

Alaska Strength & Muscle February Challenge “Exercising Devotion”

Strength Challenge

You will need – a deck of cards, floor space, your family

Pick a 30-minute time slot after dinner that you would normally be watching TV or Social Networking

Set a timer for 30 minutes

Deal out 5 cards to each player – Play like Go Fish – Draw someone else’s card and do the exercise that matches – play until cards are gone then deal again ****

You don’t have to stop when the buzzer goes off and you can make-up your own key (Face cards are worth 10 and Aces 15)



Family Devotion Challenge



new tradition: the gratitude jar

Make a family gratitude jar for the dinner table – before leaving the table write down 1 message of gratitude for the month of February. In March pull out a message each evening to share.

***** Couples could make bedside jars and drop a note each day before going to bed. What a great way to end you day with your partner.***

Exercising Devotion

By MB Redington, MAT

Forward –

Devotion is commitment to some purpose. Allegiance, commitment, loyalty, and dedication hold similar meanings and can be demonstrated in the act of aligning yourself to a course of action.

Where do you exercise devotion? What purpose(s) are you committed to and how do your daily actions reflect that devotion? Devotion aligns itself with idleness and stagnation without a course of action.

Family, morality and education are my personal top three favorites. It almost goes without saying that is easy to demonstrate devotion in good times. Devotion like so much of life requires daily practice and conscious thought especially in difficult times and situations.



My Story

The obscured midnight sun hovers in interior Alaska over a small 16x18 rustic cabin on the outskirts of town. It's an insanely smoky, hazy and cold (resulting from the sun blockage due to smoke) summer in Fairbanks making for the worst fire year on record in decades. It's summer vacation and my son is going into Third grade To cut right to the point of the story my son's reading is delayed and my husband and I along with school staff had already invested in a two year kindergarten program (starting at 4) along with various additional educational supports. Nonetheless the gap was not closing and as an educator I was panicking.

How did this make me feel...In private conversation with my husband, best girlfriends and school support I could share my feelings of defeat, shame, overwhelmment and frustration. After all I am an educator with a Master's Degree in Teaching indicating Mastery Level knowledge of my trade yet my own child was not on pace with reading norms despite growing up in a text rich, highly verbal environment where story time was a treasured activity by both mother and child. Letters and number cut outs spilled out of the Plato basket, PBS was the only TV channel available the bulk of our year and books and other creative learning toys filled the corners of our small loving home. We never had a lot but we always had enough. Education was and still is a top priority.

Two paths presented themselves at this junction. The same two paths that always seem to surface in times of difficulty. One path is clearly marked "Blame." On this path outside factors can take the brunt and carry the load called "failure". Why Not just spread the blame and give up - it was that exhausting at times. Navigation down the blame route only requires the traveler to focus on highlighting all the details of the problem by restating them over and over and over like an old piece of chewed gum while throwing up arms in utterly disgusted defeat. I just can't do that.

The other path is not well marked and far more abstract. In fact sometimes it's hard to see where it even leads. This path requires it's traveler to rethink, re-solve, research and most importantly forge along uncomfortably with the resolve that my son's education would be better than average so he could go on to live a life filled with opportunity and choice without the excessive baggage of low self-esteem that I carried for so many years.

As the Robert Frost poem goes - I came to a fork in the road and chose the path less traveled and that has made all the difference.

Back to the story

This particular summer morning really could have been any summer weekday. PBS cartoons, pajamas, cereal and milk followed by some snuggle time with mom. A young wife/mother, newly certified teacher – fresh faced and full of vigor in so many respects. Only I keep tabs on the clock because daily at the same time the TV goes off and I channel my best inner cheerleader, coach and tutor and pull out a book of reading passages targeting reading fluency under the "fun" of tongue twisting paragraphs that were about as interesting as washing dishes to me and as frustrating as trying to read a second language to my son.

Complaining, resistance and questions that lead to endless attempts at skirting the task at hand – daily reading drills, always set the beginning tone and there were many days I wanted to skip as badly as my child wanted. Why not simply put an end to the complaining? I did allow him to complain a little, after all, it was summer vacation and it did stink to have to work so hard (30 minutes in addition to complaints) on vacation. So daily after the allotted complain time was up and all pleadings were lodged to skip practice my response never changed or wavered that summer. "Yes I hear you and yes I'm sorry you feel the way you do and yes I understand that this is difficult, but we are still going to practice because learning to read is one of the most important things you will ever do, I believe in you and I'm right here to support you." For me compassion is not optional, in fact, it is so important to me to receive personally that I automatically give it. Compassion allowed my son room to express his own frustration. The best way I can describe my son's struggles with the actual process of decoding (reading individual words) was best written in the original Tarzan book when Tarzan came across his first book and described written words as ants on a page. You see my wonderous son could restate with the greatest detail a story that was read, he could predict what a character was likely to do and he could comprehend stories like a champ – but the actual words on a page....ANTS. Day after day – still ants. Two years plus two years of Kindergarten – still ants.

And so this day went like so many others over that particular summer. That 1/2 hour of discomfort always ended and we went about the rest of our summer day free spirited. Depending on the daily smoke levels and warnings curiosity about chain reactions lead to many intricate designs across the little front porch and through the trees with different levers and pulley systems. The summer library program was always a big hit and once the fires were finally suppressed long days at the lake helped erase the discomfort of mornings reading drills. Devotion

to fun and creative play was easy and that loving and purposeful devotion created enough trust to wade through difficulties.

What is your story to illustrate devotion?

Prologue –

A decade plus later my son has no memories of this summer reading. I'd love to report that by the end of the summer all was fixed, but that would be a fictional spin. The reality is that decoding slowly fell into place and I'd be hard pressed to pinpoint the exact intervention that worked because there never was a moment of epiphany where everything finally clicked. It was really the unyielding devotion to family and educational success that superceded all difficulties. At 16 he talks of being a theoretical astrologist a marker of success to me that despite difficulty our family devotion to education and relentless focus on problem solving helped our son keep his self-esteem intact related to learning. It was the course of unyielding action in the both good and hard times that triumphed.

Here's a little piece of me

