A Glimpse into Another’s Success

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No one wants to fail. Many say, “failure is not an option.” Most Americans work hard

to succeed in the field of their dreams. Many factors help each get closer to success, but some factors may hurt the processor make it more difficult. Factors such as stereotyping, stereotype threat, discrimination, exercise, sleep, healthy eating, community, family, and many more contribute to our eventual success or failure. Most of these factors can effect every area of our living whether it be Dietetics or any other major. By seeing factors at work in Professor Wanda Siu-Chan’s, Dietetic Internship Director/Lecturer at San Francisco State University, life, one can find an inspirational example through her interaction with and treatment of stereotyping, over-efforting, education, physical and mental health, and mindset to the cause of personal success or failure, and give readers an example of what might help lead to the better achieving of personal success.

Stereotypes surround us. Stereotypes are usually cement ideas of what a person or thing is based upon their outer appearance or inward appearance. From our childhood we have grown with small biases whether they be known or unknown (ex: micro-aggressions). Even though Prof. Wanda managed to get through most of her education not experiencing much stereotyping, today, she has come to the realization that she does indeed sometimes experience it. In Dietetics, since the focus is predominantly on health, many think of Dieticians as health freaks eating kale, salad, or whatever green vegetable all day. People categorize Dieticians as being deprived from “really living their life.” Wanda said when going out-to-eat with people, “Your meal gets scrutinized” (Siu-Chan, 2016). If it wasn’t exactly what others thought as “healthy”, she could be considered an “unhealthy” Dietician, which is continually a form of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat “springs from our human powers of inter-subjectivity – the fact that as members of our society we have a pretty good idea of what other members of our society think about lots of things, including major groups and identities in society.” (Steele, 2010).

Stereotypes have not only come from our background, but they can also come from “the number of other people in a setting with the same identity—the “critical mass cue”” (Steele, 2010). By simply being in the minority or fearing the confirmation of a negative stereotype, one can feel threatened to change. Media has created an ideology, “a system of ideas and ideals” Ideology and Media, 2016). With the help of media, this can promote the idea of what the perfect body is. The classic stereotype expected of Dieticians is to be “skinny”. According to Wanda, she has never really had to handle that threat but imagines that it must be difficult for an RD (Registered Dietician) to give health advice while not looking what the media depicts has defined as what is physically fit.

Most common to many science classes, there has been a past of the majority of STEM classes being men’s area of study. Although the problem is still improving, there are still only about 1 woman to every 7 men in STEM career roles (Racism and Oppression, 2016). San Francisco State University, being very diverse, provided a variety of students with separate identities while Wanda worked on her Master’s Degree. The problem found in the appreciation of Dietetics has not been so much been between men and women but between nurses and Dieticians. Although both have worked hard to become Registered through the state-wide exam, Dieticians are still paid less. This is much like the problem in which men are paid more than women. Additionally, even though both are impacted, only about 50% of students are excepted into Dietetic internships. It seems that Dieticians would be valued more if there are so many less positions available. Even though the difference has been improving, there is still a gap of inequality between the two.

Some weeks ago, the idea of over-efforting was introduced. Over-efforting is when a person feels the need to perform better than his/hers peers in order to stop a stereotype from being proven or in order to disprove a stereotype. A great example is seen in the field of Dietetics. Registered Dieticians can sometimes be looked down upon. Professor Wanda spoke about the hospital she worked in for seven years. She felt she needed to “gain their respect”, specifically the trust of doctors, because it was if Registered Dieticians were not as smart as nurses even though they take similar classes and also take a similar statewide exam. This is an example where one might be distracted from giving one hundred percent on the task at hand because of the pressure from peers to prove a stereotype wrong. In chapter 6 of Whistling Vivaldi, it was concluded that “this multitasking is distracting” and it “can directly interfere with performance, especially when what you are doing is at the limits of your skill and knowledge” (Steele, 2010). On the rare occasion, this threat can raise the performance level of an individual. This positive outcome, though rare, happened with Professor Wanda. Over time, she gained the respect she already deserved. Over-efforting is a problem that most go through, but with determination and even help, it can be overcome.

Over the years, Prof. Wanda has noticed that students that don’t attend her classes rarely do as well as students that were faithful to class. She noticed, students that didn’t come to class and read the slides posted on iLearn or did not read anything at all, were not as successful. Professor Wanda says, “Go to class. Review your notes.” According to her it seems “going to class is underrated. She especially promotes it because she can give examples that provide application for a future in Dietetics. Although a student might think they learn better one way, it can be beneficial to learn through all five senses. “It is likely that the human brain evolved to develop, learn, and operate optimally in multisensory environments. Because multisensory learning gives you more than one way to relate to new information, it’s an ideal way to learn.” If students attend class and read the presentations posted on iLearn, they are already using two senses that will benefit their memory of the material.

Contrary to what many believe, health and education are definitely linked. Obesity does not stem from merely the choice to eat too much junk food. Professor Wanda Siu-Chan, being a professor of health, has come to the same conclusion that obesity is not just because of over-consumption of food. No matter the race or ethnic group, obesity can be linked to education. Education has a great effect on all people’s lifestyles. Without a high level of education, there rarely is a high income. There are less health benefits to a low paying job. Less money, cheap food. If the grocery store did not overprice healthier foods, low-income families would be able to afford them. Cheap processed food has been made affordable to the poor causing their obesity. Not only does education effect income, but also lack of education affects knowledge. “Babies born to mothers who did not finish high school are nearly twice as likely to die before their first birthdays as babies born to college graduates” (Link Between Health and Education, 2016). “Children whose parents have not finished high school are over six times as likely to be in poor or fair health as children whose parents are college graduates” (Link Between Health and Education, 2016). These are just two examples linking health and education. Dieticians can strive to reach and educate people of all incomes and backgrounds and make this life-changing education accessible to all.

So many variables have a great effect on producing quality work, yet the key is the commitment to a healthy (mentally and physically) and active lifestyle. Professor Wanda Siu-Chan, admitted to pulling a few all-nighters in her college years but only on the rare occasion. In chapter two of The New Science of Learning, one can see that problems arise from the developing of a sleep debt, a build up of loss of sleep. Losing sleep can lead to the short term effect of having trouble remembering (no matter how counter-intuitive it may seem because of having pulled an all-nighter for the opposite purpose). Because your memories are stored in the hippocampus (long term memory), depriving oneself of sleep is counterproductive. “Sleep deprivation could lead to a lower GPA” (Doyle, 2013). It is always better to study more in less extensive and mentally exhausting time periods. What is the key to learning? “The simple answer is repetition” (Doyle, 2013). It is better to commit to a spread out method of learning. With continuous practice of material, memories are made stronger and easier to access.

Not only are there short term effects of lack of sleep, but there are deadly long term effects, obesity and heart disease. Because your brain is not getting the energy it needs from sleep, food is the only quick energy to turn to. This leads to unhealthy choices full of quick sugar which may in turn lead to heart disease. All these symptoms go hand in hand. Wanda admitted, “I would probably not promote procrastinating.”, which leads to cramming.

Most people go through a period where it seems a certain task may be impossible to overcome. This moment is where the different mindsets of individuals come out. A mindset is “your view about your own intelligence and abilities” (Doyle, 2013). There are two mindsets that occur when going into tough situations or simply all of life’s situations: a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. A growth mindset believes “that intelligence grows as you add new knowledge and skill”, but a fixed mindset believes “intelligence is a fixed trait” (Doyle, 2013). When asked how she handled times when school got rough, Wanda remarked that failure was not an option. She did not think about failing. Professor Wanda unknowingly had a growth mindset by being ready to take on every difficult class. She was fixed on succeeding in Organic Chemistry and she got through it even though it was extremely challenging. This mindset can help a person in more than just school. In connection with Whistling Vivaldi, a person may continually grow in the right mindset by rejecting the negatives put by a community on certain identities. Knowing that it is possible to continually grow in knowledge keeps the mind always ready to learn, grow, change, and never give up.

Other than sleep, memory can be better retained through exercise. Synapses allow our brain to pass indicators or signals between our brain cells allowing for the building of intelligence and stronger memory. With exercise, more of these connections are easily made. Also, BDNF is a protein that is released during exercise allowing us to learn easier because it makes those connections easier too. Having played tennis throughout her college years, Prof. Wanda recollected that exercise helped her relief stress while being in college. This leads to better concentration. Better concentration leads to better learning. Better learning can lead to better grades. Exercise is a key to not only being healthy physically but also mentally.

In conclusion, much can be learned from the interview with Professor Wanda Siu-Chan. Throughout her life, she demonstrated many desirable behaviors: ignoring any possible stereotyping, conquering over-efforting, succeeding in education, taking part in a healthy lifestyle (mental, exercise, sleep, food), and finding her own growth mindset. Although many more factors make up a person, these are a few examples that can inspire future students to success throughout their own education.

References

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