Process Over Outcome

Recently I posted my top 10 tips for parenting success. Now, I am elaborating on each item on the list. Parenting Tip #4 is this:

It’s not only about the outcome.

Sometimes the process is key.

There’s an old Chinese saying of which I am very fond. It goes like this: If you teach a man to fish, you can feed him for a day. If you show a man how to fish, you can feed him for a lifetime. The outcome of fishing is dinner. The process of fishing is sustenance.

On a gloomy, rainy, July afternoon, Tom came into the bedroom of his 14 year old son, Chad.

“Hey, son, whatcha doing?” Tom asked.

“Nothing.” Chad continued watching YouTube on his laptop. He glanced out his window to check on the rain.

“Yeah,” Tom noticed, “The weatherman says it’s gonna come down in sheets all day today.”

“There goes all my plans,” Chad sighed. He had checked with some of his friends and all of them seemed to be staying close to home today.

“That’s disappointing, huh?” Tom had noticed his son’s emotional fever elevating and active listened his feelings. When Chad seemed to settle down, his dad offered, “I have some thoughts about how you could get some mileage out of a down day. Do you want to hear them?”

“Yeah, sure, why not?” Chad replied in a less than enthusiastic way.

Tom went on to list a number of things his son could do with his time at the moment: help his dad with a project in the garage, go to a movie, get started on his English class summer reading list.

Chat rolled his eyes as he grunted, “whatever.”

Tom pursued, “You know, son, it would be fun helping me out in the garage, and even going to a movie you like. If I had a vote, however, I would encourage you to start on your summer reading list. You like the books Mr. Tillis recommended on the list. Having read them will give you a head’s up going into high school in the Fall. Reading in general gives you a lifetime of benefit. Just pick a book from the list that makes you curious and read just the first chapter for a start. Okay? See how you like it? Chad agreed to give it a try.

Okay, summer reading for school is a hard sell in any family. The point, here, is that the garage project is an outcome, as is the movie. The summer reading is a process. Outcomes are fun and engaging, while processes can be both those qualities and also build in longer value and a life lesson. So, when the option presents itself, help your kids choose process over outcome.