice in Wonderland. In Physics I understood its applications very well, but practiced inertia or "staying-at-rest- unless-force-is-applied". Chemistry for me was just trillions of different combinations of the English alphabet and the Arabic numerals. But Biology was a subject that aroused my curiosity. I loved the subject so much that just for fun I would write autobiographies of a red blood corpuscle or a mitochondrion. I found my niche there. It was in the Art room and in extra-curricular activities that I tended to outshine more than in academics. I loved the fact that I could create anything on a blank canvas with a bunch of colours at hand, or tax my mind for the Just A Minute debates or a game of dumb charades, or remember the longest dialogues while acting on stage. I think these are what made me outgoing enough to try out adventurous activities, such as a life in bureaucracy! What I don't remember however, is what questions were asked in my board exams or how did they go.

I am sharing all this with you because I want you to know that we adults do not get to where we are today by being good at every subject and every activity in our school days. Schooling is surely about exposure to various subjects, but it is much more about learning to become a life-long learner and about acquiring values and skills.

You are 21st century kids! Your future employers may not always bother too much about the marks you get in school. They will want to know instead, whether you are capable of working hard or are a creative person. Some may want to check out your critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Others may focus on good communication or collaboration skills. But all will want to know if you are honest and principled in your dealings, are gender sensitive and a good citizen, are inclusive and can be a part of a team. Known or unknown to you, I am certain that you have already imbibed these and many more skills and values, and therefore, as far as your future is concerned, you have already passed in flying colours!

You have also scaled many peaks in your life; from crawling you learnt to walk, from gibberish you learnt to talk, you learnt to make friends, do teamwork, read, write, play, paint, dance, sing, search internet, cook, do gardening, respect your elders, imbibe your culture, and the list goes on and on. Each of these have helped hone your personality to become the incomparable gem that you are today. Exams are just one among the thousands of things in that list; really, they are not as big a deal as they are made out to be. They are just milestones in your journey towards discovering the real potential and uniqueness in you. And like every other thing in that list that you have learnt to do, it all begins with one belief: I can do it!

A creative future of your own making, bedecked with your values and competencies, awaits you just around the corner. Therefore, armed with the knowledge of all your inimitable capabilities, now go forth and attack your worries, lay them to rest, work hard and do your best.

Kiddos, you've totally got this!

Best of luck and God bless you.

**Chairperson
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