

From the Superintendent's Desk

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When I am not busy working and have some time to myself, one of my interests is watching movies. I enjoy movies with a good plot, interesting characters, and a message that will cause me to reflect.

When I was a high school principal, I would sometimes incorporate a message I gleaned from watching movies into the commencement address I'd give to graduating seniors. I'd always manage to fashion my address around their commencement motto and leave them with good advice when they were embarking on that next chapter of their lives.

A few years back, I incorporated a message I got from watching Rocky Balboa (the 6th movie in the Rocky series of movies with Sylvester Stallone. No kidding! There's a scene in that movie between Rocky and his son, Robert, when Rocky tells him, "It's not how many times you keep getting knocked down that's important, but how many times you get back up afterwards."

Another movie that contains a similar theme that I liked was one called Touchback. Touchback came out in 2012. Scott Murphy is the main character in the movie. "Mr. Football" in Ohio in 1991 was when he was a senior in high school. The movie starts out showing him as an adult 20 years after high school—married to Macy, has 2 little girls, and is a farmer. He's struggling to provide a living for his family. What you soon find out in this movie is that life didn't turn out the way that he thought it would be. You see, during the last play of the state football game between his Coldwater Bears vs. the Cayahoga Raiders, as he scores the winning touchdown, he gets hit by a linebacker as he crosses the goal line and he ends up with a crippling leg injury which prevents him from going on to play quarterback the next year at Ohio State University. During the early part of the movie, when an early frost comes, it is a race against time to harvest his soybean crop before it rots. The harvester that Scott borrows hits a hidden tree limb in the field and it disables the harvester. Believing that the soybean crop is going to be ruined and he'll end up bankrupt, Scott believes that the only way out of his dilemma is to take his own life by asphyxiation so that his family can be compensated through a life insurance policy.

I don't want to give away the plot of the movie except to say that when he is sitting in the cab of his pick-up truck, with a rag stuffed in the tailpipe, the engine running, fumes building up inside the cab, Scott Murphy nods off. The next thing you know is there is a banging on the door of his truck, Scott wakes up, he steps out of the truck, and it's like he is back living his senior year in high school all over again.

It's during the middle part of the movie; Scott has an opportunity to relive his life for that week prior to his career-ending injury. Talk about a "do-over!" But, hey, I digress. I did say there's an important message in this movie that I want to share. It's half-time of the championship game with Cayahoga and Coldwater is behind. Coach Hand (Kurt Russell) says to his team in the locker room—"The quality of one's life is determined by how they overcome adversity." That's the message I want to elaborate on in the rest of this article.

Make Good Choices

Life's journey requires us to make choices along the way. What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours. I say to you—make good choices because, ultimately, you are the one who is going to have to live with them. In this movie, you learn that Scott Murphy had made some bad choices the first time he was in high school (e.g., he often skipped Lit. class, he was a bit of a prankster like when he spray-painted a wall in the girl's locker room, he picked on underclassmen like Todd by hanging him up on a hook by his underwear and banning him from being able to go into the diner where everyone liked to hang out). Even his football coach, Coach Hand, had to call him into his office and tell him, "You need to be good for more than one night a week; or else I'm going to have to bench you." So, one important point you should remember is: do your best. Lead by example. Deeds, not words, are what's important. If you want to make yourself proud, then do yourself proud. Don't be a screw-off!

Appreciate What You Have—Not What You Don't Have

A second point I want to make—"Appreciate what you have—not what you don't have." Scott Murphy gave the impression that he couldn't wait to get out of Coldwater, go on to be a standout quarterback for Ohio State, and then go on and play in the NFL. He thought all that success would provide him with the financial means to live the "good life." He thought that success and money would mean he could have his mom leave her factory job and trailer, that Macy and his family wouldn't have to live on a rundown farm, etc. What he came to realize, though, when he had a chance to do things over again is that the journey will be more enjoyable if you make "now" the most interesting time of all. While you should plan for your future, the challenge is to not live in it. One should love what they do, love why they do it, and who you do it with. It's not what you have in your life but who you have in your life that counts. Scott Murphy learned to be less concerned about himself and to be more accepting of others. He began to treat underclassmen, his teammates, his mother, Macy, and townspeople with greater respect and appreciation. "Don't take for granted the things closest to your heart. Cling to them as you would your life, for without them, life is meaningless."

Attitude Is Everything—It Determines Altitude

The third point I want to make is—“Attitude is everything—it determines altitude.” Think about this—adversity will help you decide what you really value. Traveling down the road of life will not always be easy. There will be plenty of “bumps” and “unforeseen obstacles” along the way that are going to knock you down (e.g., failed relationships, work plans that don’t go your way, health woes, money difficulties, etc.). It’s how you choose to deal with those challenges that will ultimately determine your success. Making excuses, whining, crying, running away, taking your life, etc. will not solve the problems. Accepting responsibility, getting back up each time you get knocked down and doing something about it is what’s needed. Another way of putting it is, “when you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.” (Thomas Jefferson) Follow this attitude, as Coach Hand shares, and “you’ll be winners.” One more thing... no matter how lost, down, or sorry you may feel, hold onto **hope**.

Now that I’ve shared this much about the movie Touchback and Scott Murphy, what do you think happens when he’s got the opportunity for a do-over on the final play of that football game? Run Black 47 and end up winning the game re-injuring himself, and be back in that truck trying to kill himself; or, run Red 24, still win the game, go on to Ohio State to play football, and lead a different future? Guess you’re going to have to watch the movie and find out for yourself!

The quality of your life will be determined by how you overcome adversities. So,...

- Make good choices for yourself because, ultimately, you are the person who is going to have to live with them,
- Appreciate what it is you have—not what you don’t have, and
- Attitude determines altitude.

As this school year winds down, good journey in the trails you blaze. Always do your best. Cultivate great relationships with others. Live each day to the fullest. Get back up each time life beats you down. And, believe tomorrow is going to be a better day!