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Bill Cirone op ed column

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Traits of success

By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

In a *Business Insider* article, journalist Drake Baer profiled a handful of prominent, successful people from several walks of life, from the arts to coaching to business.

Despite their different personalities and passions, successful people have several traits in common. The good news is that parents can help nurture and cultivate these traits among their children.

First, successful people enjoy their work. They can be good at it because they like doing it. The late, great poet Maya Angelou had this to say about enjoying what you do: “Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.”

Successful people almost always have a positive attitude and plenty of confidence that gets them through the rough spots. Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister during the darkest hours of World War II, certainly knew a lot about adversity. But it was his attitude in those adverse circumstances that shaped him.

“Success is going from failure to failure,” Churchill once said, “without losing enthusiasm.” While this quote comes from the middle of the last century, it is just as relevant today. Successful people invariably use negative experiences to discover their strengths. They see negatives as challenges to overcome and to learn from.

Successful people are also decisive, disciplined goal-setters. They don’t let distractions get in the way. Inventor Thomas Edison is arguably the greatest American example of the kind of focus that successful people apply to their endeavors. Edison’s work ethic was legendary. He would sometimes work on a single project uninterrupted for three consecutive days. He truly lived the motto set forth in his famous quote: “Success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.”

Successful people are also persistent. They keep at it until the goal is reached, where others may get discouraged and choose another path.

They are also risk takers, in the spirit of “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

They have developed good communication skills and problem-solving skills.

They surround themselves with competent, responsible, and supportive people, and know how to tell the difference.

They are healthy, high-energy people, and they schedule time to renew themselves before problems can arise.

Finally, self-reflection is critical in evaluating one’s success. Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden offered this definition: “Success is peace of mind,” he said, “which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.”

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