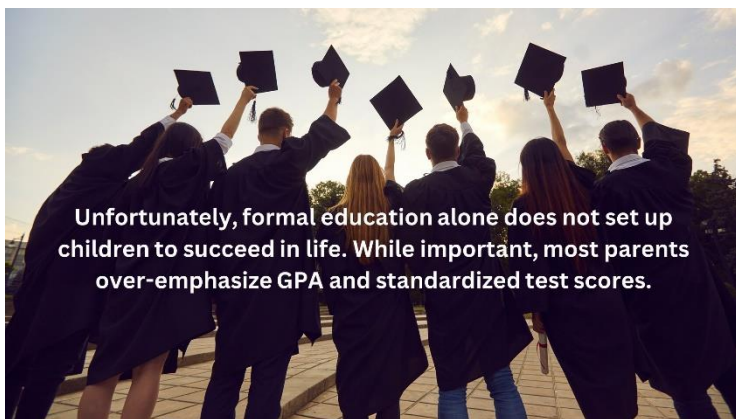


We all know how invaluable good eyesight is. Seeing well keeps us from running into things and recognizing oncoming traffic in the distance. Nearsightedness (myopia) is more common than farsightedness. The Graeco-Roman physician, Galen, coined the term *myops*, based on *meyein* (to close) and *ops* (eye). Myopia is the ability to see things up close. Myopic thinking refers to narrow-mindedness. While I'm not an optometrist, my doctorate in leadership convinces me that most parents suffer from nearsightedness in terms of how they raise their kids.

This is because we focus on immediate needs instead of envisioning our child as a fully functioning adult. As a grown-up, they will inevitably spend most of their lives, working for and dealing with organizations and teams. It will dominate the majority of their awake time, creating intense joy and fulfillment or overt pain and frustration. A parent's nearsightedness causes them to over-emphasize three activities that, while valuable, can leave little room for leadership training that will benefit them most as adults. These three activities each begin with the letter A. They are academics, athletics, and arts. Let me state that I believe in all three of these. But when we load our children's plates with them, we leave little to no room for something far more enduring. So let me address America's preoccupation with triple-A activities and what I believe is a remedy for nearsighted parenting.



Academics

As someone who has taught at the University of Southern California, Pepperdine, the University of California Irvine, and since 2010 at the Naval Postgraduate School, I'd be a hypocrite to say I don't believe in scholastic investment. My wife homeschooled our sons for several years. We also had them in public and private schools, assessing what seemed best for them at the time.

Our two oldest sons have earned three master's degrees from USC and Duke and our youngest is finishing his graduate work as well. But as an educator, I am also familiar with the limitations of formal education.

The world is full of educated people who can't lead themselves out of a paper bag. While a good education will open more doors than not having a degree, it does not teach some of the most

important skills for mastering in life, namely social-emotional intelligence, self-awareness, resilience, grit, and adaptability. Effective leadership training results in these, but academics do not.

Many parents today over-emphasize the importance of academics, forcing their children to study subjects they do not enjoy, pushing AP courses, hiring tutors for afterschool and SAT testing programs, and hiring consultants to edit their college applications. Many of us remember the recent Varsity Blues scandal, where wealthy parents paid to get their kids into top-tier universities. I was teaching at one of those universities during that period and did my doctoral work at another.

Here's my point, while GPA and SAT scores may have been the golden ticket for college admittance in the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s, that is not the case today. I've interviewed several college admittance counselors and most agree with the Stanford staff member who told me, "Every year we turn town valedictorians and perfect SAT score applicants. Parents are dumbfounded. But we're looking for well-rounded students, those who will leave Stanford a better place, not just get a diploma."

By putting too many eggs in the academic basket, parents overlook the importance of life skills that will also earn their children more money, work fulfillment, and life satisfaction, which leadership training will do. Henry Ford said, "I hire people smarter than me all the time." Intelligent people abound, but IQ and degrees alone do not guarantee a better lifestyle.

Athletics

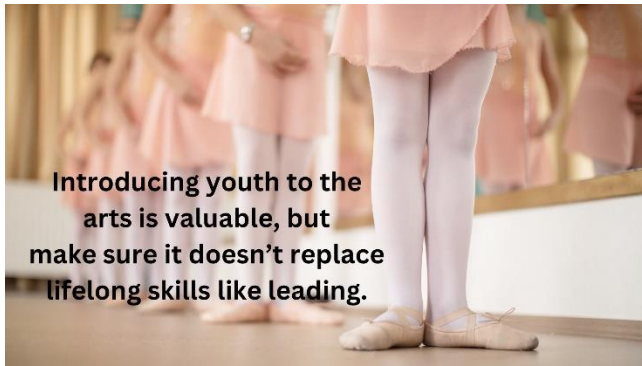
I'm a big fan of youth sports. Throughout their childhoods, our sons played soccer, basketball, baseball, and tennis. I coached many of their teams. Two of them played tennis in college and the other became a certified strength and conditioning specialist who is currently training one of the top players in major league baseball.



Athletics consume a large amount of our culture's bandwidth. According to the Aspen Institute, American parents spend \$30 to \$40 billion per year on youth sports programs. Yet the typical child will play a sport less than three years (2.9) and quit by age 11. The shortest commitment time is wrestling at 1.6 years and the longest is field hockey at 5.1.* Even then, many an avid parent thinks their child will be the next great pro. Unfortunately, this rarely happens. In basketball, for example, only 1% of high school players will land a Division I university spot and only 1% of those will get drafted by the NBA.

What's my point? My point is that while youth sports programs can do a lot to provide exercise, a sense of competition, social interaction and hopefully character development, the physical skills fade quickly after high school. While team sports offer training on being a team member, they do not focus on being a team leader; a big difference. Still, many parents try to live out their dreams through their kids, investing 1000s of dollars and years of practices and competitions, with little return on their investment. Compare that to the lifelong benefits of leadership training that increase in value over time and experience, unlike the vast amount of sports trophies that end up in garage sales and thrift stores.

*The Aspen Institute (2019) <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/staying-in-the-game-progress-and-challenges-in-youth-sports/>



Introducing youth to the arts is valuable, but make sure it doesn't replace lifelong skills like leading.

Arts

I played in the marching band in high school and occasionally sang specials in our church. My wife did theater, learned the piano, and sang in a college PR traveling group. We have paid for piano lessons, dance and art camps for our granddaughters. So again, we're not anti-arts. The inspiration and joy that come from creative expression offer significant value. At the same

time, we need to consider the long-term benefits of these, to avoid overemphasizing our limited time and money. The mean income of people in the arts industry is just over twice the minimum wage (\$35/hour or \$71,400/year IF you can find full-time work). The Beyonce's and Blake's of the world are truly rare, thus their fame and wealth. Still, only 22 out of Beyonce's 89 songs have been hits (24.7%) and Blake has had 38 hits out of 133 (21%). Hardly any aspect of the arts teaches leadership or the ability to understand how organizations function, the role of social-emotional intelligence, or how to use power and influence effectively and ethically. These latter qualities are those that usually get rewarded most in life.

Closing

I encourage you to avoid nearsightedness in raising your kids. Traditional, cultural emphasis on academics, athletics, and arts, while good, often results in longterm liabilities. That's why leadership training is so important, because it offers skills with lifetime value.

Leadership training offers real world application that are transferable across various contexts, including academic, professional and personal settings. These include communication, problem-solving and teamwork, essential for success in nearly every organization. In today's competitive job market, employers increasingly value leadership qualities such as initiative, adaptability, and the ability to motivate and inspire others. Someone said, you get hired for technical skills, but you get promoted for people skills.

Statistics show that managers, supervisors, and bosses... those in charge, make more money, enjoy work more, and experience greater family life fulfillment than those who do not lead. We know this as adults. Yet, nearsighted parenting focuses primarily on academics, athletics, and arts, so when children leave our homes and influence, they are ill-equipped to lead confidently.

That's why we created the world's first online course that trains parents how to develop their children's leadership potential. It's called KidLead Academy, a 7-hour course consisting of 10-30 minute videos, so that you can fit it into your busy schedule from your home, office, or car. We teach you how to make leadership training a fun, free activity to incorporate into your family's lifestyle. For more information on this course, go to www.kidlead.com/kla or email us at info@kidlead.com.

Raising great grown-ups is not easy work, but it's important. Nearsighted parenting fails to set up children for longterm success. The ability to see into the future will change the way we operate today. If you want your child to succeed, develop them to lead.

Alan E. Nelson, Ed.D. is a global expert in young leader development. He is the author of My Kid Leads! and has been a Department of Defense Management Lecturer for the Naval Postgraduate School since 2010. Feel free to contact him at dralanenelson@gmail.com. Dr. Nelson and his wife (Nancy) live near Los Angeles.