



The “B” Word

As parents, we have failed our children. We schedule every minute of their day during the school year: school, homework, practice, games and recitals. School, homework, practice, games and recital. School, homework...

A common phrase that parents dread hearing all summer that come out of the mouths of our children: “I’m bored...” The reason? Summer is the first opportunity for them to do something unscheduled and they are unable to do so. And as their parents, our response is to schedule something more for them to do.

What we should be doing is encouraging them to be bored. To use that free time, their vivid imaginations and the world around them, to find a way to entertain themselves. Yes, teach them to be bored and appreciate down time. In my house “bored” is a bad word and simply not allowed. My girls know not to say the “b” word. It’s been a great rule with my kids. They say the word and I give them a chore or a book to read, in response. They have plenty of daily chores, so they want nothing to do with more of them. Each summer I hear it less and less.



While my oldest was at sleep away camp for four weeks, I feared my youngest daughter would be bored without her best friend and playmate. I knew that as much as I wanted to spend four weeks going on elaborate adventures with her and her dolls, building Lego towns or going to the pool for hours, it wasn't an option. Instead, I worked at my desk while listening to her act out those elaborate adventures. She also loves to read, so I challenged her with some books beyond her reading level. For each book she read that was at least one grade level ahead, she got a little prize. I picked the prizes and she was motivated to find out what they were, and in the process read a lot of great books.

This philosophy isn't just for parents and their children. Leaders in any organization must be willing to allow our subordinates to use their imaginations and grow in their own decision making – how to best use their time and capabilities to complete projects or take the initiative for other things to improve the team, group, company or community. Coaches are quick to fix every mistake at practice, but what happens when they can't stop the play during the game? The frustration felt by athletic teams and business leaders is the same that is felt by parents.

The summer is now winding down and the school supply lists must be bought. The girls are visiting their grandparents before getting back into the routine of school and activities. Eleven weeks into the summer and it's the first time I've heard the "B" Word. I laugh because my oldest said it while visiting her grandparents and she thought mama wasn't around to enforce it. Grandma doesn't know my rule, but my oldest does and I happened to hear it on a phone call. So, I told her to go find Grandma and do a chore for her.

Eleven weeks. I call that a "win," but next summer I'll challenge them to never say it. What will you do to teach your children, students, athletes or employees to move beyond being *bored* and make the most of their time?

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