

Keep Moving Forward to Reach Success

by
Cindy Piller

Some students give up when they think something is going to be “hard”. They think that if they can’t do whatever it is perfectly the first time or “now”, they will never get it right. They don’t understand the power their brains have to learn something new and propel them to success.

Donna Hartley, educator, author and speaker working with growing numbers of young people groups in the States and abroad, believes young people need to learn they can do hard things, and that life is not a slam-dunk success. They need a vision, tools to convert vision into action steps, practice and the patience to stick with a dream.

If anyone knows this, it has to be Hartley, whose life story resembles an Indiana Jones movie. Her resilience, based on the ability to learn from hard times, tragedies and heartbreak to succeed again and again, give those who hear her message heart and hope. She’s happy to share what she’s figured out in the process.

Growing up in an abusive, alcoholic environment, Hartley, who now presents for major organizations, was kept in during recess as a first grader. Her teacher told the class it was because Hartley was too dumb to speak in front of the class, oblivious to the fact that when Hartley spoke up at home, she was hit.



On track for Olympic ski success with eight years of competitive training, a heart procedure at age 16 ended that dream. Later, she decided to become Miss Hawaii, selling pots and pans to have the money necessary to compete. She laughingly admits that winning took five tries, but wearing that crown was worth it. Life threw her more scary challenges – a major airline crash, a nasty bout of Stage 3 Cancer and another life-threatening heart procedure plus personal relationship issues and identity crises. Nothing stopped her; she learned from each experience.

Donna Hartley

Her message is straightforward. Life can be difficult, but you can do really hard things and achieve your dreams and goals. In fact, trying times and the lessons they teach can create success greater than imagined.

Hartley advises vision boards for young people. Around for ages, a vision board is a visual representation of what you want for a specific time period. You create categories in your life (family, friends, education, etc.) and write goals for each category. Pictures, words or graphics placed on an inexpensive cork board helps you see yourself achieving these goals. It should look fun and appealing! Looking at your board morning and night and seeing these goals prompts questions for daily or weekly action steps to make the vision real. Goals achieved, or steps toward them, are celebrated on the board.

Hartley says your vision board literally puts the goals in mind so you think about what achieving those goals take. The board provides focus that leads to action.

She realizes that working toward a new goal or trying anything new is uncomfortable for anyone, but “you have to push through the fears. Initial perfection is unrealistic; build on the day’s success and work toward the goal step by step.”

She encourages kids to build a support team of people to help them when times are tough because “struggle is reality.” When things are difficult, she asks young people to think about what life lesson they can learn from this to move on to better situations.

Hartley advises people to cancel out each day’s struggles by hearing or reading something inspirational, motivational or creative before bed. She recommends students of all ages build a nightly habit of verbalizing five things they are thankful for and five things they are good at.

This process has worked well for Hartley (and for others over the years -- including Walt Disney). Current brain research gives Hartley’s advice substance. It’s worth trying.

For more information: www.donnahartley.com