



OLIVERIAN

MISCELLANY

Your Child's Possessions:

Seniors and others not planning to attend summer session may either pick up their things or have them shipped by us. Pickups will be scheduled, with items packed and waiting in the meeting house to honor social distancing requirements. We will make sure that staff are present to welcome you, even if we can only offer air hugs! Shipping will be done at your request by staff using UPS or similar. Please convey your preference to Connor at cfahey@oliverianschool.org to begin making arrangements.



Summer Preparation: We are working with local, state, and federal agencies as well as other schools and programs to ensure that our summer opening is as safe and uneventful as possible. We can't wait to see you again and will keep you abreast of protocols and plans as they concretize.

Room and Board: You will receive a separate note today from our business office detailing room and board refund amounts and your options to receive, donate, or apply to future tuition.

DEAR FRIENDS AND OLIVERIAN PARENTS:

A favorite quote from my days as a turnaround executive is from Picasso, who said that "every act of creation is first an act of destruction." He was famously destructive of artistic convention in his effort to find new ways of seeing, expressing, and making. The

sentiment behind that quote helped me engage often painful, seemingly destructive restructures as creative and, ultimately, redemptive endeavors. It has also helped inform my vision for many struggling students and families even, and sometimes especially, when things get really hard. Of course, no philosophy is worth much if it just applies to other people. A version of Picasso's philosophy has helped me navigate personal struggles and setbacks with a disciplined sense of hope and curiosity--"this sucks...but I wonder what I am learning."

Picasso's words square with many other theories geared toward redeeming life's difficulties, crises, and stresses. Economics philosopher (whatever cool job that is!), Nassim Nicholas Taleb, speaks of "anti-fragility"--the notion that certain systems and people become stronger, smarter, and better as a result of stress. His philosophy makes the now popular "resilience" thinking of Emma Werner seem like a pretty low bar. There is also Stanford professor, Carol Dweck's, "growth mindset theory" which posits that our choice to view ourselves--brains and all--as plastic and improvable, makes it so. Those who believe that they are capable of evolving, her research finds, tend to emerge from challenges smarter and more capable, while those who view themselves as "fixed" (i.e. "I am what I am") suffer real setbacks when faced with difficulties and failures. Harvard's Howard Gardner found a similar truth when he researched the lives of "great" global influencers such as Gandhi, Freud, and Margaret Thatcher; a common trait of such global influencers is their ability to reframe difficulties--even tragic ones--as opportunities. This thinking is beginning to inform clinical work too; trauma specialists are now speaking in terms of "post traumatic growth," turning long-held assumptions about "post traumatic stress" on their head. And on and on....

Something common to all of these theories (many of which are well supported by research) is that growth in the face of difficulty is universally available, but it is not universal. It requires a choice, a belief, a "mindset" to unleash it.

During this pandemic I am finding that it requires an almost daily decision to consciously activate my own belief that sheltering in place is not something to endure, it's an opportunity to adapt, discover, create, and search for hidden treasures.

Usually, the most important growth we experience happens in the weeks, months, and years following a crisis. But if we keep our eyes peeled, roll up our sleeves, and grub around in the dirt, we can sometimes find treasure right in the middle of a struggle. I've dug up quite a few treasures in the last few weeks. I thought I'd share a few of them in hopes that doing so might help me hang on to them, and might also inspire the treasure hunter in you...

Nothing Doing: I have discovered that after some initial fits of guilt and shame and boredom, I am capable of sitting still and doing nothing and enjoying it. Colton and I lay on a hammock on Saturday and stared at the sky for, like, an hour. I do not want to get too good at doing nothing, but it is a pretty great way to connect with my munchkin.

Distance Support and Learning: This combination of social, emotional, and parent support along with distance learning has worked very well. It is something that we plan to carry forward in some form as an important adjunct to our regular program offerings. This new program also demonstrated the profound ability of my faculty to adapt to the changing needs of students.

Parent Partnership: More than ever, our success with students has depended upon close partnership with their parents. You have been tremendous partners during this time and we plan to continue our highly productive parent groups, coaching, and collaboration.

Monotasking: Not long after COVID-19 shut down my son's daycare he started angrily shouting a new phrase: "look at me!" Apparently my attempts to sneak in some smartphone work while supervising him was not so deft. Colton knew better than I did that multitasking is a fraud and that split attention is not attention. I have focused since on the discipline of monotasking--to the great benefit of my parenting, husbanding, and work. I hope to abandon multitasking for good.

Downclimbing: It is easy for educators, parents, and other adults to sit on our proverbial mountaintops and wait for the adolescents in our lives to climb to us for learning and support. This crisis has forced us to climb down the mountain and meet students where they are--which right now is scattered around the world at home at close quarters with their parents. It has been a good reminder that when we make the sometimes arduous journey from our comfortable perch to where our students actually are, the payoff is profound. We are using this reminder to work on creative ways to better meet students where they are, literally and figuratively, both on and off campus.

I hope that you choose to believe that the challenges of this time--which may include very real economic, health, family, and other difficulties--can and will yield more good than bad. That belief itself is likely to make it true. If that sounds like a statement of magical thinking or Pollyanna optimism, research, history, and experience declare otherwise. If you are lucky enough to have found some treasures already, I would love to hear about them.

Warmly and hopefully,

Will

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STAY CONNECTED:



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