

SEE IT BIG, BUT KEEP IT SIMPLE

By George M. Graham Jr.

A wise man once taught me a great principle to utilize when I was confronted with an apparent overwhelming obstacle in my life. He told me that I needed to “see it big, but keep it simple.” By endeavoring to heed his advice in several difficult situations, I was finally able to comprehend what he meant.

When we are dealing with any of life’s challenges, we should strive to maintain a positive mental attitude, with high expectations – “see it big.” Additionally, we must keep in mind that in order to achieve any worthy goal, we must take one step at a time to accomplish it – “keep it simple.”

If we will put forth the time and effort necessary, while maintaining a positive mental attitude with high expectations, then we can be more successful. By practicing the principle of “see it big, but keep it simple,” we can more effectively deal with stressful situations and overcome obstacles. We can achieve goals and objectives by taking one step at a time.

For over 30 years, this advice has been instrumental in helping me in working with students with disabilities. It has helped me to provide encouragement and support to the parents of these students, and it has helped me to provide helpful advice when consulting with teachers.

When I began my career in 1975, special education in the public school system was still a relatively new concept. There was very limited knowledge and understanding of what special education really entailed.

Up until 1975, there was little implementation of special education in the public school system. In fact, there were some disabled students who were not even allowed to attend school because they were perceived as not being capable of being educated. Parents were placed in a position of either keeping their disabled child at home or placing their child in an institution.

In those early years of special education, the students with disabilities who were allowed to enroll in school were usually taught in a separate area of the building or in a separate building all together. I can remember special education classes being housed in basements of school buildings or in rooms that were small enough to be closets. It gave the appearance that keeping these students separated from the rest of the student population was more of a priority.

Things began to change though, because in 1975 Congress passed Public Law 94-142 (Education of all Handicapped Children Act) which later became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This was among the first of many laws to be passed by Congress to help protect and assure that there would be no discrimination of individuals with disabilities. IDEA, more specifically guaranteed that all students with disabilities would have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Today, students with disabilities are afforded an education under drastically improved circumstances as compared to just 30 some years ago. These strides are due to a variety of reasons that include the enacting and implementing laws; the lobbying efforts by parents, educators, and organizations on behalf of students with disabilities; and the on-going research in best practices in special education. These have all helped to contribute to many positive changes in the way services are provided to students with disabilities.

As I reflect on my early years in special education, I remember feeling somewhat unprepared and inadequate for the job that I was undertaking. Much of what I learned came through trial and error or by observing other educators. I came to realize that I was learning about special education as the field of special education was also going through its own stages of growth and development.

The purpose of this series of articles is to share some of the basic positive, practical practices that I have learned over the years. These are practical practices that parents can use to help their children, teachers can use to help their students, and students can use to help improve themselves. These positive, practical practices are based on my years of experience from four different perspectives.

One perspective is that of a student educated in the public school system. The second perspective is that of an individual with a disability. I have a hearing impairment, and as a result I have to wear hearing aides. Another perspective is that of a parent with a child who was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) at an early age. The last perspective is that of having been an educator and an administrator.

All children have basic wants and needs that must be addressed in order for them to be able to grow, develop, and become successful. I believe these basic positive, practical practices can be implemented in helping students with disabilities to address these basic wants and needs. In fact, they can be implemented to help any child to be more successful.

Anyone who has participated in sports or who has strived in any field of the arts knows the importance of mastering the basics. Not only must you master the basics, but you must consistently continue to work on them on a regular basis. The basics are the foundation upon which anyone can build to improve themselves.

I believe that each of us has been blessed by God with special talents, abilities, gifts, and skills. Yes, even students with disabilities have been blessed with them. It is vital and necessary to help everyone master the basics and to develop their own special talents, abilities, gifts, and skills. This will help each individual to be as successful as they can be and help them on their way to Becoming Your Best.

In the next article, we will begin to take a look at some of the basic positive, practical practices to help build success.

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