

## **Bold Book** Notes – Excellent Sheep by William Deresiewicz

The SYSTEM manufactures students who are...

- Smart
- Talented
- Driven

and...

- Anxious
- Lost
- Little IQ curiosity
- Stunted sense of purpose

Look past the façade of elite “have it all together” students to find...

- Toxic fear
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Emptiness
- Aimlessness
- Isolation
- Resistance to vulnerability
- “Stanford Duck Syndrome” – serene on the surface / madly kicking below

***Young people aren't trained to pay attention to the things they feel connected to.***

Have a passion for a success... that's it.

Students taught that education means:

- **Do homework - > get answers - > ace test**

**They know how to be a STUDENT but not to use their MINDS**

Busy schedules push out simply THINKING

## **I WANT MY KID TO BE A PASSIONATE WEIRDO!**

***ELITE Journey Markers: Grades – scores – trophies***

- Collecting praise along the way
- The purpose of the ELITE journey? Gather gold stars

***An ALTERNATIVE journey has these markers:***

***Intellectual curiosity – attempts, failures and recoveries – following passion and having time to find it***

**GOAL:** Kids be comfortable seeking the unknown, not finding and jumping through the next “hoop” set up for them

**GOAL:** \$ / salary / certain materialistic quality of life isn't the goal. Find purpose and craft a life within those means and do NOT be caught up in a compare/despair cycle

**GOAL:** Take a chance with yourself while you are young (or older too!)

**GOAL:** don't be afraid of RISK

**GOAL:** don't become a slave to \$ / lifestyle

**GOAL:** kids invent their own path (parents help show the way... buck the system!)

**GOAL:** Show / promote there are many paths to purpose/happiness/fulfillment and many ways to get it

**GOAL: Do not be a SUPER PERSON** = busy schedule with all sorts of AP classes, extra curriculars and all the rest. This is a RAT RACE PATH that takes you far away from finding yourself.

Families / parents – are fear motivated. Need to be competitive, right? But competitive *at what?*

**Avoid HIGH ACHIEVEMENT ADDICTION** (no “curling” parenting – where you sweep all the obstacles out of your kids' way)

***“Do not feed kids the illusion that life is PREDICTABLE, and that life is reduced to an orderly succession of achievements that will guarantee security and comfort.”***

Why do parents feel the need to raise “PERFECT” children? Don't have your child be the extension of YOU. (You gave them life, they need to live it)

Affluence can breed high rates of:

- Depression
- substance abuse
- anxiety disorders
- low connection to parents
  - PRAISE IS NOT WARMTH

Fight to bring back and make time for the following:

- Curiosity building
- Character building
- Citizenship building

**GOAL:** Build resiliency – the ability to handle setbacks

- Check yourself parents.... Are you BRITTLE? (Where your kids failures are internalized as your own?)

**GOAL:** Help kids stop being threatened by other people's accomplishments. Encourage them (and yourself) to be open to what they bring into the world

- Parental expectations that are unchecked create “A false self” in the child. Her feelings / desires are not validated so she ignores them herself.

**GOAL:** Parents exude an impression of self-acceptance and tolerate a child who at times can be sad, needy, angry, furious and challenging

**GOAL:** kids not to become depended on us to give them a sense of WHO THEY ARE

- The problem – parents don’t see themselves as THAT parent

**GOAL:** Avoid an “empty sense of ritualism” as motivation / participation in leadership / sports / AP classes / etc.

- We reward manipulators of the system NOT authenticity
- The system is set up to punish those who will not play the game... but is there another game?

## Go against the FLOW!

Schools (high school/college level) should help students figure out who they are and what their purpose in the world should be.

## *What is an educated human being? What does the course curriculum look like?*

**GOAL:** Do NOT equate: Teach this: Virtue / dignity / happiness ✂ material success

Question what matters

It isn’t just jobs and financial security

## You need to get a job but also need to get a LIFE

The Purpose of College:

- Teach kids to THINK:
- Learn not to take things for granted
- To reach your own conclusions
- DO NOT be threatened by self-knowledge and do not get buffered away from it by **being busy**

**GOAL:** be like Socrates:

- Ask probing question to your kids
- Drag their opinions into the light
- Have them defend them

Live more...

- Alertly
- Freely
- Fully

## Think about YOURSELF

- Build your “self” is not quick or easy
- Requires self-examination
- Build communication between your mind + heart + your experience

**GOAL:** Offer kids opportunity to change the way they look at the world. It can change the way you look at your life.

**GOAL:** Provide opportunities for kids to determine their identities and values have kids start to contemplate: What is the good life? How should I LIVE it?

Because you’ve given credence to the importance of finding out WHO you are, you can start to answer....

- What are you GOOD at?
- What do you CARE about?
- What do you BELIEVE in?

## Inventing your LIFE

- Career is ½ the reason that you need to know yourself
- Self-knowledge is the MOST PRACTICAL thing in the world. It helps you find your way to a career that is right for YOU.
- What is the meaning of MY LIFE?
  - Make yourself receptive to answer the call of YOUR CALLING. (The thing you CAN’T NOT DO)
  - You won’t be able to recognize what you care about until you realize your grip on all things you’ve been taught to care about.
  - True self esteem means NOT CARING whether you get an A in the first place

**GOAL:** Have kids recognize grades do not define your value as a human being

**GOAL:** Have kids decide – for themselves – what constitutes success.

Moral imagination = envision new ways on HOW TO LIVE

- Can’t study for it
- Can’t compete for it
- Must use YOUR CHARACTER (not intellect)
- Courage / bravery to act NO MATTER WHAT anyone else says or thinks
- It can be a lonely path

**GOAL:** Teach kids that pursuing their curiosity is NOT self-indulgent

- Isn’t it more self-indulgent to pursue a finance degree with the goal to make lots of money being a consultant?

## Ways to Find your Purpose / Passion

- What did you spontaneously do as a younger person?
- Can we do work connected to that?
- What would you choose to do anyway, even if there were no reward for it?
- What can you immerse yourself into doing for hours at a time?

Happiness consists of:

- Feeling connected and...
- Engaging in meaningful work

***“Do work that calls upon your favorite powers” – Aristotle***

**GOAL:** What are your favorite powers? (Strengths survey – [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org))

You will:

- Learn more
- Do better
- Try harder
- Be more successful in your studies
- Do what you are interested in

**GOAL:** Find a way to work that is its own reward

**Purpose means DOING SOMETHING not BEING SOMETHING**

**GOAL:** Parents – equip and embrace children’s ability to follow their dreams

- Ideals / character give the strength to resist seductions of status / wealth and “success”

**GOAL:** Be morally autonomous! You’ve got to be willing to accept risk!

**GOAL:** Build in your kids the ability to NOT FEAR FAILURE and to see it as a valuable part of development

- Help their (and your) ability to see doubt as a skill and ***praise errors as foundations to wisdom***
- The aim? It will be **your life** – mistakes and all
- Recognize: Fear is an agent of control
- See fear born from insecurity as signals to GO FORWARD

Understand – ***following your passion means to give something else up (remember: you can’t have it all).***

- What are you willing to give up? Status? \$\$\$? These can be addictions

**GOAL:** Help kids resist the need for status - make the work itself the GOAL

- You control YOUR EFFORT not necessarily the result / recognition / etc.

**GOAL:** Teach kids who have more the way to live with less.

- It creates the freedom for them to create their life! (minimalism)
- More important? Learning to do with out parental or societal approval

***“A child who never rebels remains a child forever.”***

Remember: you WANT to get fired from your job as “mom”

Do NOT be your kid’s friend. Encourage them to separate from you so they can find themselves!

**GOAL:** Kids understand that what they owe their parent is...

Love and care when they (the parents) are older

**NOT**

Submission or their LIVES

Parent/Child Relationship:

- As a child = obedience
- As an adult: Independence

**GOAL:** Parents – Don’t overly insert yourself in your kid’s academic life

- Don’t check grades daily
- Don’t impose your help unless asked

**GOAL:** Encourage kids to take time to...

- Slow down
- Gain perspective
- break the cycle of constant achievement
- Get away from constant supervision
- Take summers off
- Take time off after college
- Suburban Rumspringa – (like the Amish)
- Give yourself TIME
- Don’t be afraid of living a life that is not orderly and linear
- Don’t think too far ahead (future fear)
- Don’t try to figure out what you want to do for the rest of your life – you will change as a person over the course of it. You can only and should only focus on what you want to do right now.

***Learning WHO YOU ARE is also learning WHAT YOU ARE EQUIPPED FOR.***

**GOAL:** Train your kids to be citizens

Kids cultivate ability to...

- Ask questions instead of just answering them
- Figure out how to get things done and whether they are worth doing at all
- Find new ways of doing / thinking

**GOAL:** Fortify your kids to be OK with...

- NOT being popular
- NOT always being a team player
- NOT always compromising

Encourage kids to....

- listen and trust your own drumbeat
- identify and ask questions

*You need courage and self-acceptance to do this work and live this way – help foster these traits in your kids*

**“Instead of building your resume, build your MIND”**

More important? Build these abilities:

- Critical thinking
- Communication
- Problem solving

**The important thing is learning how to learn** (because the stuff is obsolete within a decade anyway)

- Information is freely available. Its what you can do with it.
- The perspectives that you get from studying the general (liberal arts) are meant to be used within the practice of your specialty
- Doing so gives you purpose within your work. (Example: A doctor’s perspective: A healer vs. a pill pusher)

**GOAL:** Develop skills to think across disciplines

**GOAL:** Look around to see where you can make things better within your discipline

**GOAL:** Teach kids how to think. Ask for their input

- Discussions at family meetings
- Encourage them to share their insight and defend their position

**GOAL:** For Teachers (and parents): Challenge kids and care about them

Do not be jealous of other constructive influences on your child

- Cultivate a village of guides other than you – some of those village members may be more attuned to your kids' rising hopes (do not be threatened by this! See this as a good thing!).

**Parents / Guides / Village Members should....**

- Listen to kids
- Help them hear what they are seeing (parrot back their words to them)
- Ask WHY more
- Give permission to go their way (once they have figured it out)
- Give reassurance that their way is VALID

When picking a college path understand...

- The more prestigious the school, the more requirements for professors to publish = the lower the quality of the actual teaching to YOUR kid.
- Professors get rewarded for research NOT teaching
- The elite and upper tier colleges aren't really about the students. It's about their reputation (i.e. research) which is time NOT devoted to you as a student (undergrads)

What to look for as an undergrad going to college:

- Diversity = leads to richer discussions and view points
- Integrate studies with life skills
- Engaged and personal relationship between professors and students
- Liberal arts = smaller in size and higher in accountability
- Treated like a community member
- Second tier liberal colleges: good guides: Colleges that Change Lives / Washington Monthly College Guide and Rankings (Commitment to social good)

Go to college – the WHERE doesn't matter was much as the WHY and HOW

**GOAL:** Teach kids better at school is not simply better – there is more to it than grades

**GOAL:** Develop a "FAILURE RESUME" along with accomplishments

Remember: **GPA's favor the "Faithful Drudge" not the "Original Mind" ...**

So does quantity (not quality) of AP classes, extracurriculars, etc.