

FAILURE, SUCCESS, RISK AND LUCK: SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Address to the National Boys' Education Conference hosted by The King's Institute

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by

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Headmaster, distinguished guests, students, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for asking me to speak at your conference which is focussing on the concept of failure, from an educational perspective. I have interpreted that as an invitation to think about failure as a 'learning experience', from which boys – and indeed all of us – can grow.

Before I turn to that topic, can I acknowledge the Burramattagal people of the Darug nation as the traditional owners and custodians of this land where we are meeting today, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who may be here today.

I am myself a product, in part, of a boys' school education. From Year 6 through Year 12 I attended the Hutchins School in Hobart, which we were always told was the second-oldest school in Australia, having been founded a few months after Launceston Grammar School at the other end of Tasmania (or Van Diemen's Land as it was called then) in 1846.

I guess I must have learned enough Australian history to have wondered, if only to myself, how two schools in Tasmania could be older than any in Sydney, given that Sydney had 16 years' head start on Hobart and 18 years on Launceston.

And it turns out that this School, King's, was founded 15 years before the one I attended. But it was temporarily closed between 1864 and 1868 after the roof collapsed in a severe rainstorm. So Launceston Grammar's and Hutchins' claim to longevity is, strictly speaking, being the oldest *continually operating* schools in Australia, rather than the oldest.

Boys' schools – wherever they are situated – have always had a distinctive ethos. That ethos of course varies from school to school, and not just because of denominational or doctrinal differences, but because different schools offer, and different groups of parents expect, different things. It's clear from a glance at King's website that while its traditions, and its current ethos, have much in common with those of the school that I attended, they also diverge in some important respects.

It's also worth emphasizing that while some of the values and principles which boys' schools seek to uphold and impart are enduring – and that's particularly important for schools founded and maintained on religious principles – others can change, do change, and need to change over time.

If they don't, then – like any other institution or entity which, no matter how venerable, refuses to change – it will inevitably lose relevance, fade into insignificance, and eventually wither and die.

I have to say that while the School which I attended very much holds fast to its motto, 'Character lives after death' – a Good Thing – its values and principles have changed in some ways that I think are very important.

One of the less pleasant – but nonetheless enduring – memories of my school years is of hearing, albeit second hand, that the then Headmaster had told a gathering of the boys who were part of the School's athletics team that their membership of that team showed that they were "fine young men". Whereas, it was related to me afterwards by friends who were there, the Headmaster went on to say that the academic achievements of its pupils and students showed that the School had great teachers.

Which of course it undoubtedly did – and I remember a number of them very fondly.

I was one of those boys who was no more likely to be a member of the School's athletics (or any other) sporting team than I was to see a thylacine running across the School's oval. To this day I have no capacity to figure out where a ball is and either catch it, or put a stick of some sort next to it – irrespective of whether the ball is moving or stationary.

However I was also one of the nine students in my Year 12 class who were among the top 20 in my state's 'matriculation' results (these days they would be called ATARs) in my finishing year.

But that, according to the Headmaster of my school at the time, didn't say anything about my worth as a person – nor that of other boys who fitted a similar mould.

'Nerdy' boys – as I undoubtedly was – didn't get to be 'prefects'. They didn't get held up as role models for anything. They weren't invited to meet the guest speakers at School Speech Nights. Rather – and especially if, like me, they wore glasses; had unusual names; or were shorter, or younger, than their peers (or, like me, both) – they more commonly got bullied. And that was usually regarded as a formative, or 'toughening' experience – a bit like the 'hazing' that (as we know) still goes on in military academies.

The School I attended was by no means unique in this regard.

My first-cousin-once-removed Stephen Eslake attended this School between 1965 and 1970. Stephen (whom I only ever met three times) was, for want of a better phrase, a 'troubled soul', largely as a result of what he described as a 'toxic relationship' with his father (my great-uncle), someone who had been embittered by the disappointments of his own life and, as a result, burdened his own son with expectations that he (his son) could not possibly have ever met.

Stephen was, like me, something of a 'nerd'. In 1965, as a 13-year old, he was the reigning 'Spelling Champion' on a long-running AC-TV program called *The Quiz Kids*.

In a memoir written some years before he died, at the age of 67, after a long struggle with Parkinson's Disease, Stephen recounted his experience of what was apparently known as the "pack drill", which consisted, he said, of "an hour and a half of strenuous and painful exercises, with monitors yelling orders, threats and insults at us and standing over us in a menacing posture".

Stephen goes on:

"I was given a pack drill in my first year for the crime of walking into a classroom too early, before lunchtime had concluded ... About halfway through the pack drill, my house captain came along to join in the fun. I was a particular object of his loathing and contempt, probably because I was not a rough, tough, rugged King's School fellow. He came and stood over me as I struggled with a painful exercise. He took obvious delight in my suffering and humiliation. He verbally abused me and kicked me. The house captain and his fellow monitors undoubtedly justified their brutality and sadism by believing that they were imposing discipline, maintaining standards and deterring misconduct".

The last sentence is obviously Stephen's interpretation: and presumably his tormenters, had they ever been called to account for their behaviour, would have attempted to give a different one.

Nonetheless, I think we know enough from other inquiries into things that went on in schools, and other institutions, in this era, to be confident that Stephen was telling the truth.

There's a lot more which Stephen says in his memoir which I needn't recount today.

The more important point is that boys' schools *have* changed – significantly – in terms of what they regard as being important values, principles, attitudes and standards (as well as knowledge and skills) to instil in their youthful charges, and in terms of how they measure their success in doing so.

As they needed to.

If the School which I attended *hadn't* changed, in these respects, from how it was when I was there, my son would not be attending it today.

It still proudly proclaims its "long tradition of developing men of character" – but it follows that immediately with a commitment to "a firm focus on the wellbeing of boys".

Its website states, in large type, that "we value kindness, humility, courage and respect". The first two of those would *not* have been on the School's website (if there had been one) in the 1960s or 1970s.

It celebrates the achievements of its students in music, drama and other creative art forms as much as it does their scholastic attainments and their sporting endeavours.

It doesn't compel its boys to participate in quasi-military activities in order to prove their 'manliness'. It offers classes in dance (which it certainly didn't 50 years ago).

And it seems clear from this School's website that it, too, has changed much, and I am sure my cousin Stephen would – if he could – say, much for the better, since he was here more than fifty years ago.

That journey of evolutionary, and occasionally revolutionary, change is not one with a fixed timetable or a known destination. It is rather, I think, an on-going one.

It is one which, like our own individual life journeys, requires us periodically to pause, to reflect, to take stock of what we have done and are doing, to compare what we see against our own expectations and those of others whose thoughts and opinions matter to us, and against what others whom we may see as either peers or rivals are doing.

It is, in other words, one which requires us to have some firm ideas as to what constitutes success – and, as the unavoidable counterpoint to success, failure; and, in order to do *that* effectively, to have credible means of determining whether we have succeeded or failed.

It also requires us to have ways of understanding *why* we have succeeded or failed, as the case may be: and in the latter case, to have effective ways of learning from those failures so that we don't repeat them.

I'm not really qualified, by either training or experience, to offer a detailed prescription as to what 'success' in the education of boys might mean – other than again to suggest, as I've been attempting to thus far, that it should entail more than it did four or five decades ago.

That is, 'success' in educating boys should be about more than formal academic accomplishments, sporting prowess, military bearing, or physical strength and courage – important though those things (or at least some of them) may be.

It should include participation, and (where possible) excellence, in the creative arts, in foreign languages, and in knowledge and understanding of other cultures, faiths and traditions – things which in decades gone by boys' schools have not typically been noted for valuing or prizing (except, perhaps, for Latin and Ancient Greek).

It should include qualities such as resilience, empathy, tolerance, open-mindedness, humility, and – especially for schools who cater to the sons of Australia's most privileged – an awareness of commitments and obligations no less than an sense of rights or entitlements (the latter of which seems to come fairly naturally anyway).

And it should also encompass genuine, instinctive respect for and understanding of those who are *not* boys or men – that is to say, girls and women – as has this year been forcefully brought home to those who might not hitherto or otherwise have seen these things as particularly important – and for others whom boys attending schools such as this would typically not encounter on a regular basis.

Conversely, *not* aspiring to achieve these goals, let alone *not achieving* them, should be seen for what it is – namely, failure – although, ideally, failure which then brings you closer to success.

I'm sure that you are all taking a much more 'holistic' – for want of a better word – and structured approach to such things than you would have done a few years, let alone a few decades, ago.

But I do now want to share some more general thoughts about 'success', 'failure', and the sources of each.

One of the ways in which our culture measures 'success' is through the accumulation of money or wealth. Let me hasten to add, I'm not saying that's the *only* measure of success – far from it.

But it is one that, like it or not, *is* widely used.

When we sing our [national anthem](#), we purport to remind ourselves that among the virtues of this country is that we have "wealth for toil". Like some other things in the extended version of "Advance Australia Fair" – most obviously, the line in the rarely-sung second verse about having "boundless plains to share" with "those who've come across the seas" – we don't *really* believe that. Or if we do, that belief isn't reflected in the choices we make, individually and collectively.

We in Australia don't *really* value "wealth for toil" – that is, wealth acquired through sustained intellectual or entrepreneurial effort over an extended period of time – at all.

Rather, I'd venture that the only socially acceptable ways of getting rich in this country's culture – that is, the only ways of becoming or remaining wealthy without attracting the resentment of others who haven't been able to do the same – are through sport; gambling; or speculation in the property market.

I could perhaps add inheritance – otherwise known as choosing your parents carefully – as a fourth 'socially acceptable' way of becoming rich.

In support of that I'd note that of the 200 names on the *Australian Financial Review's* recently published '[Rich List](#)', at least 65 (or nearly one-third) are identified as having gained that status through property (and there are more who are instead listed as having gained it by 'investment' or 'retail', in which I suspect property would be a substantial element); and another four who have done so through gambling.

By contrast, of the 200 names on the [World's Billionaire's List](#) published by *Forbes* magazine, only 13 (or about one fifteenth) have gained that status through 'real estate' (of whom the top 10, incidentally, are all from China or Hong Kong), and just three through 'casinos and gambling'.

In similar vein, the most recent set of [Taxation Statistics](#) published by the Australian Taxation Office tells us that since 2012-13, more than 20% of taxpaying Australians own one or more investment properties – up from less than 8% in the late 1980s. That compares with [7% of taxpaying Americans](#) and about [11% of adults in the UK](#), for example. 5.8% of Australian taxpayers in 2018-19 owned two or more investment properties – up from 3.0% in 1999-2000.

And indeed our taxation system – which is, presumably, an expression of our 'national value set' – encourages these outcomes.

Australia's personal income tax system taxes higher-than-average wage and salary incomes – that is, broadly speaking, incomes from 'hard work' – rather severely, by comparison with other so-called 'advanced' economies.

According to [statistics compiled by the OECD](#) (the Paris-based international 'think tank' of which former Australian Finance Minister Matthias Cormann is now the Secretary-General), our top marginal personal income tax rate of 47% is in the middle rank of OECD countries (nineteen countries have a lower top rate and 17 have a higher one): but it cuts in at just twice average earnings – a threshold which is lower than all but six (out of 37) OECD countries.

No less importantly, that rate only applies to income from wages and salaries – that is, from working – and to income from bank deposits.

Income from capital gains – that is, income from buying and selling things which go up in value, whether as a result of any particular effort on the owner's part or not – is taxed at half the marginal rate applicable to income from working.

Income diverted into superannuation funds, from investments in superannuation funds, or paid out of superannuation funds to people who have passed the so-called 'preservation age', is taxed at 15%.

Professional sportspeople get [special concessional treatment](#) under Australia's income tax system which allows them to escape paying the top rate of tax on income which they earn which other people earning similar amounts have to pay.

Income from gambling isn't taxed at all – unless the Tax Office decides, and you're not able to convince a court otherwise – that you're a professional gambler.

And of course in this country inheritances aren't taxed at all – something which, since estate duties were abolished in this country from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, Australians have come to regard as perfectly normal, even though we are in fact [one of only nine OECD countries](#) (out of 37) which don't tax inheritances (and that the US and the UK, the two countries with which we most often compare ourselves when it comes to taxation, still do).

So it shouldn't really come as a surprise that such a large proportion of Australians associate 'success' with property speculation, gambling and sport – as distinct from 'hard work'.

Conversely, our legal system is fairly harsh – especially by comparison with America's – towards those who fail at entrepreneurial ventures.

[American corporate history](#) is littered with the names of business 'heroes' who failed at earlier stages of their careers – without that becoming an insuperable barrier to later success: indeed most of them seem to regard failure as [a better teacher than success](#).

By contrast, business failure in Australia is a [comparatively rare phenomenon](#), according to research by the Productivity Commission.

Instead, we 'prop up' small businesses with preferential payroll and more recently income tax treatment, out of a belief that small business is "the engine room of the economy" – a proposition which is [completely without any evidence whatsoever](#), despite the almost religious fervour with which it is incanted.

And then we wonder why so many small businesses stop growing at just below the threshold at which they cease to be 'small' for the purpose of determining eligibility for preferential tax treatment. Or at least we should wonder.

If we *really* wanted to encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and the other attributes which some of our political leaders say that we should have more of, then we would instead be giving tax preferences to *new* businesses (rather than to small ones, simply because they are small and for no other reason); we wouldn't tax the rewards of passive speculation as lightly as we do; and we would be more forgiving of failure at business ventures than we are.

As the School I went to now interprets its old motto, "what you do matters" (emphasis added). That goes for nations no less than for individuals.

Two of the key elements in the distinction between 'success' and 'failure' are risk and luck.

Risk is an inherent part of life. We can of course make choices, both individually and collectively, about the risks we take. However we don't always recognize that those choices have consequences and costs, as well as benefits.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the United States' "founding fathers", is often credited with having coined the saying "nothing ventured, nothing gained" – although others have traced it back to Chaucer, who may in turn have lifted it from a French proverb which says, in translation, "he who never undertook anything never achieved anything".

Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, is supposed to have said something similar: "The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything".

One way of minimizing the risk of failure is to avoid do anything.

But is that *really* what we mean by 'success'?

It seems to me that we, individually and as a society – and perhaps, we as Australians more than some other countries – are finding it increasingly difficult to measure or calibrate risk intelligently.

What I mean by that is that we seem to be either unwilling to work out the probability attaching to certain types of risks, or incapable of working it out – and then using those probabilities as the basis for determining how much importance we should attach to reducing those risks, and what price we should be willing to pay in order to reduce them.

At the most mundane level we see this in the spread of what psychologists and others call 'hyper-parenting' – the increasing unwillingness to allow children to do things unsupervised, such as playing, or getting themselves to and from school, without close monitoring and supervision.

But we also see it in much larger areas.

One of the most striking of these is with regard to the phenomenon we have come to call 'terrorism'.

In this context it's worth noting that 'terrorism' isn't something that didn't exist before the attacks on New York and Washington on 11th September 2001.

Indeed one of the earliest instances of what we would now call 'terrorism' was the attempt to blow up the British Houses of Parliament by Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators on 5th November 1605. Those of us who are old enough will remember that this was an event which we used to commemorate with firework displays.

The Americans used to be quite relaxed about IRA supporters raising money in the bars of Boston and New York in order to finance their terrorist activities in Ireland and the United Kingdom (activities which included attempting to assassinate the British Prime Minister). US President Bill Clinton hosted Gerry Adams, a leader of a terrorist organization which [killed more than 1,700 people](#) (none of them Americans) over 25 years, at the White House in March 1995.

More people were killed (3) or injured (11) by the [bombing of the Sydney Hilton](#) on 13th February 1978 than have been killed or injured as the result of any terrorist incident that has taken place on Australian soil since then.

Americans' attitude to terrorism changed dramatically after 11th September 2001 – when it was directed at them. And so did ours.

And in so doing, we appear to have lost our sense of perspective.

Given the frequency with which terrorism has been characterized as an 'existential threat', you might be surprised to learn that [more Australians have been killed](#) by snakes (44), dogs (43) and crocodiles (24) over the past 20 years than by terrorists (7). More Australians have died from drowning in their bathtubs (140), or falling out of beds (954), off chairs (467) or ladders (456), than have been killed by terrorists (7). More Australians have been shot by the police or prison guards (116) than have been killed by terrorists (7).

More Australians have been taken their own lives (almost 51,000 over the past 20 years) or been killed by members of their own families (535 in the past six years), or have died as a result of readily preventable diseases, than have been killed by terrorists (7).

We seem to have convinced ourselves that the risk of being killed by a terrorist is close to 100% - and that no price is too great to pay in order to reduce that risk to zero.

And so we have come to accept, seemingly without demur, whatever is dished up in the name of 'security', ranging from myriad petty inconveniences at airports and the barricading of access to the buildings in which our laws are made, through to enormous increases in the budgets of security agencies, and the erosion of some of the liberties (such as freedom from mass surveillance, arrest without warrant, detention without trial, and trials in secret) which we tell ourselves every Anzac Day that our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers risks and gave their lives to defend.

This same inability to calibrate risk, and shape what we're prepared to do to manage it, is also reflected in some of our collective responses to Covid-19.

Covid-19 does pose a much greater threat to our lives than terrorism. Covid has killed [901 people](#) in Australia – as opposed to the 7 people who have been killed as a result of [terrorist incidents](#) in Australia over the past 20 years. It has affected [over 30,000 Australians](#) (and almost [175 million people](#) world-wide).

Most of what governments have done in response to Covid I don't question.

I'm not an epidemiologist nor any kind of 'health expert': and Australia has obviously been well-served by our governments' willingness to be guided by the advice of people who are – unlike the governments of some other countries with which we often compare ourselves.

But when we see governments locking down entire states in response to numbers of cases that other countries would be thrilled to be able to get their case numbers down to, I do rather wonder whether we are again suffering from an inability to measure risks intelligently, and calibrate our responses accordingly.

I worry that some of our political leaders appear to have segued from 'managing' the risks posed by Covid-19, to 'eliminating' them entirely, without having thought about whether the costs of doing so outweigh the benefits.

Or, to put it differently, some people have taken it upon themselves to define what 'success' and 'failure' in this context look like, without thinking through all of the consequences.

Likewise when I see our national government threatening Australian citizens with jail if they seek to return from a country where they have a much more serious risk of catching Covid, and if they do, of dying from it, than they would if they were allowed to return to their country of citizenship; or when our government makes a similar threat against Australians who dare to think of 'escaping' to a third country via the 'travel bubble' we have with New Zealand – then I start to wonder whether we have got our collective priorities right.

Longer term, I worry that governments will come up with purported reasons to maintain the 'mass surveillance' incorporated in the now-compulsory process of 'checking in' to almost every building we visit other than our own and our friends' homes, long after the vast majority of us have been vaccinated.

All of this reminds me that Benjamin Franklin, whom I quoted earlier, [also said](#), on 11th November 1755, “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety”.

My point is that any conversation about ‘success’ and ‘failure’ – including the ones we have with our sons and daughters – ought to encompass a discussion of ‘risk’ – which, done properly, includes measuring it as accurately as possible, and then deciding how much risk we want to accept or take, in as full a knowledge as it’s possible to gain regarding both the consequences of accepting or taking that risk, and of the costs and consequences of whatever steps we might take to mitigate it.

I don’t see how you can properly define ‘success’ or ‘failure’ without doing that.

The world which the boys you are educating (and no less the girls who are being educated by others) will inhabit as adults will see them facing a broader array of risks than their parents or grandparents have confronted during their lifetimes.

It has for some time becoming less likely that a man (or a woman) will work for the same employer throughout his (or her) working life. But it is also becoming less likely that a young person who enters the world of work today, or in the next few years, will work in the same profession, occupation or trade throughout his or her career. The boys you are teaching face a greater risk that the skills they have acquired during their formal education, or in their first jobs, will become redundant at some stage during their working lives.

Young people are now more likely to have to rent their accommodation for a larger part of their lives before being able to buy a home than at any time in the last sixty years. That exposes them to the risks associated with insecure housing tenure to a much greater extent than their parents or grandparents faced.

If they do succeed in becoming home-owners, they will almost certainly be servicing much higher mortgages for longer periods – albeit at lower interest rates – than their parents or grandparents needed to. That confronts them with another set of risks.

Young people are expected to bear a lot more ‘investment risk’ over the course of their entire lifetimes than previous generations have done, because of the shift from defined-benefit to defined-contribution superannuation plans, and the expected constraints on the availability of the age pension.

Outside of the economic sphere, personal relationships are less stable than they once were, exposing young people to an entirely different set of risks.

As young people are themselves already very conscious, they face greater risks arising from climate change than previous generations have done.

And in the age of social media, young people must also be more conscious of ‘reputational risks’ arising from their own actions, and those of others, which were of little moment in the pre-digital age.

In short, the capacity to identify, calibrate, manage and mitigate risk will, I think, be an essential skill for the boys whom you are educating (and no less the girls whom others educating) to navigate the world they are going to inhabit as adults.

I want to conclude with some reflections on the role which luck (or chance, or fortune) has on ‘success’ or ‘failure’.

People who are successful at something – and especially people who are successful at many things – often tend to attribute their success to their own efforts – whether it be study, practice, hard work, training, a willingness to take risks, or some other characteristic.

They may well have done all of those things – success rarely comes without at least some effort – but it is usually not the result of those things alone.

Conversely, people who fail at something – and I think this may be more common in Australia than in other countries or cultures – are more inclined to attribute failure to bad luck (or, if not that, to the government).

I've reflected on this quite a bit as I have learned more about my own life.

I'm the result of a chance encounter, on the 26th April 1957, between a woman who had about four weeks previously left her husband, with whom she had had for the preceding almost eight years what we would call a 'difficult marriage', and who was as a result living with her two young children in her parents' apartment near Heathrow Airport on the western outskirts of London: and a younger man who was training to be a pilot with what eventually became British Airways, who was living with three other trainee pilots in the flat immediately below.

There was a chance that I might not have been born at all.

Certainly, once she became aware of my prospective existence, my biological mother enquired about the options open to her. Her 'preferred option' was, at the time, illegal.

I could instead have been brought up by her.

Thankfully, I wasn't: because she was not what anyone could have called a 'good mother', and certainly wasn't regarded as such by either of the two children she had with her first husband, nor by any of the three she subsequently had with her second – all of whom say that they have been scarred, to varying degrees, by their upbringing.

My biological father was, by all the accounts of people to whom I've spoken who knew him, a thoroughly decent fellow.

It would have been unthinkable in those days – and indeed it was never considered – that he could have brought me up as a single parent: although I suspect he might have made a reasonable fist of it. He would instead have been told, as was customary in those days, to 'forget it ever happened' and 'get on with the rest of his life'.

Which he did. He subsequently married a flight attendant, and had three sons, two of whom also became pilots.

I didn't know any of this until about ten years ago.

I was instead lucky enough to have been adopted by a young Australian couple who had left Australia the day after they got married in January 1951 and who - very much 'against the flow' of those years - went to live in England. At some stage during the 1950s they discovered that they couldn't have children the way that most people do, and so instead ended up adopting four kids, of whom I was one.

They loved the four of us, they gave us a home, in 1966 they brought us back to Australia, to Tasmania, they gave all of us an education, up to university level.

Perhaps God knows how my life might have turned out had it not been for that stroke of good fortune. I certainly don't.

I've also been lucky enough to have chosen an occupation that – although I didn't know it when I chose it – turns out to have been more financially lucrative than many others.

As I've said on other occasions, economists don't save people's lives, like doctors and nurses; we don't invent new devices, or discover new technologies that free people from drudgery, like scientists; and we don't leave things that future generations will look at or listen to, and admire, like artists, musicians and artists.

And most economists don't – as I was lucky enough to – end up working, for a significant part of their working lives, for employers who typically pay well above the average for the sort of work that they do.

So my final observation about 'success' and 'failure' is that a lot of both happen quite serendipitously.

And I think that means that those of us who benefit from 'good luck' or 'fortune' – something which includes having, as I put it earlier, 'chosen our parents well', as almost everyone who attends a school like this one, or the one I attended, has done – have obligations and responsibilities that are greater than those which fall upon those who have not been thus blessed.

One of those obligations is to make 'good choices', whenever you have the possibility of making choices – choices which result in better outcomes for others, as well as for yourself, than the alternatives which you could make.

I can't remember who it was that first said, "character is what you do when you think no-one else is looking".

But I think it's the case that a lot of the choices we make as individuals – including choices which can have profound and lasting consequences – are made when no-one else is looking.

As an aside, I would say that an increasing proportion of the choices our governments make are also made when no-one else is looking – that is, in secret, without any scope for Parliamentary or judicial review – and I for one would say that's regrettable, if not dangerous. But those who make those decisions don't seem to think so.

More importantly, perhaps, one of the most important elements in educating boys – though I should add it's no less important for girls – is to inculcate in them the importance of making 'good choices', whenever they have to make a choice: and to equip them with all that they need in order to make good choices, and with the capacity to recognize when they've made a bad one.

That's not the be-all and end-all of 'success', to be sure. But I suspect that without an awareness of the need to make 'good choices', and the skills to be able to make them, 'success' in other respects will prove elusive, illusory, or both.