

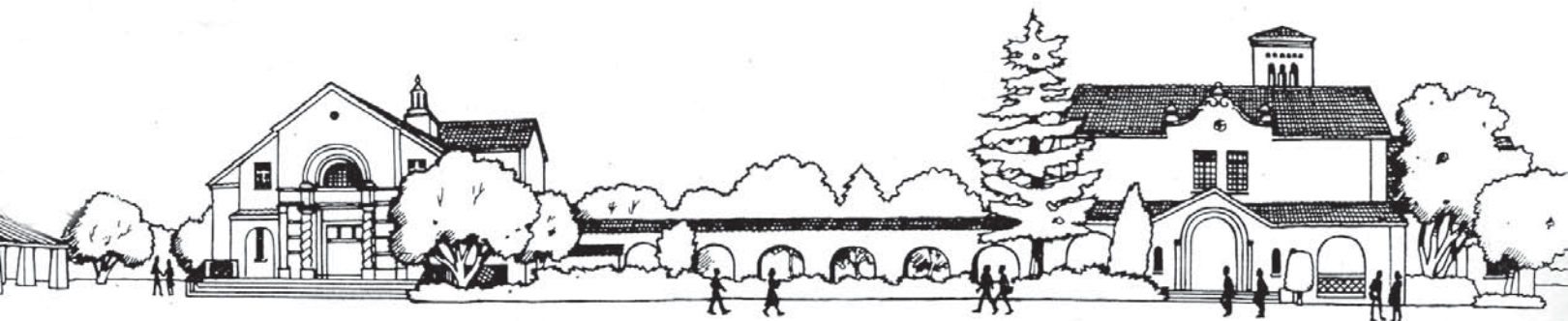
5. Taking Care of Business

Much of how people feel about themselves relates directly to how well they manage their days and “take care of business” in their lives. For young persons, that can mean study habits, part-time jobs, household chores and personal time management. For adults, it can mean paying bills, keeping up with household jobs and managing time well at work and home.

Many problems — from depression and insomnia to fears about dating and personal relationships — disappear when individuals learn how to take care of the business of their lives more effectively. This is not a mysterious process; it does require **doing**, not just knowing what should be done.

The following hints can help you and members of your family take better care of business:

- Set up a regular place to study**, pay bills and do other paperwork — a desk, a table, any place that you can arrange in a specific way when “work” is to be done.
- Do one piece of work after another until you feel like quitting — **then do one more**. This reinforces perseverance, and soon you will be working up to 55 minutes with a 5-minute “reward” for a phone call, snack, or chat with a family member.
- Start out with a small task**, finish it, and do something enjoyable as a reward. Then build up the size or number of tasks. The “business” should always be a specific thing and the reward should always be time. **(This method works!)**
- Schedule your work so the “worst” job comes first** — the hardest homework assignment, or the dirtiest dishes, or the nastiest bills. Then things get better and better.



LifeSkills Program

The Kalamazoo Connection: How You Do = How You Feel

Counselors and therapists have noted a link between how people are doing and how they feel about themselves.

Five students who visited college counselor Ljungberg Fox's office in Kalamazoo, Mich., had different concerns but shared a common problem: They needed to improve their grades. "Four years of nagging anxiety combined with either failure or



compensating behaviors of cheating, meaningless memorizing (cramming), and disguising ignorance, must have their effect," Dr. Fox noted.

Dr. Fox focused specifically on how the students could develop efficient study habits and thereby gain control over how they were doing overall.

He told them that if they followed his instructions, they could become so efficient that they could avoid most evening and weekend studying. All agreed to try, and he designed a simple program for them.

The essence of his program was that they should begin by taking the **next free time** — even a short period — and going to a place where they had no habit of "goofing off," such as the library or an empty classroom. They should sit down and **do a specific piece of homework** that would take about *five minutes*.

Then they could join their friends or do whatever they otherwise would have done instead of studying. They should repeat that process frequently — doing "piece-work" jobs and getting a time reward.

Next, the students would try several pieces of work until they felt like quitting — **and then do one more** before they quit to go do something else they would normally be doing.

They would do the first set of jobs rapidly and

happily, because that was agreed to, and then do the next piece in the same frame of mind because they knew that as soon as the short job was done they could go and play. **Doing the "one more piece" of work provided an inner reward** for perseverance — rather than their just cutting out when they felt like it.

This reward helped them increase their attention span for the amount of time they could study in an organized, focused way.

Gradually, the students found they could increase the study jobs they could do comfortably at one sitting (up to an hour's worth) before taking a short break — about par for "good study habits." Then Dr. Fox introduced the old standard "SQ3R" study method (see next page), and the students tried that.

The student whose grades improved most at the end of the term went from a straight F to a B average, and the person who improved least had boosted the average by a complete grade. **Only one student spent weekend time studying** (two hours on Saturday mornings) **and none spent time studying after dinner** (they finished during the day).



They were proud of themselves, self-confident and doing better academically and personally — with their families and friends.

The "Kalamazoo Connection" applies not just to college students, but to high school students AND TO ADULTS.

It is not just a matter of studying. How you take care of the business of your life affects how you feel about yourself, how you relate to others, and affects just about everything that happens in your daily life.

Many people "discount" their achievements and magnify their faults. **Give yourself credit** as you improve your study or work habits.

‘Low-key Praise’ Is Best for Grades, Life

Simple encouragement and praise works far better as a stimulus to studying than elaborate rewards or punishment, according to a seminal study at Stanford University.

Students whose study habits are based on the reward/punishment pattern tend to perform poorly over the long term because they never learn to motivate themselves, the classic study found.

The study was conducted by Sanford Dornbusch, professor of human biology and sociology, as part of a three-year “Study of Stanford and the Schools,” based on information from more than 7,800 students and 3,500 parents in six Bay Area high schools (including Menlo Atherton and Los Altos highs).

“Emotional upset is the worst possible reaction to poor grades. When parents are upset and the child is upset, we find an association with poor grades. Over time, the grades get worse.”

Likewise, parents who reward good grades with special gifts or vacations may be hurting their children’s future academic and career chances by substituting reward-motivation for self-motivation. While children from single-parent or divorced families usually don’t do as well academically, **a family’s behavior is more important than a family’s status or structure** in determining school performance.

Children of parents who are either “authoritarian” or “permissive” usually have lower grades than children of “authoritative” parents.

“Authoritarian” parents try to control their children through absolute standards, and emphasize values such as obedience and the preservation of order. **“Permissive”** parents make few demands, are highly tolerant and use avoid punishment. **“Authoritative”** parents use encouragement, firmness and open communication.

“The low-key use of (sincere) praise, encouragement, and offers of help is associated with higher grades.”

“SQ3R” Is NOT a Secret Code

On the wall of the Palo Alto High School Main Library are bold signs: SQ3R.

Are there any students who don’t know what that means? Or parents? (It can work just as well for them.)

SQ3R is a mnemonic device (memory helper) for an old study method that has been used in education since the mid-1940s. Each letter stands for the first letter of a word (there are three “R” words). Here is the translation:

Survey (or scan) the material (homework or job-related work), looking for the most important points and the basic flow of the content — or just the headings.

Question — Write down several questions as if you were preparing a test for someone else.

Read the material, looking for the answers to the questions you wrote down. (Don’t underline.)

Recite — Write the answers.

Review — Check the answers against the material.

This system builds in the reinforcement that is essential for someone to retain what they have learned.

For most persons, **something read over once doesn’t stick very long — particularly if it is crammed in at the last minute** (itself a stressful activity).



For study help...

Anyone can get behind, or not know how to tackle a tough subject. Confidential assistance is available through the school counseling service, **855-8286**, or:

Teenline: 327-TEEN
Parental Stress Hotline: 327-3333

Premack’s Principle

The long-tested principle of personal “rewards” (as opposed to rewards from others) as a motivating factor for studying or taking care of personal business derives in large part from work done by David Premack, Ph.D., at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the early 1960s. It has become known as the “Premack Principle” — it holds true today.

The idea essentially is that any activity you enjoy and spend a lot of time doing can be used as a reward for doing things you don’t enjoy as much and don’t spend enough time at.

Others have found that even hospitalized schizophrenics dramatically improve in self-care when things they enjoy — such as watching TV — are used as rewards for self care.

Self-rewards are equally effective.

Using LifeSkills

LifeSkills information can make a real difference in your life — but only if you read it and share it. Here are two ideas about how you can make most effective use of the concepts.

1. **Pass it on** — Share it with friends and family members. (It works best if you don’t force it on anyone — just leave it around or make a comment without being “holier than thou.”)

2. **Leave it around** — Once you’ve read it, just lay it around the house. Others will check it out, maybe without your even knowing about it.

Leave it on the kitchen or dining-room table, or a coffee table, in the bathroom or pinned to a bulletin board.

Overcoming the ‘Authority Block’ for Fun and Success!

This LifeSkills publication is only as helpful as you and those in your family make it.

It is not enough to “know” how to do something: You must actually do it in order to receive the strengthening, enriching benefits — just as with exercise or study (but more fun).

Here’s one idea that might help out when you HAVE to do something:

- ☐☐ Most of us remember a time we sat angrily with an elbow on the table eating one pea at a time. Somewhere in a corner of our head was a *realization that someone was wasting time*. Many of us “dig in our heels” when we feel someone is “making us do something.” (Grades in elective courses predict strongly how successful you will be in life, but grades in required courses predict very little.)
- ☐☐ You can break out of this “authority block” by shifting your perceptions slightly: Try looking at the “required” parts as a “package deal” — an education (or privileges) in exchange for some time and attention. Then pretend that the “required” thing is “elective,” and you are set free to become interested and do your job (of learning and growing) better.

Family

LifeSkills

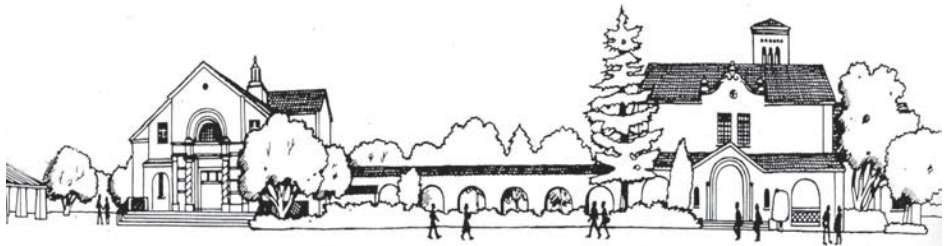
is a program to strengthen and enrich how family members interact — with the purpose of making each person and the family as a whole as psychologically strong as possible.

It was developed originally by **Palo Alto High School** and the **Palo Alto Medical Foundation** for Health Care, Research and Education, and expanded to Gunn High School.

It is now being co-sponsored by the **Palo Alto Weekly**, **Palo Alto Unified School District** and other community organizations, with major support from the **California Family Foundation**.

Taking Care of Business is the fifth publication in a program designed to help students and family members interact more positively and develop stronger abilities to negotiate and communicate. Other publications and newsletters will be mailed during the school year.

—LifeSkills Planning Committee



Family

LifeSkills Program

25 Churchill Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301

For information: (650) 329-3717

For help or Advice: (650) 327-TEEN; 327-3333

5. Taking Care of Business: Discovering Personal Power