

MAXIMIZE YOUR CHILD'S POTENTIAL

7 KILLER STRATEGIES TO COACH YOUR CHILD TO DOMINANCE ON TEST DAY & CONFIDENCE FOR LIFE

by Scott Doty



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I hope you believe this: each of your children has a signature genius and a destiny for greatness. I'm not saying every human is going to end up on magazine covers (as if that should be our goal!), but I do believe that every single human being has a unique capability of impacting the world for good. As parents, we are given an awesome privilege and responsibility: to recognize and develop the signature genius of each child.

In this mini-manifesto, I'll share with you 7 of my most tried-and-true, high-impact strategies for coaching your children to incredible performance in school and beyond. I've used these techniques with thousands of my client families around the world, and I know they will work for you. Enjoy!!

With love,
~Scott.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

KILLER STRATEGY #1: Put Mental & Emotional Health First.

At BrainStorm, the tutoring company I founded, one of our guiding mantras is “Mentor the whole person.” Why would a company focused on academic performance worry about things like relationships, self-concept, and emotional health? Because your mental and emotional health circumscribes your possibilities for achievement. It creates boundaries on your ability to strive for a goal, collaborate with others, and enjoy your successes. I have found time and again that the greater the space created by your mental/emotional wellness, the more room there is for achievement in the classroom and beyond. So if a certain activity or relationship is harming your child’s mental and emotional health, or is eating up too many hours that could otherwise be used for constructive health work, ditch it. Make time for your children’s mental and emotional health and watch their possibilities for achievement expand.

Notable/quotation:

“A child’s mental health is just as important as their physical health and deserves the same quality of support.”

- Kate Middleton

“What we achieve inwardly will change our outward reality.”

- Plutarch



KILLER STRATEGY #2: Instill Growth Mindset.

Each child is his or her own standard. There is no “other” against which we ought to gauge our kids’ progress! This is a key insight to both motivating our kids and holding them accountable. Holding our kids to an arbitrary external standard (“Nora Neighbor is already reading” or “Colin Classmate got a 32 ACT score”) is destructive because it presupposes that one child’s signature genius can be compared to another’s. I have repeatedly found with my students and my own children that if I encourage sterling effort and attitude, and de-stress the results themselves, the students develop a healthier understanding of motivation and achievement. If we teach our kids to break the ‘fixed’ mindset – “I’m just bad at math; I’ll never be as good as Kevin at it; and there’s nothing I can do about it” and instead instill the ‘growth’ mindset – “I don’t care how everyone else is doing; no matter how good (or not) I may be at this subject right now, I CAN IMPROVE” we will unleash their brilliance. The antidote to underperformance? Growth mindset. Read Carol Dweck’s compelling book *Mindset* and reap the rewards.

Notable/quotation:

“You have to apply yourself each day to becoming a little better. By becoming a little better each and every day, over a period of time, you will become a lot better.”

- John Wooden

“Whether you think you can, or think you can’t, you’re right.”

- Henry Ford



KILLER STRATEGY #3: Teach Monotasking & Focused Presence.

Many of BrainStorm's client parents tell us that their kids struggle mightily with focusing for more than twenty or even ten minutes on a given task. Digital culture is highly distracting! One of the outcomes of this common problem is that students struggle on long tests, especially those featuring reading passages. The antidote to distractibility and focus issues? Monotasking. That is, doing one thing at a time with great quality... and THEN moving on to a next task. To help our children develop the skill of focus, we can demonstrate presence (not thinking constantly about the past or the future), good attitude (deciding to fake enthusiasm during unpleasant tasks), and wise decision-making (such as eliminating distractions, like cell phones, from the work environment). Only if we do it ourselves can we require the same of them! And it's worth it: in today's intensely fast-paced and distracting environment, focused presence is a HUGE competitive advantage to give our children.

Notable/quotable:

"A person who is interrupted while performing a task takes 50% more time to complete it and makes 50% more errors."

- David Brooks

"When you are hunting elephants, don't get distracted chasing rabbits."

- Boone Pickens



KILLER STRATEGY #4: Meet the Brain's Needs.

The brain is a unique muscle, a communication hub, and the director of the entire body. That thing is busy! So teach your kids to give it love. The payoff, of course, is a brain that works when you want it to work (on test day, for example). There are many ways to care for your brain: give it ample sleep (the more before midnight, the better); hydrate it (coconut water and bananas are a potent combination); give it the nutrients it needs (via raw foods, such as vegetables and nuts/seeds); withhold toxins (high fructose corn syrup & other sugars, smoggy air, toxic water); clear out over-anxious, over-busy monkey mind (meditation is valuable in this regard); encourage it to release happy chemicals (smile, laugh, and hug people you love); give it ample oxygen, which is its lifeblood (hello, exercise!); etc. The brain is your greatest ally but it requires myriad love touches every day. Help your kids to develop habits that ensure brain health and witness huge performance increases both in and out of school.

Notable/quotation:

"Your brain is the most complex, mind-blowing organ in the planet... Knowing how to care for your brain is the first and most important step to success in anything you do."

- Dr. Daniel Amen

"I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix."

- Sherlock Holmes,

The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone

(by Conan Arthur Doyle)



KILLER STRATEGY #5: Grow the Courage Tree.

Many, many students struggle on test day because they are anxious and fearful. Of what, exactly? Some are prisoners of the 'fixed' mindset and fear they will fall short of standards set by their peers, as described in #2 above. But more often than not, I have found that students are afraid that they will disappoint their parents/loved ones, whose love and admiration they believe they need to earn. I know I'm getting deep, but stay with me! Children who are most free from fear are most available, cognitively, on test day. Therefore, if we want to see our kids succeed in school, we need to "grow the courage tree;" plant seeds (i.e. values, such as noble effort, service above self, love and acceptance regardless of results, growth mindset, etc.) that develop into the strong roots and sturdy trunk of a poised, courageous young man or woman. When our children have values and perspective that are bigger than school, they no longer need to believe that their scores define them. And without that fear hanging over their head, they are free and empowered to produce good fruit on test day.

Notable/quotation:

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear."

- Ambrose Redmoon

"A mind focused on doubt and fear cannot focus on the journey to victory."

- Mike Jones



KILLER STRATEGY #6: Teach the Ultimate Studying Technique: Externalization.

The king of study techniques is what I call Externalization. When students read or hear, they are internalizing – taking something in through their eyes or ears. But the human brain creates neural pathways, and therefore stronger memory connections, for things we produce things through our hands and mouth. Want to remember someone’s name? Write it several times and also say it out loud while visualizing his or her face. In the same way, we need to study math formulas, science concepts, English rhetorical devices, historical data, etc. by externalizing. My students externalize in many ways: they write and re-write their notes; they teach the content to me or a study partner (it is said that the best way to learn something is to teach it); they create their own mock tests with answer keys; they read passages aloud while simultaneously annotating them; they watch Khan Academy or YouTube videos and then produce their own; they take full-length test simulations early and often; etc. Teach this to your children: if you want to understand and remember something, experience it. If knowledge is flowing from your mouth or your hands, your brain can’t help but pay attention.

Notable/quotable:

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”

- Benjamin Franklin

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

- Confucius



KILLER STRATEGY #7: Embody the Fact that Geek is Gangster.

“Children are great imitators,” it has been written, “so give them something great to imitate.” If you want your kids to value education, you need to embody the indisputable fact that Geek is Gangster. Read books, watch TED talks, explore geometry in nature, memorize and recite a poem, study word etymologies or foreign languages – demonstrate the insatiable thirst for knowledge you want your kids to embody. Set the tone of proud nerdiness in your household; create an environment in which erudition and curiosity are exalted. You don’t need a high I.Q. to live the inquisitive life of an intellectual bad-ass. You just need to devote yourself to constant, lifelong learning and make sure your kids see you do it. They, the great imitators, will take it from there.

Notable/quotable:

“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.”
- Albert Einstein

“The geeks shall inherit the earth.”
- Cindy Morgan





NOW: Which of these killer strategies most inspired or impacted you? What are you going to do about it? Come to my page and share your killer feedback!!

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