

One of my favorite authors for personal and professional development is Dr. Tim Elmore. This past week I picked up “Habitudes – For Career Ready Students; The Art of Preparing for a Career.”

As a youth development agent, I find many applicable chapters in this book! In particular, the chapter titled, “Obstacle Course” is especially relevant in our current environment. Dr. Elmore writes of the challenges of an obstacle course and how some view it as a challenge and others determine quickly that it is “too hard”.

One of the tenets of 4-H is critical thinking. Many of the projects or events that 4-H members participate in require the youth to evaluate choices and make decisions. We don’t always think of livestock judging, life skills judging, or participating in an ag skillathon in this light but that is a large part of the activity. Yes, they need knowledge of the topic but they also need to be able to critically evaluate their options and make a decision. I would challenge that many of us know adults who could use practice at this!

Group projects can be a welcome idea or the bane of your existence dependent on the members of your group but this is very real-world practice! If you have been part of a group project where one or two did the bulk of the work and others decided it was “too hard”; you were probably very frustrated that others did not choose to critically think through how their behavior – or lack of – affected everyone else. A fair does not come together without everyone knowing and handling their responsibilities in a timely manner. Every job that I have held required working with others for the overall success of the event or organization.

As we prepare youth for jobs and careers, it is important to provide opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. When the adults in their world make all the decisions, youth tend to bow out of a decision as “too hard” or don’t make effective decisions because they don’t have experience.

Dr. Elmore goes on to note that problem-solving skills are highly sought after by employers. He states that there are “three ingredients in the problem-solving recipe:

- 1 You must see and clearly define the problem. This requires perspective.
- *2 You must develop a set of options for solutions. This requires creativity.
- *3 You must find ways to implement the best solution. This requires tenacity.”

I so appreciate this quote from Elizabeth Edwards in Dr. Elmore’s book:

“Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it’s less good than the one you had before. You can fight it, you can do nothing but scream about what you’ve lost, or you can accept that and try to put together something that’s good.”

Every year, we face an obstacle course of challenges. This year does feel a bit like the TV Ninja Warrior version of an obstacle course! It is important that each of us think critically through the ingredients in problem solving to make decisions that positively impact our selves, our families, and our communities. Giving our young people the time and space to practice these skills is crucial to their healthy long-term development as our next generation of leaders.

Keep learning. Keep showing grace and kindness!

Michelle Beran is the 4-H Youth Development Agent in the Cottonwood Extension District. For more information on this article or other 4-H Youth Development resources, email Michelle at mberan@ksu.edu or call 620-793-1910.

Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability.