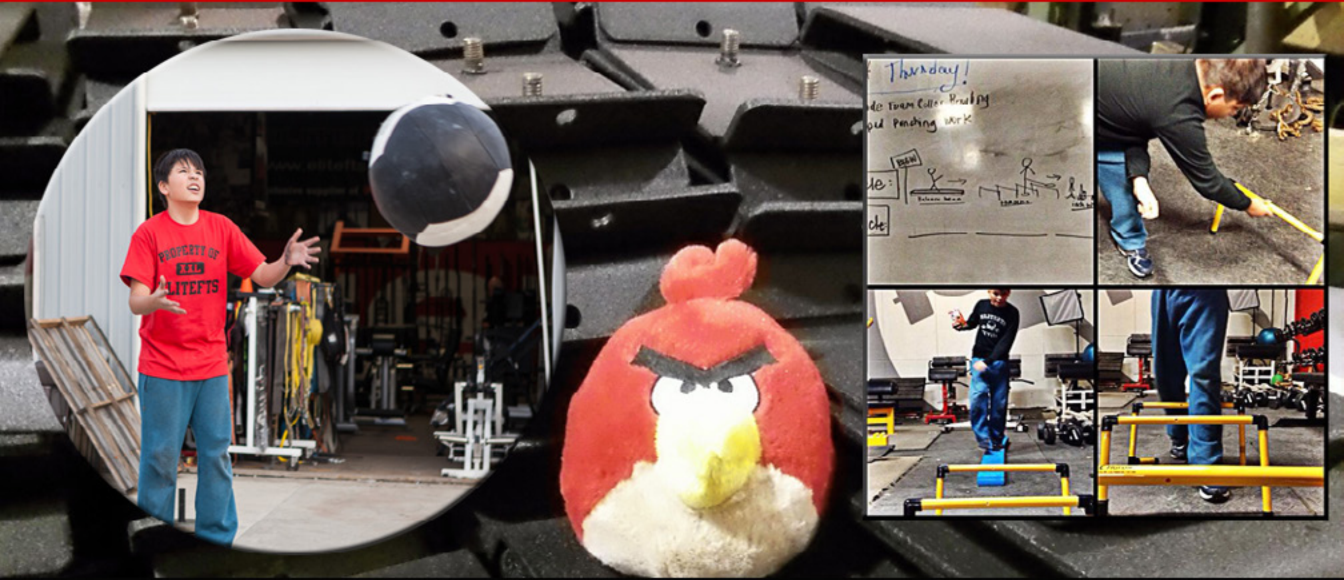
Gym Talk 4 - They are NOT Angry Birds



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They are NOT Angry Birds!

I've spent the last couple days tapping out a "business tip of the week" post and after doing some research discovered that I was walking a very fine line on copyright infringement. It wasn't that I copy-and-pasted the material, but I did sign a contract many years ago when I hired the consulting firm that taught me the material that I would not share it in any way. I will find a different way at a later time to touch on that concept.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and posting something I'm not really comfortable with, but I respect the person that asked me to do it. He feels there's a need for someone like me to write this type of material.

I guess we will find out soon enough.

The topic deals with my son, who has special needs (Asperger's Syndrome). I've posted about this once before and may never post again so here are a few quick tips I will pass along.

*** I used to hate the term "special needs,"** but now I can't stand people who say they hate the term. After nine years, if there is one thing I know for a FACT, it's that my son has special needs!

While all kids are different and each requires their own set of needs, I'm willing to bet those with autism fall outside the spectrum in this regard. If you are a

I guess we will find out soon enough.

All kids are special – they are our future!

new parent coming into this situation you need to come to terms with this, because it's a fact, and the sooner you know, quit denying, placing blame, and expecting someone to have all the answers, the better parent you will be.

*** I will also go as far as to say** that unless you have or care for a child with special needs you have NO IDEA what the term special needs really means. You might think you do but trust me – you don't. Sit down with someone who has one of these kids and ask them to speak candidly. You will gain a MUCH better perspective of what this means.

Does this mean I feel having "special needs" means these children are "special" or better than others?

No, not at all.

ALL kids are special – they are our future!

Learn all you can about sensory processing disorder

Here a few tips that have helped me work on being a better parent.

*** Learn all you can about sensory processing disorder.** While this may not be the cause, there are several things that can make a big difference. Anytime you can learn more about how your child processes, the better. Simple things

There is no point in trying to figure out what is making them, or made them, upset

like pressure, spinning, bouncing, loading, straining, jumping, etc. can help to avoid or defuse a situation very fast.

* **There is no point in trying to figure out what is making them,** or made them, upset after the breaking point has been reached. If they are on the floor screaming in a fit, they have already forgotten what got them so upset in the first place. The more you probe, the more confused and upset you will make them.

* **Regardless of how bad the situation is,** let them know you love them but don't like their specific behavior. They need to learn that they are not their behaviors.

They are NOT bad kids,they are NOT Angry Birds, they are NOT confused kids, they are NOT crazy, they are NOT any of these "behaviors" – they are loved children first and ALWAYS.

*** Determine what the problem is** if they can't or won't do it. There is a big difference and if you take the time you will find out what they are really capable of. They can and will surprise you, but at the same time, never assume.

*** Know when to fight and when to sit back.** The school system, family and other outside factors can become VERY stressful. Most of the time, it's best to just sit back and keep your mouth shut, but when it does come time to speak, make sure you are heard and your point is clear. This is where effective communication is extremely necessary because there is no way to deal with this without emotion or take it personal. Practice what you will say, seriously.

There may come a time where you do need to be aggressive, pissed and emotional, but this is a card you rarely want to play and should only do so if it is the last option on the table.

Know when to fight and when to sit back.

You will make mistakes.

*** You will make mistakes.** I can't begin to count the number of things I've done wrong, words I shouldn't have said, things I shouldn't have done, fights that could have been avoided, and frustrations that were blown way out of proportion. I can't go back and change any of these things but I can learn from them, move forward, and become a better father.

It's all in the "programming," isn't it?

I have always refused to harp on any mistakes I've ever made (or will make) and will keep my focus on what is best for my family. This way, the next time I fail, I can get right back on track because isn't THIS the real lesson we want to teach our children? Isn't this what we want them to SEE?

Angry Birds knock things down but if you look closely, you will see the structure is rebuilt strong(er) when you move to the next level.

The birds don't do this.

The players don't do this.

It's all in the "programming," isn't it?

What lessons are WE programing with the examples we set?

I'm sure I could write hundreds of these but will stop for now because I'm not

I've read many articles and books on autism

sure I want to continue going down this road.

I've read many articles and books on autism – written mostly by women.

I've spoken to many doctors, counselors, and teachers who were also mostly women.

I haven't seen very much written by men and even less written by meatheads.

So, there you go...

In case you didn't know, there are three people on team elitefts that work (professionally) with special needs children. These are Amy Wattles, Clint Darden and Vincent Dizenzo. I would like to thank them and everyone else who works with these kids.

Thank you all.

They are NOT Angry Birds! (Part 2.1)

Under the Bar - *They are NOT Angry Birds!*

After posting part 1 of this article I had a very interesting conversation with my mother. While much of it consisted of her experience, and advice from being a parent of a child with special needs, I was more impressed with her knowledge of the game, Angry Birds.

In case you missed it here is the comment she posted on the first article of this series:

Angry Birds?

When I saw this article pop up on Facebook, the phrase “Angry Birds” immediately got my attention and curiosity. Now you know at once I am past the age of 70, and although I am computer literate, I am not game savvy. So as I read this article my thought was how this phrase connected to the topic of “special kids.” I quickly did a Google search and found that Angry Birds were indeed not angry, they just wanted to conquer something or someone. Apparently this game is quite popular with all ages, so now I needed to understand the concept. As I continued reading the game options, I realized it sounded much like the game of life. We are all different, we move forward, life is a continuous challenge, and we all learn how to play the game in our own unique way. That indeed makes everyone special. *Never underestimate what any child is capable of achieving. The tag names have changed through the years – learning disabled, slow learner, retarded, and stupid, have advanced to more specific*

Teaching educators to understand children with needs is challenging

terms or labels. None have any value if we forget that the most significant tag is simply – a child.

Teaching educators to understand children with needs is challenging. Sadly teaching methods have not progressed. Having dealt with this situation many years ago, and being aware of today's continuing challenges, I have a few very simple suggestions. First, remember no one will fight for your child but you. Second, you know your child better than anyone else, don't back down from anything or anyone, each fight gives you the knowledge to provide the love and support your child will need as they grow older and find their place and passion in life. Years from now, you will look back and be able to say with unbelievable pride – that is my son (or daughter) who once carried that label and look where it has taken him.

Love Mom

Thank You

Actually I want to thank all of you who posted in response to that article. It is because of your feedback and advice that I will continue writing this series. My hope is that you all keep sharing your stories and ideas so that these posts will be able to help and guide many others like myself. I'm not an expert on children with "special needs" and I can only share from my own experience as a father, but as you can tell from my mother's post, I was and am a child with special needs.

I'm not an expert on children with "special needs"

As my mother spoke about the different colored birds, why there are pigs, and about all the other background information associated with the game – it hit me. For me to write these posts to the best of my ability I need to share some of my background information. This will expose any and all bias's I may have with any of the topics on which I touch. I will be writing from my experience as a father, a child, and someone who is learning as much as I can to help my

The best way to find advice is to look to those who have done and continue to live it

Big Weights

In the strength game I've always said the best way to find advice is to look to those:

The best way to find advice is to look to those who have coached it

1. Who have done and continue to live it
2. Who have coached it, and;
3. Where they have learned.

If they have lifted BIG weights, taught others to lift BIG weights, have trained

with others who lift BIG weighs, or were coached by those who know how to move BIG weights, the odds are they WILL get you to lift BIG weights.

When applied to special needs experience and education, I have points one and three somewhat covered. It is my hope the readers will help fill in any blanks, correct where I may be wrong, and offer better suggestions for everyone.

One Tip

This tip has been, and always will be the HARDEST parenting skill on which I need to work. This tip is: I am NOT my son and he is NOT me. We are two different people and his experiences will not be the same as mine; they will be his own. I want SO badly for him to not to go through the things I did, that it’s taken me a long time to see that he won’t. His will be different. Unless you are in a similar position, this is a hard thing to grasp. There are many advantages

This skill takes time, patience and practice

to my background that allow me to better understand what he is thinking and going though; my experience of it all allows me to look at things from a different perspective than most the educators and doctors with whom we've worked. Sometimes signals in my mind get crossed and my wife must remind me that he isn't me. There have been (and will be more) times where I KNOW the signals are crossed and need to step away from the situation completely; if I stay it will not be for the best interest of my child. This skill takes time, patience and practice.

This excerpt will provide some of my background information as discussed above.

Excerpt from Raising the Bar

Chapter 1, Faith

You are going to be a champion some day

“It is inevitable that some defeat will enter even the most victorious life. The human spirit is never finished when it is defeated...it is finished when it surrenders.”

—Ben Stein

“Winning is great, sure, but if you are really go- ing to do something in life, the secret is learning how to lose. Nobody goes undefeated all the time. If you can pick up after a crushing defeat and go on to win again, you are going to be a champion someday.”

—Wilma Rudolph

School

days…

School Days

It was a typical fall day. Leaves littered the ground, a cool breeze gently rattled through the trees, and billowing clouds sat high in a vast, blue sky. The sun was weak, casting dappled light across the grass.

I recognized two of these kids

The school bell rang, marking the end of another day. I grabbed my jacket and lunch pail and found my usual spot in the back of the line. Released from our daily educational grind, I exited the back door with the rest of the kids. Today would be unlike any other day. I took the same path home as always. I walked the sidewalk from the school and then cut through a series of yards until I reached my own.

As I made my way into the first yard, I noticed a few kids from my neighborhood playing in one of the other yards a few houses up. This was the yard that I needed to cut through to get home. I recognized two of these kids. They were both three years older than me. I had never seen the third one before.

Having been picked on and beaten up most of my childhood for being learning disabled, I was used to the teasing and name calling from the two kids I knew. So, I kept to my route and tried to cut through the yard where they were playing.

Head Down, Eyes Forward

As soon as I came into view, the name calling started. “Here comes retard boy.” “Look, there’s Tater Tot.” I kept my head down and my eyes looking forward, the same way I’d done many times before.

It started with tightness around my ankles. They’d tossed a tetherball rope around my shins, the same way cowboys do when they’re roping cattle. The ball whipped around my legs several times, coming to a stop only when I fell to the ground. I tried to pull myself to my knees, but they jerked the rope, causing me to fall flat, face first in the grass. The battle had begun.

I tried to get up, but they pulled the rope and dragged me back down. The pulling and dragging were constant. It didn’t stop. I flopped around from my front to my back trying to get my legs free of the ropes. As I fought, the other two kids jumped on me, kicking and punching me with all they had. I have no idea

The other two kids jumped on me

how long this went on, but there wasn’t a single spot on my body that hadn’t been punched or kicked.

I remember looking up and seeing other kids standing off to the side laughing and pointing. *Slam!*Someone pressed my face firmly into the ground, hindering the scent of grass and mud that tried to fill my nostrils. Blood drained from my nose onto the grass, and a blue and white striped, Puma tennis shoe kicked the side of my prone torso. There were cheers in the background. I tried to cover up, but the Puma raced toward me again, colliding with my nose this time. The taste of my own blood filled my mouth.

Then, something incredible happened. All the physical pain simply stopped. I told myself that there was no way they’d see my pain. There was no way they were going to know that they were hurting me. There was no way in this world I was going to let them have an ounce of satisfaction by showing them a single tear or by uttering a single cry for help.

My own blood filled my mouth

I found contentment in the pain, and I embraced it. I anticipated the next punch and the next kick to see if they had the strength to hit and kick harder than they had the time before.

As I withdrew myself, they became increasingly dissatisfied with how things were going. The dragged me around the yard, hoping to spark a reaction from me. My face rolled through dog shit, but I wasn't going to let them know that I was in any pain at all. All of it was held inside me, and it became my power.

It became my power

Blood, Sweat, and Grass

After what seemed to me like forever, they stopped. One of the on- lookers came over and offered to help me up. I looked up at him with blood, sweat, grass, and crap on my face and told him to get away from me. I refused his help. I didn't *want* his help to get up.

I pulled my knees to my chest and untied the rope from around my ankles. I rolled onto my side, first putting one knee on the ground and then the other. I placed one foot flat on the ground and pulled myself up. I stood with pride, knowing that I'd displayed no pain and given satisfaction to no one despite taking the worst beating of my life. The physical pain was intense, but I was able to displace myself and make it go away. The emotional pain, however, was a different story altogether.

Stop…Pause

I'm pausing at this point because I want you to think of some of the bad things that have happened in your life. For me, when I think about these things, I think of rage, vengeance, anger, and hate. I can't speak for you, but these are the emotions that come to my mind. I hated those kids for what they'd done.

I've never forgotten that day, and I never will. I used to think of it as the day the stupid learning disabled kid got what he deserved. They'd absolutely beaten the crap out of me, and it made me think about how helpless and worthless I was. I thought about how weak I was and how I didn't have the strength to fight back. I thought of the fear I felt every time I saw those kids again and how afraid I was every time I walked past that house.

Take a moment right now to think back to one of the worst things that has ever happened in your life. Did someone close to you leave you for another?

Did someone close to you leave you for another?

They're found in our own fears.

Were you cheated on or betrayed? Did you suffer the loss of a loved one? Were you beaten up like I was? Or worse?

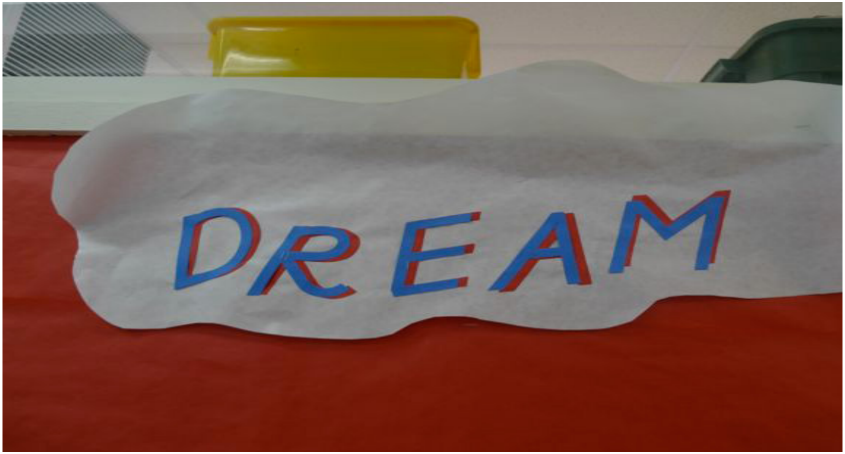
We all have great pains that we suffer in our lives, and no one's pain is greater or worse than anyone else's. We all have our horrific moments, and we'd all love to know why they happened to us. *Why me? What did I do to bring this on?* We play the blame game, but we'll never get any answers to our questions because there aren't any. The answers we're looking for aren't found in the reasons why. They're found in our own fears.

Most of us try not to think back on these times because doing so scares the crap out of us. I'll bet that when I asked you to think back, you didn't, and if you did, you were emotionally detached. The pain we associate with these moments is usually just too much. However, some important questions need to be asked. Is this pain influencing your life today? Could these events still be

Are you guided in a positive way?

causing pain in your life? Or is this yet another issue you're avoiding because you don't want to know the answer?

Are you guided by the way you think about these past experiences? If so, is it in a positive way? Or are these things holding you back from the life you really want? How could you know any of this if you've never thought about it? Maybe it's time to revisit some of these moments from a different perspective so that you can learn to overcome them. Will they move you closer to or further away from your dreams?



Understand This

To do this, you have to understand one thing. The unfavorable, adverse, grim, and hurtful losses in our lives shape who we become, and the excellent, fantastic, and awesome times are the rewards that we receive for being who we are. Confused?

Events affect me based on how I recall them

We all have good times, and we all have bad times. The key is to understand how to use the bad times to help shape who you are in a positive way. This is far easier than most of us think it is because it all really boils down to how we decide to look back on these events.

I still have a hard time doing this sometimes, but I have yet to find one bad experience that didn't yield a positive outcome. This includes even the very worst of my experiences. I'm able to see how each one has shaped who I've become in either a negative or positive way. The way events have affected me has always been based entirely upon how I recall them.

When I look back at these events and try to view them in a positive light, my life is always enhanced. To put things in training terms, learn- ing to remember them by viewing memories through a different prism feels like a weighted vest has been unbuckled and thrown from my body. By changing how I view things, my life has changed, and I'm in a state of constant growth as a person.

When someone first suggested this, I thought it was bull. Stuff happens and we have to deal with it, right? Sometimes we'll never know why an event occurs. Sometimes we don't need to know. I don't know a single person who's had a golden life without pain. We all have it, we've all had it, and we'll all have more of it. This is life, so deal with it.

Do we really forget?

That's what I would have said years ago, but what does "deal with it" actually mean? For me, it meant pushing it inside, filing it away as bad stuff that happened, and moving on. Then I'd forget about it. But do we really forget? If you were hurt or scared as a result of something happening, would you do that something again? What if it didn't yield the same result the second time around?

In powerlifting, missing a weight doesn't mean it's impossible to lift that weight if we try it again. If we still can't lift it, we can try it again on another day.

Traumatic experiences shape you

And if we still can't lift it, we learn from it, get stronger, and come back to do it on yet another day. This is how a lifter looks at a challenge. The same is true for the negative events in our lives, except missed lifts won't change how you look at life. They won't shape who you'll become the way a traumatic life experience can.

It's easy to find positives in slightly negative situations that have little influence on who we'll become. It's another thing altogether to look at extreme situations in this same light. The process, however, is the same. It's exactly the same. It all comes down to how *you* decide to look at it. I'm not saying this is easy because it hasn't been easy for me. It can take months or years to see positives, but I'm telling you that they're there. And if you're willing to look for them, you'll find them.

Extraordinary Resolve

Face down on the ground, my entire body covered in grass, mud, crap, and blood, I found something in myself that I didn't have the day before. I found an extraordinary resolve, a drive and a will. I found the faith to become stronger, regardless of the situation. With my face in the mud, I found an iron will to *not*quit and to *not* give in, regardless of how many times I was kicked or hit. I found strength in myself that I've carried throughout my life. This

I found an iron will not to quit

strength has given me faith that no matter how bad situations get or how hard I'm hit, kicked, or abused, I *will* untie the ropes and pull myself back to my feet ***strong(er)*** than before.

That day, in a pile of crap, I discovered a piece of gold. Think about this. If I can turn crap into gold, what can you do?

In a pile of crap, I discovered a piece of gold

They are NOT Angry Birds (Part 2.2)

Under The Bar

Many things have changed since I wrote the book *Under the Bar*. Looking back, it seems like forever since I sat down to write it. I also know, looking back over the years since this book was published, I've had every value covered in the book tested at max capacity and know for a fact that I'm much strong(er) today because of it.

Demonstrate the power

I just finished writing the second Angry Birds post and just happened to find this old *Under the Bar* article and felt it would be very cool to repost this on the same day as the other one. This will also provide some of my background with "special needs." It will also demonstrate the power we all have as parents, coaches, teachers, and humans.

After the book was first published, I sent a box home for my family. As any good mother would do, she read the book. It must have struck her because of the email I just received.

History

Here is a quick history for those who have not read the book. I will keep this short and to the point. The topic deals with children with learning disabilities and the labels that get attached to them. I am very proud to say I was one of those labeled children. While I was in grade school, I remember having special classes I had to attend each day. It was hard to forget because I had a big-ass picture of a clock taped to my desk to remind me of the time I was to leave the room. It seems that this was a much deeper situation than I was aware of. I can only guess of the conversations that transpired between my parents and the school principle.

> *I was one of those labeled children*

As parents, we need to be aware of who they are

The Letter

Okay, enough of the past. I will sum up my point after you read the letter. I have taken the principal's name out of the article, as it does not matter who he was or what his name is. What does matter is that there are many of them out there and we all, as parents, need to be aware of who they are.

> *Dear XXXX,*
>
> *Time has a way of passing, memories fade and we all grow older. However, sometimes forgotten memories have a way of coming back to haunt us.*
>
> *The memory we refer to is of two little boys at Wilson Vance Grade School. They were but two of the students you chose to label as learning disabled.*

Audacity to challenge your decisions

To refresh your memory, their names were David & Phillip Tate. Now, I am sure to you they were just those boys born to the “older parents” (as you chose to refer to us) who at that time had the audacity to challenge your decisions regarding their son’s education.

The details are of little importance now except for the fact that we adamantly disagreed on what children were capable of accomplishing. You chose to put a limit on ability and we stated that desire overpowers all.

One never knows whose life may be affected by our actions or words. Your profession allowed you to mold the futures of the children entrusted to you. Because of your desire to have a “learning disabled”-free grade school, you had the clocks placed on the desks, labeled the children and moved on to receive your accolades. I’m sure you can relate many examples of the successful children who passed *through the doors of your classroom; however, I doubt if you ever wondered what happened to the many you had labeled a failure and destined to a life of what you termed their limited ability!*

The enclosed book was written by one of those students. He learned how to endure and, with the other positive factors in his life, became the man at 37 that some live a lifetime and never achieve.

It seemed only fitting to share this book with you as you were a prominent character in shaping David's future.

Page 66: "I Remember" vividly describes the thoughts and feelings of the little boy you so arrogantly dismissed as incapable.

Page 68: "Coach Shoop" shows how a few well-chosen words from a caring teacher erased the label you had placed many years before. The years between was time spent preparing him to understand *those words, move on and become the successful young man that he is today. DESIRE DOES PREVAIL.*

As for the other little boy, fortunately we moved him into a school where children were not labeled; he also graduated from college, is a wonderful husband and father and is the owner of a successful business.

To put a "finale" on those memories a "thank you" now seems quite appropriate.

Thank you.

He graduated from college

“Your son does not stand a chance in life…”

How would you feel?

When I first read this, I felt like these were very strong words to be said more than 30 years after the fact. Then again, if it was my kids or your kids, how would you feel?

How would you feel to be told your 7-year-old son does not stand a chance in life and had limited abilities? How would you feel to be told your child needed to be removed from the school because they did not like to have those kinds of kids there? How would you feel if you were that kid? Fortunately for me, I really did not know everything that was happening until years later. I did, however, know that I was not treated the same as others and that I was what they called “slow.”

The labels that you develop get passed on from year to year. Each year I grew, the more I began to understand that all my friends were in different classes than I was. This went all the way through high school. Yes, I could write an entire book about the experience I went through and how tracking methods can sometimes be wrong.

Ability

This is not about what went wrong but more about what went right. The summer after flunking out of my third semester of college, I found myself in my old high school parking lot speaking with an old coach of mine about training. In

This is more about what went right

I had the ability and just needed to use it.

time, the conversation changed to my education. Basically, he gave me a wake up call and reminded me that I was not disabled as everyone has been telling me over the years. He laid it on the line and told me my biggest program was I was lazy. Yes, lazy! While the system may have tracked me in a slow category, I was the one who decided to believe it and because of this I became lazy and never took the time to figure out how to work. It was pointed out to me that the same skills I was using with my training were the very same ones needed to excel in whatever I wanted to do. I had the ability and just needed to use it.

Did this have an effect on me?

I guess this is up for me to decide. I did finish college with a 3.7 GPA, started my own business and still have much more to offer. I would say being "slow" has been the best thing that ever happened to me.

The point of this article is very simple.

Your words can make a difference

Watch what you say. **Your words can make a difference.** On one side of the spectrum, a few simple words labeled a child as slow and disabled, setting up a life of inadequacy.

One the other side, a few simple words of encouragement (harsh words at that) changed a life of inadequacy to prosperity.

Are you words building up or bringing down?

We all have the ABILITY to live, learn and Pass on.

I already had my column for the week done ("Aggression") when I received this email from my mother. After reading it I knew it needed to post it as my next column as it relates directly to the last two "Angry Birds" articles I've posted and provides great background as I moved forward with this topic.

They are NOT Angry Birds! (Part 3)

To David

My daily check on Facebook always brings an unexpected surprise. The responses to the "Angry Birds" articles are indeed very inspiring and take me to a time in my life that many of you are now experiencing. First let me say: looking back, all of the frustrations and challenges of raising four children seem so minuscule now in comparison to all of the joy and wonderful experiences. There were no handbooks

Everyone is their own unique person

then and to my knowledge no one has yet discovered a magic solution to the challenges of parenting.

Everyone is their own unique person, no two of us are alike and no matter how many children you have, their needs will always vary from day to day. All children have special needs, all children have some form of learning disability, and yet all children are capable of much more than you are able to see or even imagine.

How amazingly accurately the Angry Birds describe each of us – The blue bird separates into three birds, which we are all capable of doing in a matter of minutes; remember going from sad to angry and then suddenly happy appears. Life is a mixture of emotions that can be mixed up in any order. It is a process of learning how to manage each situation in the best way possible. There is a saying “It is what it is”;

the choice becomes what we want to do with what we are dealt. We learn how to handle being the black bird that simply explodes as well as when to be the white bird that drops explosives on others.

It is interesting to note that when we stop and look at how children handle those same emotions, especially those with special needs, it is in much the same way. The difference seems to be that we have, through the years, learned the meaning of and the ability to understand those feelings. Place them in the minds of a child who suffers some extremes and you can understand why at times they will become whatever Angry Bird they choose to be yet are unable to explain or understand why.

As a parent you think you are the one who is meant to set the example, while in reality your confidence and knowledge is being taught to

Place them in the mind of a child who suffers some extremes

You just keep getting stronger

you by each child. Your strength and ability to handle each challenge increases with trial and error. No one gets it right the first time and just when you think you have it figured out another incident appears. You just keep getting STRONG-ER

I cannot end this tidbit without discussing those “pigs” who are the victims of the angry birds. I discovered in researching this game that once the birds had been developed, the staff felt they needed to have an enemy. At that time the swine flu epidemic was headline news, thus the choice of the *Pigs* for their enemy. Ironically, they chose different sizes rather than colors for the enemy. Understandably the smaller pigs were weak and more vulnerable, thus easier to destroy, while the older and larger pigs have learned how to defend themselves. They become more resilient as they learn what protective gear is needed to save them and in their own time they find the crown that helps them survive.

So the moral of the story is this; the birds are angry for a reason, which is that nasty pig who they find to be their enemy. As they grow older and discover the ability to change their colors they also understand how to conquer the biggest pig with the golden crown. All it takes is time, patience, confidence, listening, understanding the spoken and unspoken words, communication and, most important, acceptance.

The knowledge I have gained is quite simple: your heart will lead you, love will endure you and your attitude will sustain you. Never give up, never stop learning, never underestimate anyone's ability and never ever say ***can't*.**

Never give up, never stop learning

Patience + Confidence + Listening + Unspoken Words + Understanding + Communication + Acceptance = Desire = success Result – STRONG-EST

Love to you

Mom

Under The Bar: They Are NOT Angry Birds! You Are the Parent

You Are the Parent

This is a guest "Under The Bar" post by The Special Education Meathead. This person remains to stay anonymous due to special education policies, parents, administrators and other teachers. This person intends to tell things they way they are so parents are better informed of what their real choices are.

"They Are NOT Angry Birds" are insightful articles. The site feedback and support for Dave and his family's struggles have hit a chord with many readers in both profound and private ways. After I read the first Angry Birds article I got in touch with Dave. I tried to encourage him to work in an advocate role to better support families and children with disabilities. It was very exciting to see that "They Are NOT Angry Birds" has evolved into a reoccurring piece in order to impact numerous families.

A reoccuring piece in order to impact numerous families

Special Education Meathead

As a special education teacher, Dave's articles continue to make me think and evaluate my professional and parenting roles. My professional area of expertise is students with emotional disturbance/behavior disorders. This category encompasses a broad spectrum of disorders ranging from Asperger's Disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, ADHD, depression, sensory issues, mood disorders, conduct disorder, etc. Unlike a typical learning disability, disabilities within this arena extend to many areas of the child's life besides academic school performance. These needs often include structured and unstructured learning times, problem solving, and interactions with peers and adults throughout the school day.

> *You will be with your child*

Behind these students are parents who are often overwhelmed, frightened and unsure how to best support their children. Men experience their children’s disabilities in a different manner than women. Regardless, man or woman, you are the parent. You will be with your child through all the struggles, joys, transitions, successes and apprehensions of their journey. There are no right answers; there is no right way to do things. At the end of the day, you know your child best. With that authority, knowledge, and experience comes responsibility to yourself and your child.

As the parent, your primary responsibility is to your child. You are not the teacher, doctor, therapist, best friend, etc. You are the parent, the loudest advocate for your child. With this role comes responsibility to interact appropriately with the professionals trying to support your child. Unfortunately, the eligibility and IEP process is overwhelming and many parents struggle to make sense of the process. The easy answer is that the purpose of these meetings is to identify how to provide a free and effective education for your child while meeting his or her individual learning needs. Here are some tips to help you navigate this process and advocate for your child.

A free and effective education for your child

A time for professionals and families

- The IEP meeting is a time for professionals and families to come together and identify how to best support the child. The IEP should be a collaborative effort with all parties actively involved. The IEP should be written as a general draft, not presented at the meeting in its final form simply for signatures to document compliance with special education laws. Your input on areas of concern, strengths, and needs is critical. Use this opportunity to elicit suggestions on what you can do in the home setting to support progress in school.

- The contents of the IEP must reflect the targeted areas of need identified in the eligibility report. Areas of testing are based on teacher and parental input. Typical areas that are assessed are IQ, achievement and observation. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Are behavior rating scales appropriate? Autism rating scales? Sensory evaluations? Auditory processing? Occupational therapy concerns? Speech or language issues? As the parent, you help shape what areas will be evaluated. If you have concerns about a specific area, begin the dialogue with the special education teacher or school psychologist prior to testing to determine a plan of action. Eligibility is determined every three years. You do not need to wait until the next eligibility is due. If there is a nagging issue of concern or worry you have, call and speak with the special education teacher or school psychologist. Discuss options and possibilities to further investigate your concerns.

Special education may be only one component

- Special education may be only one component of the overall needs of your child. As the parent, it is your responsibility to explore options for private services outside of school, if appropriate. Doctors, psychosocial rehab, developmental therapy, counseling, etc., can also help. Referrals and service delivery options can be discussed more effectively with the school psychologist or social worker within the school to point you in the right direction.

- The eligibility report is essential in order to document special education eligibility. However, it is also a tool to gain insight into your child. At the meetings, the report is reviewed and the best efforts are generally made to “translate” the information so families better understand the contents. The meetings can be overwhelming, uncomfortable and intimidating. As the report and subtests are reviewed, make sure you thoroughly understand the information. Oftentimes some of the subtests and complete testing data can give you essential information and insight into how your child operates. This is profound and vital information that can positively impact parenting and structure within the home.

- After the meeting if you are still unsure of the information you heard, call the special education teacher or school psychologist. It is your child and it is your responsibility to fully understand the assessment information. These phone calls are sometimes more beneficial because information can be shared and translated more informally than in a meeting with every professional under the sun occupying space. Every professional comes to the table with his/her own interpretation of information as it relates to his/her area of specialty. A quality evaluation and IEP will ideally synthesize the information from all parties and develop an effective learning plan for your child.

Lashing out is counterproductive

- Doctors are medical, not educational, professionals. They cannot write a prescription for an IEP, an accommodation or modification. Oftentimes parents turn to their medical professional for all of the answers. If your child is suffering from a cold or strep throat, absolutely. If there is a reading or learning disability, the doctor is not acting within his or her area of professional expertise to determine educational interventions. If a clinical diagnosis needs to be made and medicine prescribed, the physician is the professional in charge of those areas. The doctor can be a critical member of the IEP team and his or her input should be welcomed and valued. Still, interventions and implications within the school setting remain educational issues. The family physician, psychiatrist, counselor should be encouraged to participate in the educational process and share information freely to collaboratively support your child and to impact his or her own treatment plan for the child.

- Sometimes parents struggle to face the realities contained within the testing information. Coming to terms with the true nature of your child's disability can be devastating. Understanding long term implications and mourning the loss of some of your expectations and dreams for your child can be heart wrenching. But lashing out at the school or teachers is counterproductive and will not change your child's needs. Working calmly as an advocate for your child is essential.

Anger

Anger is often a symptom of an underlying issue. Communication can resolve those issues most of the time. Reach out in a concerned and proactive manner to the educational professionals. Problem-solve, identify solutions and develop a plan. Letting anger fester undermines the overall goal of supporting your child. Rarely is a professional acting out of malice, indifference or anger. It can happen, but if there is a conflict, spend some time asking yourself what exactly are you angry about and how do you want it resolved? Have a plan of action, not a sharp tongue. Oftentimes parents do not know what it is they want. That is completely understandable. Spend time thinking your desires through, and write down your issues of concern so you are prepared when speaking with any school professional.

Anger undermines the goal of supporting your child

- Special education is a process. Procedures must be followed, interventions attempted, data collected, and the least restrictive

Be open to ideas

environment must be considered along with access to the general education curriculum and setting. Oftentimes this process is equally as frustrating for the professionals supporting your child as it is to you. Opportunities for professional judgment are frequently reduced, and requirements for extensive and detailed documentation tend to take over. Have an outline of your concerns and questions, along with ideas of how to address these concerns. Present them to the special education team with the understanding that you are the parent and you know your child best. Be open to the concept that the school or teacher may embrace your ideas and thoughts or perhaps they might need to be tweaked or adjusted to be properly implemented in the school setting.

Empower yourself

Parental Participation

Special education is an overwhelming and frustrating, yet beneficial process for students with disabilities. It is also a process that mandates parental participation and input. The spirit of the laws is to encourage collaboration amongst professionals and families to provide a comprehensive plan of support for your child. Understanding the process can be overwhelming and time consuming. Your child's special education teacher, school psychologist and special education team should be a source of support and information for you as well as your child. Reach out, empower yourself and embrace the process. You are the parent, you love your child unconditionally, you know your child best. In the not-so-distant future, you will be standing next to your child at graduation, celebrating the joys and challenges that life brings you both.

Here is another article sent to me from the Special Education Meathead – Dave Tate

Note from the Editor: This is a guest “Under The Bar” post by The Special Education Meathead. This person remains to stay anonymous due to special education policies, parents, administrators and other teachers. This person intends to tell things they way they are so parents are better informed of what their real choices are.

Boring Ass Training

Since the start of the school year, I was required to sit through seven mandatory, boring ass trainings. If these trainings were actually related to working with special needs kids, I would be somewhat ok with it. They weren’t. The topics were somewhat varied, but all related to documentation and legal requirements related to federal law. As I sat there listening to the mind numbing drool, I wanted to kill someone as I thought what a waste of time this dog and pony show was for everyone. I just want to work with kids, shove the legal and documentation requirements.

I did the math while sitting there

I did the math while sitting there. For each training I was required to attend, there were a minimum of 10 professionals sitting there being subjected to the same torture as I was. These trainings were happening all across the district, so it's a conservative estimate to say at least 75 professions were required to attend these things. That's just one district across a very populated and large state. At each of these required life-sucking meetings, I came to some conclusions.

Special education is an unfunded federal mandate. Contrary to popular belief, it is not funded by the feds at 100 percent.

Not even close.

Not even close to a third.

So, that means local school districts are left footing the bill. Cutbacks and downsizing are hitting education hard. That means it's directly impacting student delivery in the classroom. Like it or not, it's true. Special education caseloads are increasing all the time and having one teacher managing 40 or more students is common.

Caseloads are increasing all the time

Going through the motions of pretending

Doing The Math

As I did the math in the meeting, there were 10 professionals sitting there hour after hour, going through the motions of pretending to give a shit about the legal requirements of special education law. For each hour of training, students are missing 10 hours of professionals in the classroom. On a grand scale, that

They decide to take the issue to a state hearing

shit adds up.

An outrageous amount of time and money is being spent to prevent legal issues (money out the door via lawyer fees and lawsuits) and compliance with federal law. Special education has a gruesome history and significant and appropriate gains have been made for service delivery to students with disabilities.

But, let's get real...

Over the years, some total assholes decided they didn't like something they were told, had a grudge match with the school district and couldn't problem-solve like grown-ups. So instead, they decide to take the issue to a state hearing or litigation. These morons ruined it for everyone. The way I see it, the main priority in school districts is to prevent litigation. Service delivery is probably a close second. Sure, there are times a very real issue was brought forward. Most of the time, it’s just nonsense and a waste of everyone’s time and money. If I had a dollar for every time I heard a parent or student threaten to sue me, I could retire today.

The Biggest Pile of Crap

Mostly just a tool for writing their compliance

Special education teachers really don’t give a shit about the details and requirements. Talk to any ‘special ed’ teacher out there and they will report that the biggest pile of crap of their job is the legal requirements and documentation. When we write IEP’s, the majority of our time is spent figuring out how we will document and detail all of the legal requirements, assessments and content, while extending the least amount of work possible. In our eyes, it’s a road map to working with students, so it does have some direct value. But, the IEP is mostly just a tool for the district to document their compliance with special education law. Verbage has to be just right and every detail is scrutinized.

I took a breath with your child

Each IEP requires about an hour to write. Re-evaluations, assessments and progress monitoring are other responsibilities for each student on an IEP. So now, let's deduct a minimum of four hours per student just on paperwork and documentation per school year. Again, on a grand scale that shit adds up.

Think About This

Think about this...while I am away doing paperwork, trainings or documenting every time I took a breath with your child, the odds are probable that one of my aids is in the classroom covering for me. That's well within their job description and scope of responsibilities, but let's get real. Who do you want working with your kid all day? I am betting it's actually the teacher.

Now stop and think about the money and resources from the federal, state and district level devoted solely to compliance with federal law and training professionals on implementation. Are you getting the picture yet? Your child

Your child is always my first priority

should be the first and most important priority. Somehow through this huge system, the priorities are all messed up. Your child is always my first priority. The paperwork and requirements are secondary. Most teachers will tell you the same thing. But, the day-to-day practice and requirements of this monstrous system indicate otherwise. Tens of millions of dollars are being spent throughout this country each year just covering our asses from the feds and litigious parents. Is that what you want for your kid? I don't.

Under The Bar: They Are NOT Angry Birds! The Fight for Funding

Here is an article sent to me from Tony Manifold. – Dave Tate

Note from Tony Manifold: I am writing in response to Dave's request for people who live with special needs children to write an Angry Birds post. My son is special needs and I personally got a lot out of this series and I thought I would try and add what I can to help someone else. I'm a Canadian Soldier and my son is 6 years old with Cornelia de Lange syndrome. My wife and I have been dealing with agencies and fighting for funding the entire time.

About the article: In short this article contains a strategy for helping get funding/support for a child with special needs. As things vary from state to state and country to country, it contains general information and really discusses the mindset needed to succeed on that front.

-Tony Manifold

They Are NOT Angry Birds! The Fight for Funding

Reading Dave Tate's "They Are NOT Angry Birds!" article series has been a real eye opener for me. Like Dave and many of you, I'm the father of a special needs kid. My son has a rare genetic disorder known as Cornelia De Lange Syndrome (CdLS). CdLS affects approximately 1 in 10,000 live births and leaves about 2,500 people in the U.S. with this syndrome. In Canada, where I live, there are about eight kids that we know of who have it. It isn't exactly prevalent, and to top it off, there's a lot of disparity between cases, which presents a lot of problems when getting support. However, for my son, it presents a lot like autism, with some developmental delay and a few other health concerns. More information on CdLS can be found at www.cdlsusa.org.

There's a lot of great information in this series on how to deal with kids that have special needs. I'm going to focus on the issue that I'm dealing with right now, namely getting support for my child from various agencies. This can be troublesome enough if your child has a well known condition like Autism or Down's syndrome, but when your child has a rare condition, it gets even tougher.

It gets even tougher

Hurdles

The first hurdle is that you'll most likely have to educate everyone you talk to. Talk to your doctors and any specialists you dealt with, and if need be, do your

They will deny support

own research so that you can properly explain your child's condition. Many of the people you talk to will be bureaucrats, who will look at your child and want to fit them into a box. When they don't, they will deny support. These people are most often not bad people; they just deal with such a wide variety of people looking for support that they need to justify expenses to an ever-shrinking budget. If you can educate them, they may be able to help you and your child.

Next, you need to make your case as strong as possible. Just like in powerlifting, you need to shore up the weak points. If you're anything like me, you have no idea what these are when it comes to dealing with government agencies. So what do you do when you have no idea why your squat sucks? You get outside help. The same thing goes for getting your child support. Use things like Facebook, or other web resources, to find other families with similar situations to yours and get advice. If you have any existing resources (like doctors) talk to them about how to get access to more. Also, there are many foundations and other non-profits, who assist parents in getting support for their child. Exhaust them all.

Finally, we do what we have to do every day in the gym – we get under the bar and push. We push until blood weeps out our eyes if need be. You keep pushing until something moves. If it doesn't work, go back and get more info, get more help, get more advice, then push again. It sucks when you feel like no one wants to help your child. You will feel helpless from time to time. But if you keep pushing and keep bringing up weak points, in your case, you will get somewhere. No one else can advocate for your child like you can.

No one else can advocate for your child like you can

Support

Not only will this approach help you towards getting support for

Treat each success as a PR and celebrate it.

your child, it will help you feel good about yourself as a parent. One of the worst traps parents of special needs children fall into is that they feel they're doing something wrong. The hard work you put into supporting your child will remind you that you are doing everything within your power to help your child succeed. Treat each success as a PR and celebrate it. Each step you take towards getting your child the support he needs, is one more step towards your child having the most fulfilling life possible.

- Tony Manifold

Under The Bar: They are NOT Angry Birds! The Holidays

The Holidays

I'm back!

You see what I did here, right? I took a risk and stepped outside my comfort zone and wrote "Under The Bar: They are NOT Angry Birds!" This went over really well and convinced me to press on and make a series out of it. The support, suggestions and advice offered in the comments section of that first article were awesome.

Then, I continued with the series with Parts 2.1 and 2.2. Soon after came Part 3 and You Are the Parent. While great installments, there was one thing missing from them all…me! As noted, these were great installments and I plan on recruiting as many parents, consultants, doctors, educators and adults who have "special needs" as I can to make this a series that has the potential to those looking for answers or at least help them ask different questions.

I saw a chance to pull out and took it

I saw a chance to pull out and hide and took it. This is not something I'm afraid to admit. This topic does make me uncomfortable because I personally lived it and am now living it again as a parent. As I sit here and write this, all I can think about is, what will he think when he grows up and reads this? How can I offer this advice, but not open up too much of my own personal life, history and present situations? If I do speak the truth on what I've seen and dealt with, will it negatively effect my son's education? Do I really want to expose the mistakes I made as a parent and husband? Do I really need to do any of this?

There are risks in life I didn't want to take

Will it even matter?

My simple answer when I get stuck in uncomfortable situations or having to do something I don't want to do is...

Do it anyway!

In the gym there are many days I just don't want to be there, but I go anyhow.

In business there are certain things I do not want to do, but I do them anyways.

There are risks in life I didn't want to take, but did so anyhow.

The days I went to the gym when I didn't want to, were those days I felt drained, beat up, stressed and had other things to do. The odds of injury were MUCH higher, but I still went and pushed with all I had.

Things rarely work out the way I want

In business, I'm driven to pursue the vision of the company no matter what it takes. There are many decisions and situations where the company has to come before my own personal wants or needs. At any time, it could all be blown away. I build it anyway.

I have dreams that seem SO far off, but have dreamed them for so long they aren't going anywhere.

I'm constantly told how bad the economy is and that our future is going to be a giant mess. I don't watch, read or listen to the news, so I press forward regardless.

Things rarely work out the way I want, the work always takes longer and is harder than I imagined, there always seems to be "something" that is creating uncertainty, but I keep pressing forward anyhow.

I can put myself into this article and have it forgotten by the end of the week but as you see, I'm writing it anyhow.

Every time you get close to the edge and look down, your stomach turns BUT the hole doesn't look so deep the next time around.

I'm doing this for the kids

For the Kids

I'm doing this for the kids. Look, I completely understand I'm not an expert when it comes to special needs and have much to learn. I will never claim to say I'm an expert and I'm sure you'll get sick of reading me write this. I also understand all kids are different – even those without special needs. One child with Autism may respond completely different to another who is also on the spectrum. One child with Asperger Syndrome will be completely different than another with the same syndrome. Just like the child down the street isn't the same as your own. Those who say we are all the same and respond to stimulus the same are full of crap. If life was only that simple – how easy (and boring) it would be.

As I mentioned in the first article, what I can offer are tips and suggestions that worked for my family and keep the comments open for others to share tips and suggestions of their own.

I can offer tips and suggestions

Their life is flipped upside down

Holiday Tips

Merry Christmas!

Christmas is a great time of the year for everyone. It is also a time of the year when children flip their lid, are excited and for the most part their routines are majorly impacted. School is out, there are numerous social gatherings, baby sitters or day care. Their entire life is flipped upside down and...they LOVE IT! Think back to how cool it was to be on Christmas break. Oh I forgot, they also spend most of their waking hours telling you different things they'd like to add to their "list."

Below are some tips we've found helpful.

Daily Agenda

Let them know ahead of time what will be going on for that day, or better yet, the night before as well as that morning. Reinforce where you'll be going, who will be there, if it'll be loud (if you child uses headphones remember to take them), and what there will be to eat. If they're on a special diet, remind them that you'll be packing their food. Actually, it's a good back up plan to pack their food in case they don't like what is being served. If there could be something there that could set them off, let them know ahead of time so they are prepared (and you need to be prepared with a back up plan). You need to be honest, don't down play anything. Don't take them to a concert and tell them it won't be "that" loud. You KNOW it will be loud, so tell them and bring your noise reduction headphones and be prepared to leave if you have to. If you decided to bring your child to an event that you KNOW has triggers that might set them off, then be prepared to leave if you have to. I don't care how bad YOU

Be prepared to leave if you have to

want to see the show. If this is about your enjoyment and you really want to see the show, then find a sitter. When you decide to bring your child, you made it a family event and families stick together. Lastly, if you get upset because you did have to leave, I suggest you take a long look in the mirror and ask who really has the problem in this situation.

Take a long look in the mirror

It can become a total nightmare

Back Up Plan

I mentioned this a couple times already, but you need to have a back up plan in place. As noted, every child is different, so one back up plan may be different than another. For many of these children, they will need private space to regroup as well as something to do. This could be a spare bedroom with their favorite toy. This needs to be a space where other kids know to stay out of. The actual plan doesn't matter, you know what they need and what works, just make sure to have a plan in place.

The Car and Travel

OMG! Anytime you have more than one child in the car and have to travel more than 30 minutes, it can become a total nightmare. The solution – Xanax. Okay, just kidding, that the last thing you want when you need to drive a long distance. I'm not sure there's a real solution to this one, except to learn how to

Keep them awake all the way home

tune them out the best you can. Movies, handheld games, books, or anything else than can make a dent should be used to their full advantage. All the basic things like 20 questions, I spy, and making a couple pit stops can also help.

It will also help if you let them know how long it will take and speak in terms they will understand. If the children are young and still don't understand the concept of time, you can tell them it will take as long as one TV show, as long as one movie, two movies, you get the point.

A side note to this, we learned to try and keep them awake all the way home. If they fall asleep, there's a really good chance when you get home and want to relax that they will be well-rested and ready to tear the house apart. Keep them awake so when you get home they will go to bed and pass out.

No need for a list of right and wrong

Reinforce Behavior

Discuss what you feel is appropriate behavior and what you expect from them at any holiday event. You don't need to provide them with a long list of what is right and wrong, but you do need to tackle what you feel is the most important. Kids are great because they say and do the funniest things at the most inappropriate times, but manners still matter. They should be reminded...

- To thank others for any gifts they receive.
- To not get upset if they get a gift they do not like.
- That you do not give and expect to receive. You give because you want to and should never expect anything in return.

- To be patient and take turns.

- To remember there are many others less fortunate than they are and be grateful for the things and family they do have.

- Use good table manners.

- You will have lots of hugs and kisses and we know these drive you nuts – but deal with it. There are many kids who won't have either on Christmas day.

- Today we are celebrating a birthday and this is what this is all about.

We are celebrating a birthday

I guess when I go back and read much of this article, it really isn't about children with special needs is it?

Merry Christmas!

They Are NOT Angry Birds: Unleashing The Fury, ADHD Part 1

Note from the Editor: This is a guest "Under The Bar" post by The Special Education Meathead. This person remains to stay anonymous due to special education policies, parents, administrators and other teachers. This person intends to tell things they way they are so parents are better informed of what their real choices are.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a significant issue impacting countless children. I've been torn about even touching on this issue and how it fits into the Angry Birds series. The reality is this is one topic that can light a fire under people's asses quicker than anything when it comes to vilifying teachers and public schools.

Contrary to any anecdotal story or friend-of-a-friend example, you think illustrates how terrible and ill-equipped schools are, schools are not in the business of medicating kids. Throughout my lengthy teaching career I only saw one crusty old ass teacher demand that a kid be medicated. The best comparison I can make with people spouting off with these examples is the moron in the gym who tells you squatting is bad for your knees. So, it's with hesitation I even move forward writing this and open Pandora's box. There are readers out there who truly need and desire to understand how to best help a struggling child. I decided to move forward for that reason – and that reason only. This is a topic that will span several different articles since there's so much to discuss.

There’s a Problem

Let’s face it, no parent wants to hear their child is struggling in school. It sucks when the teacher delivers news you weren’t expecting, or you knew deep down, but just don’t want to face. Hearing it by an outside person is a slap in the face with a heavy dose of reality. Instead of hearing what the teacher is trying to say (oftentimes the teacher cannot be completely direct) people get pissed off and blame the teacher. The teacher is a bitch, he/she doesn’t really understand your kid, if he/she knew how to deal with kids nobody would be in the situation to begin with, the teacher is just targeting your kid because he/she doesn’t like your kid, etc. The issue becomes about the teacher NOT about the struggles your child is experiencing.

Guess what? Teachers get it that you’re uncomfortable hearing there’s a problem. Chances are they’re having a hard time telling you and finding a way to do so humanely because they know that you’ll get bent-out-of-shape and

The teacher is just targeting your kid go on the defense. It sucks for all of us. In the interest of your kid, we have an obligation to start the dialog. This dialog often starts early in school and you're working hard at home to make it not true. Due to the nature of the difficulty, it often takes years of different teachers communicating the same information to parents before acceptance comes. The part that sucks for all of us is when there's a parent who gets pissed off because trust, cooperation and collaboration for your child's best interest go out the door.

Your child's best interests go out the door

If you have a child struggling with ADHD, in the younger grades you were probably faced with getting feedback centering on hyperactivity and not being able to sit still, keep his/her hands to themselves or follow multi-step directions. As your child gets older, the issues might start changing a bit. It may look like a tornado hit their desk and it's a dungeon of chaos, your kid leaves a trail of shit and mess behind them, their handwriting sucks, they make careless errors in their school work, etc. Once a student transitions to the intermediate grades

Develop a big picture of your child

and junior high and the teacher isn't holding their hand anymore, they can't keep up. Their head is in the clouds, organization is horrible, assignment completion is mediocre at best...and at this point the kid hates school. For them school is hard, and in their mind nothing they do is good enough.

The best piece of advice I can give you is to pay attention to what teachers are telling you. After you've heard the same shit over and over for a couple of years, there's likely something ADHD-related that you need to start paying attention to. Sometimes it is difficult to truly understand how your child is doing in school, despite what the teacher does or does not tell you. Take the teacher out of the equation and start gathering information to develop a big picture of your child and his/her school experience. Be open to honesty and truth.

Student Success

Before you evaluate your child's success in school, you must take time to think what the final product or expectation for your child is when he or she is grown. That's the marker for which you need to gauge school progress and define success. School is not just about a grade on a report card. Success is individually defined based on ability, intelligence, personal experiences and preferences.

Gauge this information in relation to grade level peers

Questions to ask:

- What is my child's school performance? This includes grades, standardized testing and informal assessments. Gauge this information in relation to grade level peers. Some teachers can be harsh graders, while others give everyone A's. Gain an understanding of the evaluation-style of the current teacher.

- If your child's classroom or grade level is involved in ability grouping, understand what group your child is in for each content area. Is it the high group or the low group? An A is an A on a report card. However ,an A in the high group has different meaning than an A in the low group.

- How is your child relating to others? Is he or she kind, have friends and can get along with others?

- Does your child have discipline issues involving the school administration or visits to the principal?

Family Support

A child who is struggling with ADHD in school is also struggling at home. The odds are high that you fight that battle every day ,but you don’t use the term ADHD. In an effort to help support a struggling kid, many parents work very hard at home to support what’s happening in school. It can cause battles and more chaos than sometimes is appropriate. Here are some guidelines for you to support the school issues at home.

If there is
an ongoing
discipline issue

Be careful with setting expectations for your child. Do not create expectations that he or she cannot live up to. This includes unrealistic expectations, but also assessing the current classroom your child is in. If the teacher grades harshly, expecting all A's and B's may be unrealistic. Some teachers have more latitude for behavior than others. Understand the culture within the current classroom. Reassess your own expectations against the teacher's style.

School issues are school issues. If you are beating yourself and your child up at home, STOP. Ask yourself if the struggle you are engaged in supports the long term school outcome for your child. If it does not, stop. If there is an ongoing discipline issue or difficulties with the teacher, you don't have to do anything. You don't always have to give consequences. Support your child, express you would like them to make better choices but do not drag your kid into a situation of punitive punishment at home in an effort to back up the teacher.

Do not extend the torture of school into home

School is only one aspect of who your child is. Not all children excel at school. Average isn't bad in school and average is the biggest part of the bell curve. Remember that. Not all children like school. If your child dislikes school, chances are that it is challenging for your child in one way or another. Figure out what area that is. Support it at home in a positive and loving way.

Do not extend the torture of school into home. Home should be a safe place to relax, decompress and be loved. Support homework and school behaviors. If you're getting into a power struggle over school issues, stop. Figure out solutions that support your outcome-based goal for your child. If you're spending an excessive amount of time on homework, STOP. Talk to the teacher and figure out a different arrangement.

The next installment will discuss the educational diagnosis versus a medical diagnosis of ADHD and how special education or a 504 plan might be appropriate. The final installment will be medication. I’m not going to drag out what my thoughts are on medication and make you wait. There’s a point in time when medication IS appropriate and there are times when it’s not. I just hope that in the meantime, I don’t have to read through a thousand comments talking about what bullshit schools and medication are, or how your neighbor’s Great Aunt Ginny cured her out-of-control kid by feeding him exotic fruit from some craptastic country none of us ever heard of. Be patient.

They are NOT Angry Birds! DRIVEN

Today marks the beginning of National Autism Awareness Month.

Source: Autism Society www.autism-society.org

National Autism Awareness Month

In order to highlight the growing need for concern and awareness about autism, the Autism Society has been celebrating National Autism Awareness Month since the 1970s. The United States recognizes April as a special opportunity for everyone to educate the public about autism and issues within the autism community.

Join the Autism Society in getting involved with the autism community this April.

To learn more

Put on the Puzzle! The Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon is the most recognized symbol of the autism community in the world. Autism prevalence is now one in every 110 children in America. Show your support for people with autism by wearing the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon – as a pin on your shirt, a magnet on your car, a badge on your blog, or even your Facebook profile picture – and educate folks on the potential of people with autism! To learn more about the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon visit http://www.autism-society.org/about-us/puzzle-ribbon.html. To purchase the Autism Awareness Puzzle Ribbon for your shirt, car, locker or refrigerator, click here.

Make a difference. Contact your representatives on the state and federal level and ask them to "Vote 4 Autism." For more information about this legislation and to take action to support it, visit www.autism-society.org/vote4autism.

Connect with your neighborhood. Many Autism Society local chapters hold

An online tool that makes it easy to mobilize

special events in their communities throughout the month of April. But if you can't find an event that suits you just right, create your own! 1Power4Autism is an online tool that makes it easy to mobilize friends and family and help make a difference.

Above content is cited from the Autism Society web page

http://www.autism-society.org/about-us/national-autism-awareness-month/

Source: Autism Society http://www.autism-society.org

Back up to speed

To get us back up to speed here is a segment from the first part of the series.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and posting something I'm not really comfortable with, but I respect the person that asked me to do it. He feels there's a need for someone like me to write this type of material.

I guess we will find out soon enough.

The topic deals with my son, who has special needs (Asperger's Syndrome). I've posted about this once before and may never post again so here are a few quick tips I will pass along.

*** I used to hate the term "special needs,"** but now I can't stand people who say they hate the term. After nine years, if there is one thing I know for a FACT, it's that my son has special needs!

While all kids are different and each requires their own set of needs, I'm willing to bet those with autism fall outside the spectrum in this regard. If you are a

Ask them to speak candidly.

new parent coming into this situation you need to come to terms with this, because it's a fact, and the sooner you know, quit denying, placing blame, and expecting someone to have all the answers, the better parent you will be.

*** I will also go as far as to say** that unless you have or care for a child with special needs you have NO IDEA what the term special needs really means. You might think you do but trust me – you don't. Sit down with someone who has one of these kids and ask them to speak candidly. You will gain a MUCH better perspective of what this means.

Does this mean I feel having "special needs" means these children are "special" or better than others?

No, not at all.

ALL kids are special – they are our future!

There is nothing more special than our children

There is nothing MORE special than our children, but some DO have needs that fall outside the normal spectrum.

They are NOT bad kids, they are NOT Angry Birds, they are NOT confused kids, they are NOT crazy, they are NOT any of these “behaviors” – they are loved children first and ALWAYS.

You can't just sit back

Here a few more tips that have helped me work on being a better parent.

Take Action

Take action early – To put this into a better perspective, it's much easier to take control and teach a 6-year-old than it is to teach a 200 pound teenager with anger issues. I wrote before about accepting responsibility and understanding that your child does have special needs and this means you'll need to parent according to these needs. You can't just sit back and hope things will get better. It would be awesome if the world worked that way, but as we all know...it doesn't. We have and will continue to educate and provide tips to help parents who have children on the Autism Spectrum. I highly suggest you do more research, speak to other parents, specials needs educators and doctors to learn what your options are, what you can do and what to look for.

There are always other options

You have to get over the “not my child” things NOW because denial does you nothing. The other point I want to make is regardless of what someone tells you, there are ALWAYS other options. Make sure you KNOW what these are. FAR too many educators, doctors and specialists think they know all the answers and to be frank – this is bull crap! I’m not saying they don’t know what they’re talking about. What I’m saying is they don’t know YOUR child as well as you do and nobody has this all figured out.

One example to illustrate this point, years ago we were told to put my son on a special diet. We were to pull sugar, gluten, food coloring, and to make sure he ate whole organic foods. This advice was offed from a very well-respected doctor who specializes with children on the spectrum. We were are told that his biggest issues was PANDAS and he would need to cycle antibiotics for many years.

After close to one year of this, we didn't notice any difference except for lighter pocket books from all the supplements we were asked to have him take. By the way, this didn't work because he wouldn't take them and spit the liquid out or vomit it back up. Because there was no difference, we went back to a normal diet (my house eats healthy) and his behavior stayed the same.

He used to eat tons of natural peanut butter

Fast forward one year and we take my son to see another doctor who also wanted to change his diet, but this time blood work was pulled and a full analysis was done. Turns out he is ok with many of the things we were asked to pull from the diet the first time, except there were others such as yeast and nuts (he used to eat TONS of natural peanut butter) that scored extremely high. Since he has been on this new plan, we haven't had any issues in school at all and very few at home. I'm not going to say they've all gone away, but I can confidently say there is well over a 90 percent improvement.

Just because it doesn't work the first time...

So much for the first expert who knew everything and cost a fortune to see!

One second point I want to make here is just because something doesn't work the first time, doesn't mean it's worthless – it might not have been implemented correctly. I knew from research and being in the strength and conditioning field that diet had to have some impact, so I didn't want to give up on the idea. This is why we keep looking in that direction.

I do plan on expanding on this topic more in the future and will look into our doctors submitting sections to help explain some of the concepts better than I could. Hopefully he will. The problem with the doctors who do work on the nutritional side is they get very frustrated with parents. They do all the testing, make the suggestions and the parents aren't willing to change their own habits, so the poor food choices are still in the house – or they make justifications for their child to eat something they shouldn't instead of just dealing with the tantrum. Don't be one of those parents.

Don't Spoil Them

I understand that this is not easy, but this brings me to the next point – **don't spoil them.** I'm very guilty of this and I'm much better now than I used to be, but I understand how hard it can be. You understand your child's frustrations and what to make things better even if it's just a temporary solution. What you really need to ask yourself is who is this for? Is it REALLY for the betterment of your child – or – is it to make yourself feel better? I know in my case, my son could care less about any toy he is given. He has told us many times he already has enough and if he rewarded and can select a prize, it may take him two weeks to think of something. This leaves me as the guilty party here. I know I'm not doing him any favors and in the long term just making things worse, so I have to constantly remind me of this.

It may take him two weeks to think of something

The good ones know they can't treat kids on the spectrum the same

Self Esteem

We have been through FIVE school systems; early intervention, private, catholic, public and now a school that specializes in kids on the Autism Spectrum. While there are HUGE differences between them all and I could write a book on the issues we had to deal with to get to the point we are now, I will save this for another time because we did learn a lot about how to deal with teachers and administrators. Before I get to my main point, I want to say when it comes to teachers and administrators, like any other profession, there are some who are great...and some who suck. The problem is that when you have a child on the spectrum, this is MAGNIFIED big time. If they're a great teacher, they'll become the greatest teacher in the world. If they suck, they'll become an absolute and complete nightmare to deal with. The good ones know they can't treat kids on the spectrum the same, while those who suck, think they HAVE to treat all kids the same. If you're a parent who is or has dealt with this, you know what I mean.

The reason why I bring this up is because one difference between all the other schools and the one that specializes in Autism is one way in which they build the child's self esteem. While I can't speak for all kids on the spectrum I can say my son hates to lose – REALLY hates to lose. This is one of his triggers and if it happens, all hell breaks loose. Kids on the spectrum also don't fair that great on the social spectrum, so they may not act the same as their other classmates. Every school system we've been though had a discipline system they use when kids get into trouble. One example would be:

White – no issues

Green – one issue

Yellow – two issues

Blue – three issues

They earn points for good behavior.

Red – had to see the principle

As soon as one problem happens, the kid is asked to come to the front of the class and move their clip from white to green. To a child who hates to lose, this is a form of losing and now they know they had a bad day. They (my son) didn't get that there were other levels. He understood two things. No clip move = good. Clip moved = bad. The school did try to work with this and not move the clip unless it was bad, but the basic concept was to punish the bad behaviors. It's hard to build self-esteem when every day involves that you take physical action (get up and move a clip) that is designed to punish behavior.

In contrast, at his new school, they earn points for good behavior. If they're having a bad day, they won't earn points. If they're having a good day, they can earn up to 20 points per section, or 80 points a day. They also have a store where you can use your point to buy toys. The points can also be used to buy

If all my actions were just to punish the negative and not reward the positive, that would be a mistake.

extra video game time during the day.

Now, you tell me what one will build self-esteem and what one won't?

This is just one example. We as parents, have to be constantly looking at how we're treating our children and if we're building their self-esteem or bringing it down. I don't have all the answers – I'm not sure if I even have any, but I do know if all my actions were just to punish the negative actions and not reward the positive, that would be a mistake.

Being a parent isn't easy.

Final Thoughts

There are a couple ways I look at all of this. First, being a parent isn't easy. It takes work, time and a commitment for the long term. This is regardless if you have a child with special needs or not. Years ago, I presented a private seminar for an extremely successful CEO of a fortune 500 company. At dinner that night after I presented, I told him we just adopted a baby boy and I wasn't exactly sure how I was going to be able to balance this with building a business. At the time, I was still working out of my home and I wasn't making a dime. While I never considered closing up shop and going back to work as a trainer, I also didn't know how I was going to be able to devote the time needed to develop and grow the systems of the business. Aside from my own training, all of my waking hours were spent working on the business and now this was going to change.

When you have nothing to lose, you're willing to take bigger risks.

This was over 10 years ago and I still remember what he said as clear as day...

"Dave, your child will make you BETTER at business. You have no idea how much better, but in a few years you will know what I mean."

My fear was when you're starting out and having nothing to lose, you're willing to take bigger risks. How was I going to compete with others who were in that position, when I knew I had to find an income and spend more time with my family? I saw this as a huge disadvantage and it did take a few years before I understood what I was told.

In short, when you have nothing to fight, the hits you take hurt more, the hits you toss are not as hard and you get up slower when you're knocked down. Business is actually more competitive than sports. In business, there are others who want to see you fail, they want to make you fail, they want to take what you have and they don't care how it's done. There's zero sportsmanship in business…only laws. It's brutal and you will get hit HARD. You will get knocked down MANY TIMES and you will have to strike with all you have. Every day I wake up, I know exactly what I'm fighting for. I know this now MUCH more than I did before I had kids.

I know exactly what I'm fighting for.

Having children took my passion and made it DRIVEN…

…driven to the point that I LOVE the competition, challenge, fight, chaos, drama and all the other crap that tries to get in the way.

The second way I look at this, is when I'm 80-years-old sitting in a rocking chair, I want to know I did the BEST I could for my family. Yes, I have and will make mistakes, but when my world comes to an end, I want to close my eyes knowing I did right by them and did it in the best way I could. More importantly, I want them to KNOW I did. I'll be the first to admit I'm not there yet and have a long way to go, but I strive to live each day the best I can, to learn from my mistakes and to pass on what I can to make those around me better as well.

Before closing, I want to note that I'm humbled that anyone really cares what a "Meathead" has to say about special needs, but this month is exactly the reason I write these. We need to increase awareness and I want to make sure I'm doing my part. Please spread the word that this is National Autism Awareness Month. It's not about how many people we make aware. If you make the right person aware and they go out and make a difference, then just that one was worth it.

They are NOT Angry Birds! Normalcy?

As I have mentioned in previous editions of this column, this is without a doubt the hardest writing project I have ever undertook. I would rather have teeth pulled than write about my own children, let alone one with “special needs.” Because I have already addressed the label of Special Needs in past articles, I will just cut to the chase and say a child with Autism,namely Asperger’s Syndrome. If you have followed this column over the past year, you have seen that I have recruited several people to write this column because they could offer better information than I could on the subject, as well as relieve me of writing about my experiences.

Unlike other subjects I write about, I can’t just sit down and knock the article out. This one takes more thought and time because while I do some research, I’m really just a parent doing the best I can, making a ton of mistakes but getting some things right. Unlike training, where it is comfortable to write about the things we have done wrong, this is very uncomfortable to do when writing

Faith Jegede

about navigating the education and growth of a child with Autism.

I did have a solid outline for this one but stumbled across a video that changed everything. After showing the video to Steve Colescott (Sr. Content Manager for Elitefts.com Inc), we decided it would be best to push the content I was going to write for this article to a future edition and let the video speak for itself.

This video is a short TED clip from Faith Jegede about what she learned from her autistic brothers. I think we all have something to learn from children and adults with autism, and this video drives home a very important lesson that applies to all of us.

One thing I have learned from my son is a statement I hear him say almost every single day.

Today is my lucky day

"Today is my lucky day"

This can be in response to his ride being on time, having the right cereal, or even Nick Jr being the first channel set on the TV. Simply put, he sees the smallest things as being lucky – or in adult talk, he doesn't take things for granted – EVER.

As far as writing this column goes... Today is my lucky day because I found this video.

Enjoy and let me know

"The pursuit of normality is the ultimate sacrifice of potential"

- Faith Jegede

TED

FAITH JEGEDE

WHAT I’VE LEARNED FROM MY AUTISTIC BROTHERS

WATCH VIDEO LINK