






FROM ~~SE~~ SOO KIM ABBOD AND
JANE KIM, TOP OF THE
CLASS: HOW ASIAN PARENTS
RAISE HIGH ACHIEVERS - ~~A~~ AND
HOW YOU CAN TOO (NY: BERKLEY, 2006)

Contents

	Foreword	1
	Secret 1 Instill a Love and Need for Learning and Education	5
	Secret 2 Instill a Sense of Family Pride and Loyalty <i>team</i>	24
	Secret 3 Instill a Respect and Desire for Delayed Gratification and Sacrifice	37
	Secret 4 Clearly Define Your Child's Role as a Student	52
	Secret 5 Cultivate a Respect for Elders and for Persons in Positions of Authority	64
	Secret 6 Play an Active Role in Your Child's Education	74
	Secret 7 Determine and Develop Your Child's Individual Talents	88
	Secret 8 Set Clearly Defined Short-Term and Long-Term Goals	98
	Secret 9 Teach Your Child the Art of Valuing Academic Success Over Social Status or Popularity	105
	Secret 10 Reward Positive School Performances and Devise a Plan of Attack for Poor School Performances	118

Secret 11	Forget the "Do Whatever Makes You Happy" Mentality and Strive for Professions with Financial Security and Intellectual Fulfillment	125
Secret 12	Keep Your Money in Perspective	135
Secret 13	Limit Extracurricular Activities That Interfere with Schoolwork	146
* Secret 14	Promote an Environment of Healthy Competition	157
Secret 15	Surround Your Children with Similarly Minded Friends and Role Models	167
Secret 16	Help Your Child View America as a Great Land of Opportunity	178
* Secret 17	Accept Responsibility <u>with</u> Your Children for Their Failures at School	188
Afterword	Where Asian Parents Go Wrong	198

8
I
J
E
e
(

F
H
E
S

an

rs—

v



Dr. Soo Kim Abboud is a surgeon and a clinical assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Her sister, **Jane Kim**, is an attorney and an immigration specialist at the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania. Visit their website at www.topoftheclassonline.com.

Foreword

Have you ever sat next to an Asian student in class and wondered how she managed to consistently get straight A's while you struggled to maintain a B-minus average? Or wondered why the percentage of Asian students enrolled at the top colleges is disproportionately high? Asian students are considered amongst the best and the brightest in America. And although we hesitate to stereotype all Asian students, we cannot deny that, as a whole, they are doing something right.

If you don't believe us, just check out the following statistics. While Asian-Americans make up only 4% of the U.S. population, Asian-American students make up a much higher percentage of students in top universities around the country. Among Ivy League schools, the percentages are astounding: 23% at the University of Pennsylvania, 25% at Columbia and Cornell, 15% at Brown, and 18% at Harvard. Asian-Americans make up 24% of the student population at Stanford, 15% at Johns Hopkins, 17% at Northwestern, and a whopping 42% at the University of California at Berkeley (despite making up only 11% of the population in California).

In addition, 47% of Asian and Pacific Islanders over the age of twenty-five hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, while the corresponding rate for all adults in this age group is much lower, 27%. Sixteen percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders over the age of twenty-five hold an advanced degree (i.e., master's, PhD, MD, or JD), in contrast to 9% for all other adults in this age group. A startling 15% of all U.S. physicians and surgeons are of Asian descent (statistics made available from the U.S. Census Bureau). And the buck doesn't stop there. After outperforming their colleagues in school, Asian-Americans also bring home higher incomes than their non-Asian counterparts; in 2002, the median income for Asian and Pacific Islanders was \$52,018, almost \$10,000 higher than the median household income for the rest of the population (\$42,409).

So what do these numbers signify? Certainly Asian-Americans are no more intelligent than any other race or ethnic group. Contrary to what the public may believe, Asian students are no more intellectually gifted than non-Asian students. *The reason that Asian students outperform their peers in the classroom has nothing to do with how they are born and everything to do with how they are raised. This book is for all parents and children who want to discover (or rediscover) a love for learning and develop the discipline to use this love to build knowledge and indispensable skills in the classroom and beyond.*

You may be asking—who are we to write this book, and why are we writing it? Well, we're happy to tell you. Soo is a board-certified surgeon and an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania; Jane is an attorney and immigration specialist at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. We are first-generation Korean-Americans—that is to say, our parents, Jae and Dae Kim, were born in Korea but emigrated to the United States prior to having us.

Our parents came to America with their heads full of dreams of a better life but with little money in their pockets. Although they

had stars in their eyes, their early life in America was far from glamorous. After moving into a small one-bedroom apartment on the University of Southern California's campus (where our father was getting his master's degree in Computer Science), our mother went to work as a seamstress. She worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days for less than minimum wage with a dozen other immigrant women who were trying to help their husbands and families financially. Our father worked evenings as a janitor and as a gas-station attendant to make ends meet. He barely had time to study but somehow managed to obtain his degree after two years.

Soo was born two years after our parents came to America, Jane three years later. Our parents traveled from California to Toronto, Canada, and finally to Raleigh, North Carolina, as our father climbed the ranks of Nortel Networks (formerly Northern Telecom). Our mother stopped working outside the home after she had us and concentrated her efforts on educating her children. Our parents were never able to provide us with designer clothing or trips to the Caribbean, but we were never lacking for love or attention. Not once during our childhood did we ever doubt that our happiness, education, and future were our parents' top priorities.

Soo was the typical smart, quiet Asian kid throughout grade school and high school. She got straight A's and won math competitions instead of sports trophies. She attended math camp in the summer instead of partying at the beach with friends. Jane was a bit more social and outgoing. Nevertheless, her main goal in school was to get good grades rather than be seen wearing the latest fashion. Sound boring or even painful? Not at all. We are now successful career women who are fulfilled both professionally and personally. We have wonderful relationships with our parents (and each other!) and have only the fondest memories of our childhood.

Growing up, we noticed that many of our fellow Asian-Americans had similar experiences and views on education and

professional development. Like ours, their parents had made education one of their children's top priorities.

Needless to say, we are proud of what we and other Asian-Americans have accomplished. More importantly, however, we are convinced that ingredients specific to an Asian upbringing best prepare a child for success in the classroom and beyond. In this book, our hope is to share these secrets with you.

If you are wondering whether we were always at the top of our class, the answer is no. Soo struggled with advanced science courses and Jane experienced more than her fair share of mediocre grades throughout college and law school. But we made our way through and are now two financially secure professionals. Like many Asian immigrants, our parents came to Los Angeles with little money in their pockets and dreams of a better life. Thirty years later, we still smile when we hear our parents brag to friends and family, "One doctor and one lawyer in the family—who could ask for anything more?" Although this book will not guarantee that your child will be an exceptional student or college valedictorian, what it *will* do is help bring out the best student in your child by nurturing a lifelong love of learning and a true commitment to education.

Of course, professional success does not guarantee personal fulfillment and happiness, but it certainly helps. This book can show you how to maximize your chances of raising children who are successful at school and in the workplace by adopting the principles of many Asian immigrant parents. Each child is unique, as is each family; however, if some of our secrets make their way into your child's life, we guarantee your child will be a better student for it.



Secret 1

Instill a Love and Need for Learning and Education

The most important thing parents can give to their children is love—but a desire and love for learning and education comes in as a close second. Many parents find it difficult to instill this passion for learning in their kids. Not surprisingly, years later these parents find themselves wondering why their son or daughter has no interest in going to college, much less to graduate school. It's never too early to start encouraging a love of learning in your child. In fact, early childhood is the best time to start, as young minds have an incredible capacity to absorb information and establish the necessary values that set the stage for future success.

But before we begin discussing how to get your child to love learning, let us first explain the major reason parents today find it difficult to pass this love on: very few adults today actually love to learn. We live in a society that seeks comfort and leisure above all else; the "American dream" typically includes a home complete with a big-screen TV and state-of-the-art grill. Many working parents today punch in and punch out, in a hurry to get home to sit in front of the TV. They view the process of learning and education

as part of their thankfully distant past—for the majority of us Americans, learning and education stopped after high school and college. After all, hitting the books for more than a decade is enough for any lifetime, isn't it?

Learning should be a lifelong process, not something that stops abruptly in one's early twenties. When your kids are young and start going to school, you as parents are their main role models. They equate the way you approach your job with the way they should approach their jobs (school). If you have to drag yourself out of bed every morning and complain about how miserable your job is as you drop your child off at school, chances are he or she will do the same.

If you're finding this concept difficult to swallow, think hard about your friends and family. How many of them do you truly believe love to learn new things, love the field they are in, or look for new ways in which to grow? On the other hand, how often have you heard parents gripe about their job or vocation?

We would venture to say quite often (and we would be guilty as well). Perhaps you can even relate to what we are saying. Parents have only the best intentions when it comes to raising their children, and all want to be ideal role models in the home. However, it is hard not to complain about a boring or stagnant job or a rough day when you finally return to the comforts of your own home and family. Even if you enjoy your job or career, you might need someone to vent to after an especially tough day. Who better to express your frustrations than to your spouse and kids, right?

We disagree.

Children have no more powerful role models than their parents. Children who witness their parents in an abusive relationship will often learn to abuse others or become victims. On the other hand, children whose parents value family will likely learn to do the same. It's amazing that so few parents realize how powerful an

influence they are in their children's lives, and how certain behaviors can negatively impact their beloved offspring.

Along the same lines, if your child sees that you appreciate and love learning, he or she will learn to do the same. If your child sees that you look forward to going to work every morning, he or she will view work (and school) as rewarding and fun. If your child sees that you dread your job, call in sick every chance you get, or badmouth your work environment or colleagues, he or she will come to believe that schooling and education will only bring misery in the future.

You are your child's best role model, so be enthusiastic toward learning and education—and your career.

It is important to know that an education alone does not ensure happiness or professional success. We know many unhappy people with advanced degrees and hefty paychecks. However, a love for continued learning and advancement in any occupation is essential to professional happiness. Without making this love evident in your life, there is little chance your child will think of any profession as fulfilling.

Right about now, you might be thinking that it's possible to love learning but hate your job. You might love going to museums in your time off and learning about architecture or archeology but hate your job as a data processor or store manager. While this is certainly possible for many Americans, we still firmly stand by our belief that a love for learning and commitment to advancement can make any job, however dull or stagnant, substantially better. Perhaps you hate your job punching in numbers all day and all you can think of is that managerial position in your company that seems so

out of reach. If all you do is punch in and do the least amount of data entry possible for that day to avoid criticism from your boss, chances are you'll never be fulfilled enough to excel at your job and get that promotion. On the other hand, if you take advanced typing or data-entry courses to exceed your quota and distinguish yourself amongst your peers as a high producer, and then discuss with your boss taking managerial courses to increase your chances of a promotion, it's likely your job happiness will substantially increase.

Always create ways to actively include learning in your profession. This will dramatically increase your career advancement opportunities and add to your sense of professional fulfillment in a way that will benefit both you and your child.

Of course, no job is perfect, and everyone is entitled to a bad day. If you hate your job and want to complain about it, do so to your spouse or friends, and bite your tongue around your children. Even go as far as to act excited about your career. If you absolutely cannot (we know it's hard sometimes), at least take up activities or hobbies that you are excited about and share this passion with your children.

For those parents who are extremely disappointed with their careers and want to ensure that their children experience the excitement and pride an intellectually stimulating job provides, make it a point to surround your children on a regular basis with adults who are clearly empowered and enlightened by their professions. Surrounding yourselves and your children with these adult role models will not only whet your child's appetite for learning, but it may even inspire you.

A close friend of Soo's from middle school was a first generation

Chinese-American named Angela. Her parents were hard-working immigrants who had opened a nail salon in the suburbs of Raleigh, North Carolina, where the rent was cheap and the public schools reputable. Angela's parents worked twelve-hour days, breathing in noxious fumes from the polish and alcohol all day long. After several years of extremely hard work, they had amassed enough money to employ all of their siblings, who moved to the United States one by one. Despite their financial success, Angela's parents had become increasingly disgruntled with their profession. Some days, Angela's mother could barely drag herself out of bed to go to work.

As you might expect, Angela was quite aware of how unhappy her parents were in the business, and it caused her much distress. Every day after school she would rush to the nail salon to relieve her mother of her duties. As a result, her grades began to suffer. Although she became a top-notch manicurist, she was miserable. She nearly failed out of seventh grade, a difficult feat for someone as bright as she was.

Angela had two big problems. First, her parents had allowed their daughter to assume responsibility for their unhappiness. In other words, Angela had taken it upon herself to "save" her parents by rushing home from school and helping out at the salon. Angela's parents wanted their daughter to make school her top priority, but by allowing her to work at the salon rather than concentrate on schoolwork, they failed to make that desire clear. Second, Angela's parents regularly complained about their jobs in her presence, to the point that she began viewing work as an undesirable yet unavoidable aspect of everyday life. As a seventh-grader, Angela's "job" was to keep up with her assignments and do well in school. However, having adopted a similar attitude as her parents toward her "day job," Angela's grades began to fall.

Angela's failure at school initially came as a shock to her parents, who did not realize how negatively their daughter's schoolwork

was being affected. Upon discovering that their child's grades had suffered, Angela's parents resolved to change their habits. They stopped complaining about work, and they immediately hired help (despite wanting to keep profits in the family) so that Angela could concentrate on schoolwork and so that her mother could relax and spend some quality time with her daughter.

Angela's mother relished her time off. Now with more free time than she had known in several years, Mrs. Tan became active in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and in the community. Despite her shyness and broken English, she befriended many of the parents at our small middle school. She offered free manicure services (who doesn't love a nice manicure?) to many of the PTA women, who got to know her on a more intimate level; soon, they began inviting her and Mr. Tan to dinner parties and community events. Slowly but surely, Mrs. Tan also began to view her work as a way to bring the community together, and this greatly added to her professional fulfillment.

In addition to becoming a better role model for her daughter, Mrs. Tan was now in good company with architects, physicians, businessmen, lawyers, and computer programmers, many of whom loved what they did for a living and were eager to share their passion with the younger generation. Although Mrs. Tan realized she might not ever be the ideal model of professional fulfillment or joyous lifelong learning for her daughter, she now had many newfound friends who were. Eager to get her daughter excited about learning, Mrs. Tan soon began asking her friends if they would sit down with Angela and share with her what had led them to their respected professions. Soon Angela found herself having lengthy discussions with these men and women, all of whom delighted in sharing how they beat the odds to secure professions that fulfilled them intellectually and personally. Angela specifically recalls speaking with a software designer whose creativity and technological ingenuity left an indelible impression. After spending a few days at his office and

taking computer-programming classes in the summers, her mind was made up. Angela eventually graduated from the University of California at San Diego and became the vice president of a start-up company in Silicon Valley during the Clinton years, the golden era of technology. Today, Angela's family is doing extremely well. Her mother continues to work at the salon part-time and now relishes her role in bringing the women in the community together for regular 'manicure parties' to discuss parenting, opportunities for professional advancement, and social events.

Surround your children with people who love learning and are in diverse fields. This will allow your children to develop a healthy respect for learning while also giving them information to pursue various career paths.

If community events and PTA meetings are not your cup of tea, there are other ways you can instill a love of learning and education in your child. Allow us to share another success story with a different slant. Janet was the eldest daughter of our church's minister, Reverend Suh. Reverend and Mrs. Suh were deeply religious and loved their roles as leaders of the church community. Although they attempted to share their passion for God's work and study of the Gospel with their fourteen-year-old daughter, like many children of religious professionals, she rebelled. She wanted no part of the church and could barely be forced to get out of bed for the eleven o'clock Sunday service, let alone attend the teen Bible study group on Wednesday evenings.

Although disheartened that Janet would not follow in his footsteps, Reverend Suh wanted to make sure that his daughter learned the value of education and experienced the thrill of learning firsthand. Janet was a bright and gifted girl, and her father wanted to

provide her with opportunities to learn about different career paths from people who genuinely loved what they did for a living. In essence, he wanted to whet his daughter's appetite for a challenging and intellectually stimulating career—even if it was not in a field of his choice.

A love of learning is imperative to success in any field and should be promoted with enthusiasm despite any objections you might have toward the professions your child wishes to pursue.

That's when he came up with the idea of having a "Career Day." At the time, our church's congregation consisted of several hundred Korean-Americans, many of whom had recently emigrated to the United States. There was a plethora of PhDs, pharmacists, physicians, business executives, accountants, and engineers in the congregation. With the help of his congregation, Reverend Suh began announcing and advertising a monthly Career Day at the end of his services. Each month, a member of the church would meet with the youth group (children from elementary to high school) to talk about his or her profession and share reasons for pursuing it. A Q&A session would follow.

At first, Janet resisted the idea of having to stay at church even longer than usual. Career Day typically took place after Sunday service and lunch. Suddenly, Sundays turned from tolerable one-hour affairs into dreaded half-day affairs. Nevertheless, she was forced to attend, as were we.

Initially, Janet would sit in the back corner of the room, smacking her gum loudly and fidgeting in her chair. This created such a distraction that some of the more attentive children could barely

concentrate on what the speaker was saying. As various speakers took center stage, Janet continued her gum-smacking and rude comments, saying things like, "God, I need to get out of here and smoke a cigarette!" Several Sundays passed, with no change in her behavior. But one Sunday, everything changed.

She was absolutely stunning, which immediately put the boys in the group on their best behavior. Her name was Myung Park, and she was a pharmacist at a local university hospital. Her eyes lit up as she spoke of her profession and the satisfaction she obtained from aiding patients with medications, as well as ensuring their safety. She could not have spoken for more than two minutes before we heard Janet cursing under her breath about how any idiot could dispense drugs off of pharmacy shelves. "It's not like you're a doctor or anything," Janet added with a smirk, obviously hoping her nasty comments would put an end to the session. Boy, was she wrong.

Myung's beautiful almond eyes immediately focused on the rowdy teenager and narrowed with displeasure. In a soft but non-sense tone, she quickly put the pastor's daughter in her place, a feat no member of the church (including her parents) had been able to do. "Comments like that show just how misguided you are," she said pointedly. "Too bad your insecurity makes you look down on people who are happy with their work. When you get older, your attitude will stop you from reaching your full potential. When you're ready to talk like an adult, my door will be open. In the meantime, shut up so that others can listen."

The audience gasped as all eyes turned to Janet, anticipating her rebuttal or noisy departure. There was none—a beet-red Janet remained quietly in her seat while the rest of us (mostly the guys) talked with Myung about the pharmaceutical industry.

Janet never did attend another Career Day, but Myung had left an indelible impression on her. During the next few years, Janet frequently visited Myung at work and eventually became a

pharmacist herself. Last we heard, Janet was working in the field of pharmaceutical development.

The message is clear. The best way to get your children excited about lifelong learning and higher education is to surround them with people who are excited about learning and their careers.

The second reason parents have difficulty guiding their children to love learning and education is that many parents are hard-pressed for time. It takes time to instill a love of learning—precious time that most of us don't have. Many American families today revolve around two working parents or a single parent. After a long day on the job, parents seldom have the energy to spend time teaching their children to read, learn a new word, or practice their arithmetic. Watching TV or playing with your children seems a much more enjoyable and relaxing alternative for your weary minds and bodies. We understand that. Nevertheless, our goal is to inspire you to embrace activities that are educationally rewarding for your child with the same enthusiasm you would approach other pastimes.

In order to instill a love for learning and education in your children, you must 1) exhibit this love yourselves or expose your children to people who do portray this love, and 2) joyfully invest the time to teach this love to your children.

Thinking back to our childhood, we have many wonderful memories of family vacations, Christmas dinners, and trips to the movies. But we also have countless memories of times spent with our parents tackling math problems or deciphering a difficult text. Sound boring? It doesn't have to be, and it certainly wasn't for us.

A wonderful example comes to mind. When Soo was a sophomore in high school, she had to take the PSATs, otherwise known as the pre-SATs. This examination was generally considered a good indicator of how one would do on the SATs, so Soo wanted to score as well as she could. When Soo got her results back, however, she was disappointed. Although she did extremely well on the math portion, her verbal score was nothing to write home about. It seemed that her vocabulary needed improvement.

That surprised her a little at first. Soo had won numerous spelling championships over the years and had always managed to get A's in English. But she had to face the facts—the score didn't lie. She would need to improve her vocabulary and reading-comprehension skills.

Soo was not the only one who was disappointed, of course. After getting over his initial disappointment, our father praised Soo on her math score and asked her how she thought she might improve her verbal score. Soo was at a loss for ideas, with the exception of tackling the entire English dictionary word by word. Thankfully, our father had a better idea.

Days after Soo received her test results, our father scrutinized her suggested summer reading list and selected *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. At the time, Soo was an avid reader who had read many classic works beyond her years. However, so as not to interfere with her reading pleasure, she had repeatedly chosen to ignore the words she did not understand. *Jane Eyre* would be the first book that would take her an entire summer to read.

Soo was to read twenty pages a day, which seemed an easy assignment. It was not: she was to highlight each word she did not understand, look the word up in the dictionary, and write out its definition in a separate notebook. Our father, whose English was not as good as Soo's, would also attempt to learn the words by reviewing them with his daughter at the end of the day.

In the beginning, those twenty pages took hours. On average,

there were 5 to 6 words per page that Soo did not understand, which translated to about 100 new words a day. What kept Soo going at the end of each day was the excitement that our father himself showed learning the new words. Each day after work, our father would review the vocabulary list Soo had compiled and valiantly attempt to learn it with her. His evident love of learning was contagious and soon Soo began to look forward to the sessions. Looking back, both Soo and our father found the entire process to be a wonderful bonding experience.

Weeks after she started the project, Soo began to notice that many of the words she had learned earlier in the book were repeated in later chapters. The more she read, the fewer words she had to write down. By the end of the book, she was highlighting only one word per page. The time she spent reading went from several hours to under thirty minutes, and her confidence boomed. By the time Soo finished the book, she had incorporated more than 500 new words into her vocabulary. Not only did she improve her verbal SAT score the next year, she gained a deep sense of pride in her accomplishment. Soo never read a book again without fully comprehending every word in it, no matter how long it took.

Of course, there are many different ways to make learning fun and rewarding, and not all them involve hours reading books in the summer. Let us give you another example, one that involves our mother and Soo at a much younger age.

Like many immigrant parents, our mother chose to stay home with her two kids while our father worked to support his family. Of course, we now realize that being a stay-at-home mom is much tougher than most jobs. In addition to making the home run smoothly, our mother's main goal was to educate her children. Unlike our father's didactic approach, our mother attacked learning with a more playful style.

When Soo was only two years old, our mother taught her the

alphabet, numbers, and colors. She used the typical children's books, but she also used some more innovative techniques. Realizing that a two-year-old's attention span was relatively short, our mother minimized the amount of time spent indoors with books. According to our mother, Soo loved going out with her while she ran errands. She would always point to the various signs on the road with curiosity and delight or get her hands on as many products (mostly candy) that she could at the grocery store.

Our mother began asking Soo to identify letters and numbers on everything from road signs to candy wrappers. Within days, Soo was babbling in the car, reading aloud the letters and numbers that she recognized on road signs. Soo eventually became more interested in reading the letters on the wrappers than she was in eating the candy!

These are only a few examples of the many ways parents can teach their children that learning is essential, fun, and rewarding. Our advice to ambitious and loving parents is this: your children will enjoy learning if you show them that learning and education is fun, rewarding, and *worth your time*. We think it's so worth your time that we're going to give you two other examples from our childhood that show how you might educate your children while creating happy childhood memories.

In Asia, decorative school supplies and accessories are extremely popular among children and young adults. Companies spend millions of dollars designing colorful pens, erasers, notebooks, and numerous other school accessories to be purchased by eager students and their parents. Going to the school-supply store is a fun and memorable affair. Although they lived in America while we were going to school, our parents brought many of their Asian traditions with them. While many of our peers compared returning to school to entering a concentration camp, we never dreaded going back. We particularly enjoyed going with our parents to purchase school supplies prior to starting the new school year.

This was the one shopping trip that did not take place at Kmart. Every year, our parents would take us to a special Korean supermarket (these stores are everywhere now and sell everything from food to gifts to school supplies). There, we would rummage through the piles of colorfully decorated pens, pencils, erasers, and notebooks. Jane loved Hello Kitty merchandise (which is now popular in stores across the United States) and would fill her baskets with Hello Kitty paraphernalia. Being a full two and a half years older, Soo felt she was far too mature for Hello Kitty school supplies. Instead, she filled her book bag with fragrant erasers and pencils with hearts on them. Our parents spared no expense, so we typically bought enough supplies to more than last the entire year.

After the shopping spree, we were always eager to use our new supplies. After carefully arranging and proudly displaying our new items on our desks, we would begin "trying out" our new purchases. Jane would write thank-you letters to our parents; Soo would pen semiautobiographical stories about a girl who one day grew up to become a famous writer. Now that we are adults, we understand how important it was for our parents to convey to us that school was exciting and fun. To this day, Jane has a soft spot for Hello Kitty merchandise and will occasionally buy a pen or two for old times' sake.

Our parents were adept at making even the most frivolous activities educationally rewarding in some way. Even a fun, relaxing family activity like going to the movies was not without an educational slant. We remember our entire family going to the movie *Ghostbusters*, which remains one of our favorite childhood memories. After pigging out on buttery popcorn, candy, and Coke, and laughing so hard our stomachs hurt (we couldn't tell whether it was from laughing or the candy), our family returned home in good spirits. With the movie still fresh in our minds, our parents challenged us to use the experience to broaden our knowledge base. Soo was encouraged to study the periodic table of elements;

Jane learned about Mars by reading our *Encyclopedia Britannica* (our parents told her that the ghosts from *Ghostbusters* were born there).

As you can see, our parents took the time to incorporate learning and education into all of our activities. Indeed, many of our fondest childhood memories involve learning or educational games. We may not have the same memories as many of our peers, but they are happy ones all the same. The most important thing to remember is that learning should not be associated solely with school or "work," but rather with every fun family activity.

Incorporate learning and education into all your children's activities so that they don't associate learning primarily with school or homework.

The third reason that parents find it difficult to instill a love and respect for learning and education is that their actions don't complement their words. In other words, it is easy to *tell* your child that he or she must attend college or get good grades. It is not so easy to alter your lifestyle or make sacrifices in order to give your child the best possible chance at obtaining a top-notch education or receiving a stellar report card. Every chance you get you can say that your child's education and commitment to learning is your top priority. However, if your actions don't support what you are saying, your words will fall on deaf ears. Children are smart—they can easily distinguish between what you say and what you do. On that note, two specific examples come to mind.

A close friend of Jane's was an Indian-American named Susan. Susan's parents were both physicians in busy university-affiliated settings. Both had earned their medical degrees from top institu-

tions and were highly regarded in the medical community. They were also extremely busy and routinely worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days, often leaving Susan in the care of a neighbor or babysitter. When they did spend time with their daughter, they tried to stress the importance of higher education. Pointing to the walls that were covered with their diplomas, they truly believed that their daughter would be motivated to achieve educational greatness simply by being surrounded by it. They were wrong.

According to Susan, her parents derived little pleasure or happiness from their high-powered professions. She recalls anxiously waiting for them to come home, only to be met with haggard faces and complaints of a "really tough day." Although her parents often asked her about her studies and whether she had completed her homework, they had little energy to actually get involved in their daughter's education. Susan sadly recalls how her parents were even too tired to help her with a biology project one year.

Despite her parents' urging their daughter to pursue medicine or a similarly high-powered professional career, Susan equated higher education with only misery and fatigue. And why wouldn't she? Her parents were as successful academically as they could be, but they were always tired and unhappy. Why would Susan want to be like them?

Susan attended college and began dating an older artist halfway through her sophomore year. Months later, Susan announced that she had taken up painting and that her boyfriend had convinced her she was good enough to make a living off her new vocation. Since Susan had never picked up a paintbrush or shown any interest in the arts before, her parents were understandably worried. Despite their protests, Susan's mind was made up. She dropped out of college and married the artist. As it turned out, her parents' fears were confirmed: her career as an artist floundered. Susan is now divorced and trying to get a degree in communications at a small community college.

So what went wrong? We are not saying that people with a love and talent for art should not pursue their dreams. Susan, however, chose to pursue that particular career path with little talent, drive, or understanding of what it took to be successful. Had Susan's parents shown her that education and learning provided (at least some) happiness, pride, and security, things might have turned out differently.

On the flip side, our friend Christy was the eldest daughter of two Chinese immigrants. Her father was an orthopaedic surgeon, her mother an electrical engineer. When Dr. and Mrs. Wong emigrated to the United States in 1973, Dr. Wong had already been practicing in China as an attending orthopaedic surgeon. Because of differences in medical licensing between China and the United States, Dr. Wong was forced to repeat his orthopaedic surgery residency in Pennsylvania. Although he had already completed the grueling residency in China, he and his wife decided that the advantages of practicing medicine and raising a family in the United States were well worth it.

Although Dr. Wong spent many of his nights away from home, he never complained. When he was home, he made a point of spending quality time with Christy. Although it would have been easier to come home and catch up on some well-deserved sleep, Dr. Wong chose to spend time with his daughter. Christy learned that her father loved taking care of his patients and that his happiness and pride were well worth the long hours and small salary. Christy is now completing her residency in general surgery and hopes to specialize in breast cancer. More importantly, she is happy and fulfilled by her career.

The sacrifices parents make—even the little ones—can have a huge impact on a child's life. We know parents who have purchased the smallest house in a great school district just so their children can reap the benefits of a good education. Others have forgone buying a new car so that their child could have brand-new

textbooks. Children of parents who make these sacrifices are reminded on a daily basis how much their education is worth. These parents are not complaining about how much time and effort they are dedicating to their children's education. On the contrary, they are content with the knowledge they are doing everything in their power to ensure the best future for their children.

Secret 1: To-Do List

- ❑ You are your child's best role model, so be enthusiastic toward learning and education.
- ❑ Always create ways to actively include learning in your profession. This will dramatically increase your career advancement opportunities and add to your sense of professional fulfillment in a way that will benefit both you and your child.
- ❑ Surround your children with people who love learning and are in diverse fields. This will allow your children to develop a healthy respect for learning while also giving them information to pursue various career paths.
- ❑ A love of learning is imperative to success in any field and should be promoted with enthusiasm despite any objections you might have toward the professions your child wishes to pursue.
- ❑ In order to instill a love for learning and education in your children, you must 1) exhibit this love yourselves or expose your children to people who do portray this love, and 2) joyfully invest the time to teach this love to your children.
- ❑ Incorporate learning and education into all your children's activities so that they don't associate learning primarily with school or homework.
- ❑ Don't just tell your kids how important their education is to you—make the sacrifices in your lives that will convince them.

A

The
Colu

36

TOP OF THE CLASS

What
exce
strive
doct
hund
Ame

Like
them
that

Secret 2: To-Do List

- Stress family, not individual achievement.
- Teach your child that his/her performance at school affects the entire family by celebrating successes or addressing failures together.
- Build family pride and loyalty by stressing the uniqueness of your family in as many ways as you can.

PAREN

Secret 3: To-Do List

- ☞ Firmly believe that the rewards reaped through hard work and diligence, however delayed, are more satisfying than short-term accomplishments. Set an example for your children by always leading your life according to this principle.
- ☞ Help your children reach their long-term educational goals by teaching them to envision the joy and satisfaction their future successes will give them.
- ☞ Have fun along the way! Make sure the sacrifices your children make on the road to academic success are not too severe; allow your kids to indulge occasionally in things that provide instant gratification.
- ☞ Teach your children the value of delayed gratification early by using practical scenarios even they can understand.
- ☞ Include your children when deciding what to sacrifice for their long-term educational goals.

Secret 4: To-Do List

- Manage your child's time after school carefully. Establish a strict yet enjoyable schedule or curriculum after school hours in order to constantly reinforce the role of student in your child.
- Assume the role of educator after school hours so that your child can't shed the role of student at home. Incorporate styles or methods of teaching that your child's educators believe are most effective for him.
- Teach your child that being a full-time and lifelong student is both rewarding and fun.
- Show the utmost respect for your child's educators; never undermine an educator and compromise your child's ability to be a student by turning the teacher into an adversary.

Secret 5: To-Do List

- Limit the amount of time your children spend watching shows on channels like MTV or E!. Make them understand that pop icons are not the norm!
- * Never tolerate disrespect for elders or authority figures from your child, whether it's reflected in his tone, language, or behavior.
- ∴ It's okay to encourage your child to be the teacher's pet! Handing in quality work on time, being attentive and courteous in the classroom, and encouraging the same from peers will win the hearts of your child's educators. Rest assured, your child (and indirectly, you), will reap the rewards for years to come!

Secret 6: To-Do List

- During parent-teacher conferences, be prepared to discuss your child's weaknesses openly and without taking offense.
- Keep a list of what was discussed at each parent-teacher conference.
- Take a moment to celebrate your child's successes!
- Time parent-teacher conferences to coincide with a fun family activity.
- Know exactly when your child should get his report card and make a point to review all report cards as a family. This will stress the importance the *entire* family places on the education of its individual members.
- Prepare for standardized tests well in advance—years in advance, if possible.
- Make investing financially in your child's educational opportunities a top family priority.

the ones you might have thought best for them. In the end, however, being able to nurture your children's talents and allow them to make informed decisions regarding their professional careers will be reward enough.

Secret 7: To-Do List

- Identify your children's natural talents and provide them with opportunities to enhance and nurture these abilities. Do your best to foster a passion for fields that showcase your children's gifts.
- Talk openly about your child's professional plans and encourage careers that will secure your child's interest and showcase his abilities while offering financial or job security. Put a limit on how much time off your child can take; during this time away from school or work, schedule regular meetings with your child to form and talk about his future plans.
- Many kids associate "secure" professions (i.e., medicine, law, engineering) with years of arduous schooling and difficult lifestyles. Show your child that these professions need not be devoid of creativity, flexibility, and fun.

is essential that children, who often don't have the insight or experience to know how their current actions may impact their future, are carefully nurtured and monitored. Even the most carefully thought-out and well-crafted long-term goals will fall by the wayside without frequent parental guidance. Check in with your kids often. Talk to them about how their goals are changing. Despite the resistance you may be met with, monitoring their goal-setting abilities is crucial to their success and to your peace of mind.

Parents can begin working on both short- and long-term goals early in their child's life. Despite the child's short attention span, parents can succeed if they construct reasonable goals compatible with their child's strengths and weaknesses, and if they keep the big picture in mind at all times. As your child grows older, getting him involved in the goal-forming process to increase accountability, providing encouragement, and clearly defining the steps to achieving the goals will ensure maximum academic success.

Secret 8: To-Do List

- Set achievable short-term goals without losing sight of the long-term plans, and have fun meeting them!
- Adopt a strong work ethic and an attitude of perseverance and attention to detail that your child can emulate.
- Actively involve your child in the development of his short- and long-term goals. Have him write down his goals in a "goal notebook." This will increase his sense of accountability and thus his chance of succeeding.

Secret 9: To-Do List

- ❑ Learn to view intellect and personality as far more effective builders of self-esteem than popularity or social status. This will stress the importance of academic achievement to your child.
- ❑ Celebrating your child's academic achievements more than his social or sports-related triumphs will discourage him from clinging to measures of social status at school.
- ❑ Although your child's social life should take the back burner to his schoolwork, don't totally ignore its importance. Encourage your child to forge meaningful friendships with like-minded peers. Planning one social activity each weekend should keep your child refreshed and focused on academics during the week. Remember to be flexible: if your child's grades fall, schedule more time for schoolwork; if his grades are stellar, allow him more time to hang out with his friends.
- ❑ Stay on top of your child's progress in school by keeping a "grade log" according to school subject. This log is a great way to spot downward trends early and keep track of improvements.

There are few things more destructive to a child's educational development and scholastic achievement than a parent who denies their child praise or positive reinforcement (Asian parents, of course, can also fall into this category, which we will touch upon at the end of the book). However, parents who offer constant praise toward all of their child's successes and failures are ultimately doing their child a disservice. The best thing to do is to employ positive reinforcement when warranted while also teaching your child to recognize his mistakes. When your child fails to meet his potential, actively devise a plan of attack. You'll bring out the best in your child in the classroom while maintaining his self-confidence and enthusiasm to tackle the next assignment, however big or small.

Secret 10: To-Do List

- Stress effort first and foremost, but don't forget about the importance of achievement!
- Be realistic with your child about his abilities and talents.
- It is okay to show your child that you are proud of his effort yet unsatisfied with his performance. Undeserved praise will only do your child a disservice.

Secret 11: To-Do List

1. Don't be afraid to voice your opinions regarding your child's career choices. What your child thinks will make him happy now may differ significantly from what you believe will fulfill him in the long run. Strike a balance between maintaining his happiness and guiding him in the right direction.
2. Talk early and often with your child about his career choices. As he gets older, schedule one-on-one meetings with him and between him and his educators and other mentors. Emphasize professions with financial security and intellectual fulfillment.
3. Teach your child never to underestimate the physical, emotional, and social havoc financial insecurity can wreak, even if one loves what he does for a living.
4. To help determine the best career path for your child, evaluate what he enjoys, what he is good at, what challenges him, and what lifestyle he desires in the future.

Secret 12: To-Do List

- If you are part of a modest-income family, encourage your child to pursue careers that offer both personal fulfillment and financial reward. Teach him that happiness is in some part dependent on financial stability.
- If you are wealthy, provide your child with incentives to excel academically that are not financial in origin. These incentives may include (but are not limited to) increased self-esteem and family pride, a love of learning, a respect for higher education and the skills it imparts, and the satisfaction that comes from setting and achieving goals.
- Make your child pay for some, if not all, of his college education. This will instill in him an appreciation for how hard one has to work to make ends meet.
- Wealthy parents may find it difficult to teach their child to delay gratification if they live lavishly. Living more modestly (at least in front of their child) can improve their chances of raising a child who views higher education as the most effective means of securing financial and personal wealth.

Secret 13: To-Do List

- ❑ Being the jack-of-all-trades generally equates to being the master of none.
- ❑ Limit your child's extracurricular activities to two or three activities your child shows both an interest in and ability for.
- ❑ Try to incorporate at least one artistic extracurricular activity into your child's routine.
- ❑ Through teamwork, children learn that the likelihood of success is greater when individuals work together toward a common goal. Relationships are nurtured and social skills are developed through teamwork as children learn how to best interact with other members of the team. Extracurricular activities provided us with the foundation to work well with others, develop lasting relationships (both personal and at work), and value teamwork.
- ❑ Juggling extracurricular activities will improve multitasking ability—an important skill to have in the real world.

Secret 14: To-Do List

- 1. Parents should use competition to bring out their child's best effort and performance. A desire to win is healthy!
- 2. Have your child adopt the attitude that losing in one competition can only help him win in another—if he learns from his mistakes.
- 3. Life is a series of competitions, so the best way to get your kids comfortable competing is to immerse them in activities that will develop their competitive spirits. Remember, practice makes perfect.
- 4. Fear is a great motivator, as long as you don't let it paralyze you.

Secret 15: To-Do List

- Make it your business to find out as much as you can about your young child's friends and their families. After getting to know the parents, encourage your child to spend more time with peers whose parents value education.
- Remember that you have every right to tell your children what to do and whom to hang out with—within reason, of course.
- Even the oldest and strongest of friendship can change over time. If your child's friend is no longer a positive influence, the friendship should end.

E
N
C

to them. In a land as full of opportunities as America, your kids would be foolish not to take advantage of them; stressing this fact is not only wise, but also crucial to their future successes.

Secret 16: To-Do List

- A child born in America is among the luckiest children in the world. The best way to get your child to realize this fact is to send him overseas to experience different cultures and ways of life (if you can afford it).
- Other ways to get your kids to appreciate the opportunities given to them and to motivate them to take advantage of those opportunities is to encourage volunteering in the community to help the less fortunate, or to host a foreign exchange student.

Secret 17: To-Do List

- ❑ Accepting some responsibility for your child's failures in the classroom will stress the value you place on education without stifling your child's independence.
- ❑ The best way to show your kids that you gladly share responsibility for their education is to be enthusiastic and available when they need your help.
- ❑ Parental involvement need not end after high school; college and graduate school achievement is perhaps more crucial to professional success in the long term, and should also be monitored, albeit less rigorously.

Afterword

Where Asian Parents Go Wrong

If you think we have all the answers, think again. Asians may make up a disproportionate percentage of the student population at the top universities, but they are also plagued by the highest suicide rate amongst college students and young adults. We may be doing something right, but we're also doing some things wrong.

In addition to being viewed as obedient and gifted in the classroom, Asians are often seen as rigid and one-dimensional. As sad as it is to say, the very secrets that Asian parents use to raise children who are successful in the classroom can backfire when pursued without the right intentions.

So let's begin discussing where Asian parents go wrong. It all starts with Secret 1—instilling a love and need for learning and education. This is the most important of our secrets, and not surprisingly, the most difficult to practice. It goes without saying, then, that some Asians don't practice this particular secret well. As we have mentioned throughout this book, Asians are men and women of ritual. Because of this, many Asian immigrant parents don't find it difficult to instill the *need* for learning and education in their

children. They focus on homework and lessons, drilling concept after concept into their children. What they don't realize, however, is that the *love* for learning and education is more important than the *need*. Time and time again we have seen well accomplished and highly educated Asian-Americans fail to reach their potential because there is no joy in their hearts for acquiring knowledge. They know how to study, assimilate knowledge, and fill their houses with diplomas, but they do not enjoy the process of learning or earning the degrees. These Asian men and women will look at their diplomas hanging on their walls or the suffixes attached to their names with short-lived pride. On the other hand, men and women who love learning will experience the lifetime of joy (and pride!) that knowledge can bring.

Asian parents often fail in this regard because they are consumed by ritual. They enforce a strict and rigid schedule for studies that cannot be altered; they believe in performing mind-numbingly boring exercises again and again until a concept is drilled home. There is little fun interjected into these hours dedicated to academic pursuits, mainly because these parents mistakenly believe that fun and education are separate and distinct entities.

Because of this attitude, some of our Asian friends and colleagues view their childhood as nothing more than an endless series of lectures, homework assignments, and competitions. Asian parents who deprive their children of fun during their formative years by centering all activities around homework or goal-oriented activities are forgetting that Secret 1 involves instilling a passion for learning. This passion is fostered by making learning fun and rewarding—not by forcing it down the throats of children without much-needed periods of rest and relaxation. We know many instances where well meaning but overzealous parents spent all their energy and time instructing their children without *having fun*. Children who view learning and education as a chore due to strict or overbearing parents will never continue the joyful quest for

higher education and knowledge once they are away from home. A good rule of thumb is this: if you're not having fun, you're kids aren't either.

There are unfortunately many more examples of Asian parents guilty of depriving their children of a normal and happy childhood than we would care to admit. One particularly sad story comes to mind that involves a Korean-American we will call "Sandy."

Sandy was the only child of two Korean immigrants, who we'll call Mr. and Mrs. Song. Mr. Song was the only son in his family, and hence the only man able to keep his family name alive. Rumor has it that he was severely disappointed when he and his wife were only able to have a daughter.

Whatever bitterness and disappointment Mr. Song felt must have been short-lived, because we never knew a father more devoted to his daughter's education and future. Quite frankly, his devotion bordered on the fanatical. Sandy was ten when the Songs moved to Raleigh and joined our church. We remember her as a cute girl with long eyelashes and a shy smile. We also remember Sandy never being able to join us for birthday or slumber parties, despite numerous invitations from our parents. Sandy's own eleventh birthday party was cut short after only two hours, with Mr. Song constantly watching the clock at Chuck E. Cheese's and rushing everyone out the door before all the children could finish their birthday cake. Later we found out that Mr. Song wanted to make sure his daughter was able to complete the arithmetic exercises he had assigned her for the weekend.

Mr. Song kept his daughter on a tight schedule. The whole family would wake up at 5:30 A.M. and drive to the family business, an Asian grocery store. From six to seven, Sandy would tackle advanced arithmetic problems handpicked by her father. At the dot of seven, Mr. Song would drive his daughter to school. After school was over, he would pick his daughter up and drive back to the store. Sandy would then complete her homework with

the help of her parents. After closing the store, returning home, and eating dinner, Sandy and her father would continue to work on an advanced curriculum of mathematics and science for hours.

Sandy was a gifted girl with a knack for mathematics. To the pleasure of her father, she excelled in this area at school and was soon taking classes with students many years older than she. Mr. Song continued his frantic pace of study with his daughter throughout middle school and high school, and at last his efforts were rewarded. Sandy was awarded a full scholarship to an Ivy League university.

Unfortunately, this story doesn't have a happy ending. Although Sandy had excelled academically, she had never experienced the fun-filled birthday parties, vacations, dates, or proms that make up the childhood memories of most men and women. Because her father had stressed study and work over fun for most of her life, Sandy never developed the love for learning and higher education that some other students did. When she went off to college, where her father could no longer directly supervise her every move, you can guess what happened. Finally free to do what she wanted and to experience the fun she had been missing, Sandy stopped studying and began partying it up. She hung out with the wrong crowd and even dabbled in drugs. Two years later, she lost her scholarship after failing to maintain a 3.0 grade point average. Although she was able to graduate from college, Sandy became a disillusioned young adult who never associated learning and higher education with joy or personal fulfillment. She never reached her full potential, and the last we heard, she and her father were barely speaking to one another.

Depriving your child of a normal and happy childhood because of overly ambitious academic goals can have disastrous consequences. Remember that in order for your child to view learning as fun and rewarding, you must *make* learning fun and rewarding for him or her. That involves providing your child with plenty of

happy memories involving activities that are both academically and nonacademically based. A true love for learning will ensure that your child will be committed to higher education long after you are gone.

Another skill that some Asian parents fail to import to their kids is the ability to speak different languages. One of the most important things you can pass onto your children is the gift of gab. If you are a parent who speaks another language, it is crucial that you pass this asset onto your children. While most adults take several years or a lifetime to master a foreign language, children learn things at lightning speed and can easily pick up two or three different tongues without difficulty. Some parents have expressed reservation about teaching their children a second or third language, for fear of overwhelming them. Our advice is this: They won't be over whelmed; rather, they'll be thankful years later.

You might be surprised to know that our own parents didn't teach us to speak Korean when we were young. When we asked them why, they regretfully told us that they feared that teaching us both Korean and English at the same time would confuse us. Although they tried to teach us Korean years later (after we mastered English) by enrolling us in weekend Korean language classes, we never came close to reaching the ultimate goal our parents so desired: to speak fluent Korean.

Today, we live in an increasingly globalized world. As a result of tourism and increased trade with other nations, our world is getting smaller. Having the ability to speak another language will give your child a competitive advantage over his or her peers.

Having the ability to speak another language not only looks good on a resume, but also provides your children with a broadened view of the world. Although this is by no means a scientific fact, we have made one rather interesting discovery: all of our friends and colleagues who speak more than one language tend to more willingly embrace people and ideas from other cultures. They

are more eager to learn new things and to keep an open mind. In today's multicultural society, these traits are vital to personal and professional success.

The best example we can share with you is the international high school Jane attended in Tokyo, Japan. At the time, students from forty-two nationalities were represented at her school. Roughly a third spoke a language other than English fluently, and a good portion of the remaining two-thirds could at least hold a conversation in a second language. Many of the cliques and racial tensions that were prevalent in so many American high schools were practically nonexistent at The American School in Japan. Students seemed to accept and embrace other students' differences, while expressing a genuine interest to learn about other cultures and ways of thinking. If they didn't feel this way when they first arrived in Japan, they definitely did when they left (yet another reason to surround your children with similarly minded individuals).

But, what if you can't speak another language? Should you focus on other things to teach your children, such as your hidden talent of belly dancing? Well, maybe. But don't give up just yet! Just because you or your partner is limited to one language does not mean your child is destined to travel down the same path. These days, language schools are a dime a dozen, particularly in metropolitan areas, or areas where various ethnic groups live side by side. For example, in New York City, you can find a language school for almost any language imaginable. Companies are more than aware of the allure of being bilingual or multilingual, and if you can afford it, we believe this skill is worth every penny of your investment.

If you can't afford the cost, there are creative ways to teach your children a second language. Do you have a friend or neighbor who speaks another language? Ask them if they would be willing to tutor your child in their native tongue in exchange for that family recipe of yours they've been pining after for the last year. In

addition, high school students are always looking to make some extra cash, so weekly tutoring sessions would work out nicely for both parties. You could even post a job ad at various universities requesting a language tutor—just be sure to ask for references. Finally, many cities and/or communities also have nonprofit organizations whose mission is to advance the causes of various ethnic groups. Talk to the executive director or ask if he or she knows of any nonprofit organizations or individuals that would help your child become bilingual. You might be surprised with the results of your search.

If you're lucky enough to live in California or a smattering of other states that have adopted a foreign language curriculum, your tax dollars are already being put to good use. In 2001, the California State Board of Education adopted a foreign language framework into their public schools for kindergarten to grade 12. This demonstrates that state governments are now openly recognizing the benefits that second-language skills bestow upon students.

When it comes to schoolwork, Asian parents are notorious for putting an enormous amount of pressure on their children. What's worse, they often don't recognize when they do! When we asked our parents' friends and colleagues whether they pressured their children to excel in school, we were surprised at what they said. Approximately a third of them said they never put any pressure on their children, but simply encouraged them to work hard and try their best. Another third said they put pressure on their children only when they knew they weren't trying their best or not reaching their full potential. The remaining third admitted they put some pressure on their children, but raised an interesting question: if they couldn't do it, whose responsibility was it to motivate their kids? After speaking with the parents, we then spent some time with the kids (all adults now) asking them if they felt pressure growing up to excel academically. Regardless of what their parents had said, an overwhelming majority said they felt more than an

average amount of pressure. And, the children of the parents who claimed to have never pressured their children were the ones who felt the most pressure!

So . . . what does this tell us? That these parents are delusional? Well, not exactly (although some of the children might think so!). What it does tell us, loud and clear, is that many parents fail to realize just how much pressure they are actually putting on their children. Day after day, year after year, parents *think* they are hands-off and easygoing, while their children are silently buckling under the strain of trying to perform.

Many Asian parents are what we call "results oriented." This means that they place more emphasis on the end result than the means to the end. They often fall into the trap of demanding improvement (or threatening punishment for a lack thereof) without offering any emotional support or strategy to bring it about. As a result, the child of such parents ends up feeling alienated from his or her family. It is important to remember that as a family, you are a team working toward the same goal: academic and professional success for your child. Demanding or telling your child to improve in school without offering the necessary support and guidance will surely backfire.

We'd like to share a story that illustrates this point. Mimi was an outgoing and funny Japanese-American teenager. She was the youngest of three daughters, and although Mimi was an above-average student, she paled in comparison to her sisters. Both Mimi's sisters had been awarded scholarships at top universities; one was studying to be an architect, and the other was a corporate attorney. As long as Mimi could remember, it was expected that she would graduate from an Ivy League university and pursue a high-powered career—just like her siblings. When she was in the ninth grade, Mimi brought home her worst report card ever. Her parents were shocked, never having seen a report card smattered with C's. Their shock, however, soon turned to disappointment and anger. Mimi remembers being lectured for over an hour by her parents about

how disappointed they were, how she would not be able to get into a respectable college, and that she should have learned how to study from her two older sisters. She remembers barely saying a word, and when the lecture was over, she was no better off than she was before. However, her parents did make one thing crystal clear: improve your grades, or you will be grounded indefinitely. Although her parents didn't say it, Mimi also got another message that day: improve your grades or be considered a failure who brings shame to your family.

After the talk, Mimi felt like a complete failure. At that moment, she believed the only thing she could do to please her family would be to get good grades. She vowed she would never let her parents down again and set out to earn their love again (or so she believed) by getting good grades on her report card. For most of the next quarter, Mimi studied like a fiend. She quit the softball team and took a leave of absence from the school newspaper. All her free time during school was spent in the library, and since she was not allowed to see her friends outside of school, she felt even more alienated and alone.

Things got worse after Mimi received her next report card. Although she had improved quite a bit, she had gotten a C+ in both physics and English literature. In her short life, Mimi recalls never feeling more alone. By not getting a report card with mostly A's, she felt as if she had betrayed her parents. She also told us she started to believe she might be stupid after all. The entire bus ride home, Mimi thought about how she would break the news to her parents and how they would react to her report card. She decided that her parents would be so disappointed in her, she couldn't bear it. That's when she came up with a plan to "change" the two grades on her report card. When she got home, Mimi copied and pasted a B+ over both her physics and English literature grades. The next day at school she Xeroxed a copy of the revised report card and handed the new and improved version to her parents.

Mimi's parents were thrilled—and for the time being, Mimi's secret was safe. Because they were so happy with her improvement at school, they showered her with gifts, praise, and something she lacked all quarter: freedom to live a normal life again. But as we all know from past experiences, lying is *never* a good solution. The next quarter, Mimi once again struggled with physics and English lit, and her geometry grade also fell. She had hoped her grades would improve so she wouldn't have to deceive her parents again, making the fake report card a one-time offense. But Mimi had now dug herself into a hole, and she convinced herself it would be easier to lie again than to face her parents' anger. And so the cycle continued.

Mimi continued doing this for three quarters until her parents discovered what was going on. When her parents' initial anger had worn off, they asked her why she would resort to such extreme measures to cover up her grades. Her parents explained they were most disappointed in the fact that she had lied, and felt betrayed as a result of the deceit—not the grades. They told her all she needed to do was ask them for help and they would have either helped her themselves, or helped her implement a strategy to improve. Mimi was shocked. She felt compelled to lie about her grades because of the way her parents reacted the first time she slipped. She had never heard her parents communicate their willingness to help before.

So, what's the moral of this story? If we were to pick one, it would be that communication with your child is key. If you fail to ask your child how he is feeling and what you can do to help him improve his grades, then you are not communicating effectively. If you are angry, be sure to cool down and collect your thoughts before speaking with him. You don't want to say anything you will regret later. Furthermore, be sure to make it clear that you are not disappointed in him *as your child*, but rather, you are disappointed with his *grades*. Help your children develop a strategy or plan for

their success, and communicate to them that you believe in them. Open and honest communication will help diffuse some of the pressure your children face.

As you can see, Asian parents do not have all the answers. But we feel that as a whole, they're doing something right. Throughout this book, we have recommended strategies to help your child excel in the classroom and experience the joy that comes with intellectual fulfillment and academic achievement. Now that we have come to the end of our journey, we want to review some of our secrets, as well as touch upon our most prized secret to academic success: discipline.

If you ask most Americans (or most anyone in the world) what they believe the key to Asian success in the classroom is, the overwhelming majority would say discipline. According to their peers, Asians are a disciplined people; in other words, they are able to exercise a considerable amount of self-control. Right now you may be wondering why "instilling discipline" was not one of the secrets included in our book; after all, discipline is a frequent subject in most parenting and family magazines in addition to parenting books. Our answer to you is that our *entire book* is centered on instilling discipline in your child. For example, instilling a love of learning and education, getting your child to embrace being a student, teaching your child to delay gratification and embrace sacrifice, setting short- and long-term educational goals—all of those secrets both build and require discipline.

Like most things, there is no one way to gain the discipline and self-control needed to embrace the years of schooling that we believe lead to academic and professional success—but we believe our seventeen secrets will help. We strongly believe that disciplined parents are more likely to raise disciplined children. In other words, you as a parent are your child's most valuable role model.

In summary, Asian students excel in the classroom because we are *raised* to succeed academically. Early in our childhood, our

parents instilled in us a love for learning and education, the ability to delay gratification and embrace sacrifice, as well as a fierce sense of family pride and loyalty that would serve us well in the classroom for years to come. While we were attending school, our parents further impressed upon us the importance of competition, setting and achieving both short- and long-term goals, surrounding ourselves with like-minded friends, and regarding our educators with only the utmost respect. Our parents were actively involved in all aspects of our education, and they ensured their daughters would be grateful for all the opportunities America afforded them—in particular, the joy that comes from intellectually challenging, prestigious, and financially rewarding professions. Our hope to all of our readers is that your kids will be as happy in their careers as we are now . . . and as grateful to you as we are to our parents!