



"Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude."
—Ralph Marston

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Expecting More

An interesting email from one of our members arrived in my inbox this morning. It was a review of findings by Dr. Robert Rosenthal, professor of psychology at Harvard University for 37 years and now at the University of California, Riverside, on the role expectations of teachers, coaches, judges, and managers play in the achievements of those under their supervision. "The Rosenthal Effect," as it is widely known, states that the expectations of a mentor do influence the performance of those he teaches, although the manner in which he conveys his expectations is oftentimes difficult to substantiate.

This can be seen most clearly in the classroom. In a study undertaken in the 1960s, Rosenthal gave inner city elementary school teachers a list of students who were predicted to blossom academically based on test results. In fact, no test had been given; the names on the list were randomly selected. At the year's end, those on the list had progressed substantially over those not on the list. The only variable was the teachers' expectations of those children to do better.

This Rosenthal Effect works on non-humans too. Twelve researchers were given five rats apiece. Half of the researchers were told their rats were bred

for their intelligence, and the other half were told that their rats were especially stupid. Their task was to train them to run a maze in five days. As the Effect predicted, the "smart" rats learned the maze more quickly—and even progressively increased their times—than the "idiot" rats. It was only after the experiment was over that all the rats were revealed to belong to the same genetic strain. The only difference was the researchers expectations for their particular group of rats.

It should not be hard to spot this principle working itself out in American education. The powers that be have steadily "dumbed down" the curriculum and the standard achievement tests. Since they have expected less of the students, the students have generally delivered just enough to meet the lowered expectations. An email, titled "8th Grade Final Exam: Salina, KS (1895)," which circulates occasionally on the Internet, points this difference out in stark terms. Most of today's college graduates cannot even muster a "D" on it!

The same is true in publishing. Over the years, the targeted grade-level of books and articles has plummeted from college to about sixth grade. Since editors do not expect their newspaper or magazine readers to be able to understand longer, less common words, they edit them out and simplify the language to the point that American journalism is appallingly shallow and simplistic. In most writing found in the popular periodicals today, nothing even remotely mentally challenges or stimulates.

We can see this principle at work in American families as well. Parents rarely seem to expect their children to behave, practice good etiquette, and perform the social courtesies, and their children live down to their low expectations. Parents who set high standards and lovingly enforce them produce children who constantly amaze strangers in public places. It is no fluke that such children also tend to achieve in school, on the sports field, at work, and overall, in life.

As [Christians](#), we need to take this Rosenthal Effect to heart in our relationships with our spouses, children, extended family members, friends, coworkers, and business contacts. Are we positive about people and expect them to succeed, or conversely, are we negative and expect them to fail? Do we extend the benefit of the doubt, looking for the best in people, or are we

distrustful, treating others as if everyone is out to get us? Do we uplift others by whatever means to succeed, or are we the kind who hammers down every nail that sticks up?

God's example is the one to follow. He has given us the most noble, most righteous, and most difficult of standards to live up to: His Ten Commandments and the perfect life of His Son, [Jesus Christ](#). And what does He say? "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" ([Luke 12:32](#)). He was so confident of His disciples' obedience and loyalty that He promised them they would sit on twelve thrones in His Kingdom ([Matthew 19:28](#)). He is equally confident that we will enter His Kingdom.

[God](#) has high expectations for us, and He works with us, encouraging us and guiding us to fulfill them. We can take this Effect as assurance that, if we persevere with Him, we will reign with Him in His Kingdom, and we can use it to make our lives and others' better now.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Christ Our Standard](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

If we don't see the concrete proof of Christ working in us, we are on thin ice. Head knowledge of God's truth is useless unless it is transferred to action. Spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:13-14) happens when our senses (sense of judgment and reason) are exercised. God will only accept children who follow Christ's example and conduct their lives by His high standards.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Having a Right Attitude](#)

by John O. Reid

Not only must Christians follow the correct doctrines, but they must also live God's way in the proper attitude. John Reid uses Jonah's and Moses' examples, among others, to explain how important a right attitude is to God's people.

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