

I'm not a dream killer, I swear



My daughter taking a photo on her phone at a fashion show at Irvine Spectrum.

I'm not teaching my kids to follow their dreams.

At least not right now. My kids are 13 and 10 years old, and what I'm teaching them are things like perseverance, the value of hard work, responsibility and charity. Those ideas aren't splashed across T-Shirts in the juniors' department of Macy's, but they certainly are more important and are key components to reaching life-long goals.

My Facebook feed is filled with inspirational quotes telling people that whatever they can put their mind to do, they can

do. "If you can dream it, you can do it," is a quote by Walt Disney that pops up almost daily. With all due respect to Mr. Disney, that is just not true.

Just one episode of American Idol's audition show debunks the idea that you can do whatever you set your mind to. With all the confidence of a gladiator these kids take the stage, declare they will be the next American Idol, and then proceed to massacre a song by singing it. For heaven's sakes where are these kids' parents? Did they not tell them, "My dear son I love you but you can not carry a tune?" It is fun to watch but at the same time I can't help but feel it is a peek into the pandemic of overconfident kids.

It's not that I don't want my kids to be happy and pursue their passions. I just want them to have true confidence that comes from actual achievement.

I work in a profession that is a "dream job" to a lot of young adults. I'm a writer and an editor for a magazine and I work for our county's largest newspaper. Because of this, around May and June I get many calls from journalism and English soon-to-be graduate students asking about job opportunities. They tell me it's their dream to be a writer or to work at a newspaper. "Great! When would you like to do your internship?" Without fail many turn down an internship. Why would they work "for free?" After all, they will be college graduates.

Recently, a parent told me proudly that her high school daughter wanted to be a writer. He went on about what a passion she had and what a natural talent she possessed. When I chatted with the obviously intelligent and accomplished young girl she told me it was her dream to write for magazines one day. I told her my best piece of advice was to start her own blog and write every day.

She quickly informed me that she was far too busy to write every day. "That wouldn't work in my schedule" and that she

had a blog already but rarely wrote there. She blew me off as if I was giving her advice on how to be a rabbit, not how to achieve exactly what she said she wanted from someone who had success in that field. Her dad backed her up. "You should see her iCal. She's very active at school," he said.

Kids need to be equipped with more than a well-developed dream, talent and a parent who believes in them. Those things will only get them so far. I fear we are parenting our kids right out of a successful future. We are at once over parenting and under parenting our kids. We pad them from every possible failure, we do everything for them from chores to their homework, but then we don't teach them the hard stuff like responsibility and discipline.

It's not my imagination; I recently heard a jaw-dropping statistic that confirms my fears. One in eight college graduates brings a parent with them on a job interview.

So, these kids land their dream job interview, yet can't face another adult without their mom or dad. It sounds absurd, but talk to anyone who works with young adults and they won't be surprised.

My daughter dreams of being a fashion designer one day. Fantastic! We watch Project Runway. I buy her sketchbooks and colored pencils. But my focus with her right now is to teach her to keep her room picked up, complete her homework on time, be kind to her brother and volunteer at church. I believe these simple disciplines will help her achieve her goals (which may change five times before her sixtieth birthday).

I swear I'm not a dream killer. I've just seen too many kids crash and burn when they reach adulthood. What keeps me up at night with worry is not whether my son or daughter will "reach their dreams" it's whether they will be successful, responsible adults in their personal and professional life. My goal as a parent is not to pad their life and cushion them for

disappointment, mean people or rejection. It's to teach them to handle these situations with maturity and grace.

It might seem like an odd declaration from someone like me who is living her own dream of being a working writer. But, if you knew my story, it hasn't come easy. I worked jobs I hated. I stayed up late night after night to meet deadlines because I was taking care of small children at home all day. I wrote for years without receiving a dime. What I've learned is that your true dreams pursue you. Your passion will nip at your heels throughout your life and insist on being fulfilled.

That is what I want for my kids.

From my weekly column in the Orange County Register.