



Psychology

Participation Trophies
Leveled Assessment ____/4

Name:
Section:
Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the article below connected to the idea of Participation Trophies and answer the questions below.

You Don't Get Participation Awards For Showing Up At Work

Don Yaeger, Contributor, Forbes Magazine, AUG 25, 2015

Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison is not a guy that I would normally offer as a model for life lessons. Sure he became an NFL starter after going undrafted, proving his desire and work-ethic, but he's also generated more than his share of controversy through his career. And some of his off-the-field habits are, at the very least, troubling. But his recent comment that he was returning his children's "participation" trophies because he felt they didn't earn them was spot on.



"I'm not sorry for believing that everything in life should be earned and I'm not about to raise two boys to be men by making them believe that they are entitled to something just because they tried their best," said Harrison on his Instagram page. "Sometimes your best is not enough, and that should drive you to want to do better."

Right on.

Harrison's take on "entitlement" trophies, as some have called them, connected with an uncomfortable truth in modern society. It is a fact of life that we won't always be successful; sometimes you can work your absolute hardest to accomplish a goal and give it your best shot, but still come up short. These defeats can build character and grit, but I think it's dangerous to create an environment where we hand out trophies—or any kind of acknowledgment—just to reward people for showing up.

"While I am very proud of my boys for everything they do and will encourage them till the day I die, these trophies will be given back until they earn a real trophy," said Harrison.

A \$2 billion a year industry has grown up around some parent's need to reward their child with meaningless awards just for joining a team. And as it has, we have all fumbled an important life lesson for our children. Prizes won't increase motivation—it actually lowers it. Why would a child attempt to improve when he or she is treated the same as the kid on the sidelines chasing butterflies?

Unfortunately, the "helicopter parenting" crowd has already profoundly affected our society. Study after study on millennials show an increase in depression, anxiety, and a lack of coping skills with disappointment. How do we reframe this discussion with a generation of young people that have been sheltered from the harsh realities of losing?

Simple: They have to be taught that losing is okay...if you learn from it.

I get asked all the time by parents: "What is the most important habit of a great winner?" Throughout my more than 25 years of interviewing the highest-performers in sports and business, I know that great champions "hate to lose more than they love to win." They learn this habit when they eliminate the many excuses that get used every time things don't go their way—"The game wasn't fair" or "The referee didn't make the right call."

Our youth must learn how to handle both winning and losing in order to have a realistic perspective on life. Being celebrated for just competing hurts the player more than anything, because it prevents that lesson from taking root...which ultimately stunts that individual's growth.

The great ones in sports and business all know that you don't get participation trophies by showing up for work. Winning and losing is a consequence of competing—and we're all competing every single day in the professional world. We should never treat life as though it lacks hardships or that failures don't happen. Instead, we can use these moments to make us better.

James Harrison, there are some days where I might not root for you—but I will, from here on out, root for your sons.

“Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thought Questions

1. How are the ideas of Operant Conditioning connected to the idea of participation trophies? What are the Reinforcements? What are the Behaviors learned?
2. What are the arguments for and against participation trophies?
3. How does the article claim that participation trophies actually lower a drive to perform better?
4. What is your opinion of participation trophies? Explain your position.