

Inside the Bell

Generation-E

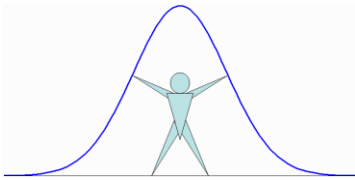
A while ago, I was engaged in a conversation with a colleague in a management position with a medium sized company. Somehow, during a discussion of the frustrations related to his position, he related a story of his interaction with a new employee. He had met with the twenty-something employee for the previously scheduled, six-month new employee review. During the review, he outlined how well the employee had been performing during the previous six-months and a number of ways the employee could improve their performance, raise their productivity, and pursue a career with the company. Overall, he felt the employee could benefit from, what he felt was, constructive criticism and become an asset to the corporation.

Everything seemed reasonable until the next morning, when he received a phone call from the employee's mother demanding that he show a better appreciation for her child's contribution to the company and refrain from demeaning and upsetting comments directed at her child. He was more than taken aback at the content of this call. In subsequent discussions with other managers, and a little research, he discovered his experience was not unusual. The existence and persistence of "helicopter parents" was having an increasing impact on companies. A subsequent discussion with his employee established that, if it happened again, the employee would be asked to leave the company for "parental interference."

He may have established a new standard for employee behavior, but he highlighted a larger problem. We have, as a society, created a generation of entitled, highly self-centered children. Collectively I would refer to them as Generation-E, Generation-Entitled or, if you prefer, Generation-Esteemed. We have carefully avoided harming their self-esteem, and raising their sense of entitlement, to the point they cannot deal with adversity in any form. We have done so to the detriment of both the society and the children themselves.

Yesterday, media outlets from the Chicago Sun-Times (<http://www.suntimes.com/news/nation/11534563-418/easter-egg-hunt-canceled-because-of-aggressive-parents.html>), to Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/03/26/aggressive-parents-force-cancellation-colorado-towns-easter-egg-hunt/>) published a story about the cancellation of the annual Easter egg hunt in Colorado Springs due to "Aggressive Parents." By their actions, "helicopter" parents changed a joyous event into a competition that their child must not lose, and they destroyed the event for everyone including their child.

Have we done our children a disservice by emphasizing entitlement over education and esteem over enlightenment? I argue that we have done far worse. We have harmed our children by leaving them unprepared for the challenges of the real world and we have harmed the society itself by depriving it of the thoughtful individuals necessary to lead us into the future. We have deliberately



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isolated our children from experiencing failure. Failure is required for success. Without failure, what incentive do we have to better? By preventing our children from experiencing failure, we inhibit them from investigating other opportunities at which they might excel. It is difficult to find any entrepreneur who did not fail more than once before becoming successful. What inventor succeeded without first failing multiple times? How many politicians never lost an election or authors haven't received a rejection letter? Every athlete knows personally the effects of failure. There are 68 teams in the NCAA Division I basketball tournament and only one team will end its season with a victory. George Washington lost almost every battle of the early Revolution. Failure is the natural state of the world. What we learn from failure and how we deal with failure, creates wisdom and builds strength and character.

The effects of Generation-E are all around us. We have experienced street demonstrations of young adults, with little regard for the safety or personal space of others, demanding the right to attend the university of their choice but have someone else pay for it. These Gen-Eers are unprepared for the stress and responsibilities of daily life and demand we tear it all down and replace it with something unspecified without realizing that they will be the first, and most adversely, effected.

Can we reverse the Gen-E effect? We can hold the reins of leadership longer and hope some of the Gen-Eers will realize the weakness of their upbringing and step up. However, control and hope are not enough. We need to restructure the education system. We need to stop living vicariously through our children and ensuring they succeed where we didn't. We need to allow them to fail and show them the path to success. Participation trophies might improve self-esteem but they destroy initiative. Boxes of blue ribbons and plastic trophies with eventually be discarded but hard work and dedication will support our children for the rest of their lives.

Russ

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