SCHOOL SUCCESS REQUIRES GRIT

Former Rockwood Students Author Book for Pupils on How to Be Gritty

Principal Rodney Lewis, a former VICC participant, stands with his Ballwin Elementary School students. He is an award winning educator and co-author of the book, Gritty.

When 35-year-old former VICC participant Rodney Lewis reflects on how far he has come in life, he sometimes shakes his head in disbelief. Raised in a community of violence, drugs and gangs, his low college entrance test scores testified to his strategy of taking the easiest path and putting in the least amount of effort. His poor scores only amplified his recurring feelings of self-doubt. Now flash forward to the present. Lewis holds multiple advanced degrees, authored a book, and has climbed high in the education field. He was named top area school administrator in the Excellence in Education awards sponsored by St. Louis Magazine.

What caused this transformation, you wonder? A lot of soul searching and something called “grit.” Rodney and his twin brother Ron, who also struggled in his early years but went on to make remarkable achievements, document their low points and challenges in their book, titled Gritty, to motivate others. Their thinking is, “If we can do it, you can do it,” and Gritty provides the rationale and how-to’s.

In some education circles, “grit” is considered to be the key to student success. The idea is that passion and persistence are essential characteristics to possess, maybe more so than intelligence or the ability to learn quickly and easily. The Lewis twins contend that grit is absolutely necessary to get ahead, especially for those who grew up in impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods as they did.

The twins’ book gives first generation college students strategies for overcoming adversity and creating success in their lives. They speak from their own experiences as first generation college students, defined by them as being the first in one’s immediate family to attend college and whose parents do not hold college degrees. They use their missteps as teachable moments for young people who share their same background.

Because of their successes, these 1999 graduates of Rockwood’s Lafayette High School have been the topic of past articles where the focus was on their experiences in Rockwood schools which, they say, served them well. They benefited from the diverse population, the rigorous academics and the faculty who bolstered and groomed them. According to Rodney, the academics were such that the young men had “to put in extra work.” This was their early introduction to the concept of grit—a mindset they would struggle with at times but eventually master. They earned not only bachelor’s degrees, but master’s and even doctorate degrees.

Ron is a consultant with PQC (Ft. Wayne, IN). He provides leadership training for the organization’s Midwest clients. Rodney is principal at Ballwin Elementary School in the Rockwood district. In addition to their full-time jobs, they have a consulting business, The Lewis Influence, where they offer inspiration and advice to students.

The Excellence in Education award that Rodney won (first place, “administration” category) from St. Louis Magazine (produced by St. Louis Magazine) recognizes hard work, determination and dedication. Those are the very characteristics he and his brother emphasize in their book. They define “gritty” as having the strength and resilience to overcome obstacles and reach one’s goals. They write, “Grit is believing in yourself when the environment is screaming otherwise. It is never quitting when self-doubt is having a long conversation with you. Grit is believing in the unbelievable and doing the unthinkible.”

While Gritty is targeted to first generation college students, its general principals are useful for anyone and especially young people who could use some impassioned motivation from a couple of guys who have walked in their shoes. Visit the twins’ website to order the book: www.lewflu.com.

The following are words of wisdom, extracted from Gritty, applicable to all students:

Don’t just want something (good grades, a dream job, a slick car); you have to EXPECT that it can become a reality. The stronger the expectation level, the more you will be willing and ready to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

If you are capable of making A’s, don’t settle for B’s or C’s. Opt for “hard and necessary” instead of “easy and convenient.”

You must create good habits (study time, sleep time, powering through challenges, resilience) in order to be successful.

Take ownership of your learning as though your life depended on it (and it does!)

Know your numbers: credit hours, class grades, GPA. Understand where you are and where you need to be.

Don’t blame the teacher for your poor grades. Remember: own your education; it’s not the teacher’s doing, it’s what YOU do.

Look closely at the people you hang with. They should be focused and positive just like you, not people who will negatively drive you down the wrong path. Surround yourself with good people.

If you abuse freedom, you will lose freedom. Make smart decisions. Use your time wisely.

Mental strength is important. Believe in yourself. “If you don’t believe, you can’t achieve.” You will have setbacks (that’s only natural), but what is important is that you dust yourself off and try again…and again… and again.
AFFTON
Affton High School
DeVonte Houser was a determined, hardworking and goal-oriented student athlete. He was voted Homecoming King which attests to how well he led his peers and faculty like and respect him. A standout in football, DeVonte distinguished himself by being a record breaking athlete. He still runs business at Missouri Western University where he will play football.

BAYLES
Bayless High School
Taylor Owens was an exceptional student leader with an outstanding academic record. She was an active member of the Student Council and participated in the Leadership class, both which produced successful events that contributed to the school and community at large. Taylor was part of the Bayless dance team and served as a captain. She led her team to become State Champions in Hip Hop in 2016. A hard working student, Taylor took advanced and college dual credit classes in addition to completing the requirements of the Missouri A+ program. She will enroll Missouri State University to study Physical Therapy.

BRENTWOOD
Brentwood High School
Nigel Benney developed into a man of character and leadership at Brentwood. He is honest, genuine, charismatic and approachable young man, respected by both peers and staff. Striving to make Brentwood High a better place, he actively participated in class leadership, helping to plan events and volunteer opportunities for his classmates. He was a member of the basketball team (four years), baseball team, National Honor Society and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He was offered to attend the Missouri School of the Arts and was a camp counselor and mentor for the middle school’s eighth grade camp. Nigel will attend Washington University (Missouri Scholarship recipient) to study engineering.

CLAYTON
Clayton High School
Chinyere (Chi-Chi) Okereke is an accomplished scholar, obedient citizen and a leader. Chi-Chi is outstanding in the study of languages and culture as much as she loves science and math. Chi-Chi prepared herself for the rigors of a government program in college dual credit classes. She discovered her love of cultural arts and pursued this interest at South County Technical High in her junior and senior years. Tania’s dedication and ambition will serve her well as she plans to continue her studies in the culinary arts at Johnson and Wales University and also enrolled in the Missouri National Guard.

OAKVILLE
Oakville High School
Bright, curious and determined, Sara’Ann Patterson is a synthesizer of a particular excellence in the classroom while following a college preparatory curriculum including honors, college dual credit and AP classes. Sara’Ann’s consistent honor roll performance was a talented and dedicated member of the choir and drama programs. She is active in the Spanish Club and Missouri National Honor Society, plus served as a advisor in the National Honor Society. She volunteered at a local hospital, taking advanced placement courses, and engaging in interests that broadened her horizons. She is a diligent problem solver, motivated by new challenges. She plans to study neuroscience at either Washington University or Duke University.

HANCOCK
Hancock, Place High School
Michaela Smith was very involved in academics, extracurricular and community service. She participated in volleyball and cheerleading, as well as Student Council and school hours welfare committee. Additionally, she served as a teacher’s assistant and student mentor.

The summer, Michaela will move to Texas where she plans to attend Park University and study criminal justice.

KIRKWOOD
Kirkwood High School
Being a former recipient of Kirkwood’s African-American Achievement Award, Tonia Princess challenged herself by taking several honors and college dual credit courses. She discovered her love of culinary arts and pursued this interest at South County Technical High in her junior and senior years. Tania’s dedication and ambition will serve her well as she plans to continue her studies in the culinary arts at Johnson and Wales University and also enrolled in the Missouri National Guard.

LINDBERGH
Lindbergh High School
Performing in the school band while also playing on the football team takes a special kind of student and Brandon Rice was that student. All four years of high school, he played trumpet in the marching band and is the defensive tackle for the Flyers. Despite that grueling commitment, he earned good grades. In the spring time, he participated in track and field. Brandon decided to focus his time on his military and ultimately hopes to become a medical doctor.

MEHLVILLE
Mehlville High School
Donte Hopkins has an insatiable appetite for knowledge as reflected in his many involvements: student leadership, AP classes, the Chess Club, Captain/Council (supporting the Chesterfield Police Department in keeping West drug free and safe), AP/IB (Advanced Placement International Baccalaureate program), and the Superintendent’s Social Justice Leadership Advisory Council. With a future goal of attaining a double degree in Educational Leadership, Donte will attend the University of Missouri to major in elementary education.

ROCKWOOD
Eureka High School
The impressive Amina Muhando was an integral part of the senior group. Amina Regina, participating in student panel for staff and other activities designed to educate the whole student body about racism and diversity. During her four-year participation, she demonstrated outstanding level of self-awareness and modeled how to think critically and also rely on issues of culture and social justice. After being identified for AP classes due to her remarkable and strong work ethic, Amina excelled in approved classes. This honor roll student also excelledartistically, executing her artwork in the school art show and winning the picture competition. A thoughtful leader and wise beyond her years, Amina is a dedication to fellow students and to teaching others about the power of love is an inspiration. Her plans her to study nursing at UMFK.

Lafayette High School
Excelling academically and athletically, Kalena Johnson was a dedicated active member of the school community. She excelled in extracurricular activities, can track, served as a captain her senior year and won a Student of the Month award winner. Kalena is hard-working, determined and creative. She has amazing communication skills and a very caring personality. She engaged in experiences that broadened her understanding of culture and social justice. After Lafayette High School she will go on to attend the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Marquette High School
Coursey Savage was a strong member of the Marquette’s soccer team, both academically and extracurricularly. An active recipient of the Missouri academic achievement award, she ran track for several years and was a Bell Ringer for the Salvation Army. She received the Celebration of Excellence award from Missouri Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. Coursey is headed to UMKC to major in Fashion and Design and Minor in Business Administration.

Rockwood Summit High School
Tia Hall is an outstanding young man and one of the finest student at Summi. She earned a full scholarship to play football at Missouri Western State University where she hopes to study business and then go into real estate. She does not play a contact sport, football in the NFL. She would like to pursue a master’s degree in business well. Tia was awarded the teacher-selected Kelvin Rahn award which recognizes academic and athletic achievement, leadership, community service and volunteer work.

VALLEY PARK
Valley Park High School
The high achieving Cityscapes Griffin maintained excellent grades while taking honors, college dual credit and AP classes. A leader in her class she was an award-winning scholar of Future Leaders of America. She also served as secretary for the National Honor Society, captain of the track team and was involved in other school activities. She was named Multicultural Leadership Scholarship from Missouri State University, and she will continue her education in public relations.

WEBSTER GROVES
Webster Groves High School
Camryn Bouchard demonstrated her strength and endurance both in school and on the track team. She participated in the community service-funded Interact Club as well as Future Leaders and being a gifted athlete, earned a track scholarship to UMFK where she plans to major in pre-pharmacy. She was awarded the Webster Groves Family and Friends Scholarship and also received a scholarship from the high school parents’ club.

Message from the CEO
Certainly, one of the goals of participating in the voluntary interrelated choice programs is to graduate from high school and to pursue higher education at college or technical training in preparation for a career. This issue highlights our outstanding graduates of 2016. We are proud of their hard work and accomplishments and wish them the very best in their future opportunities. As I stated these three, I was struck by a number of the adjectives describing what led to their success. I believe we can learn from these character traits and seek to emulate them as we raise our children. The following descriptions were mentioned multiple times. • Exceptional leader • Hard-working • Strong work ethic • Determined • Active, involved (member of the school community) • Several others • Dedicated

In addition, these are also mentioned:
• Bright • Responsible • Strong • Dedicated • Responsible for knowledge • Self-aware • Critical thinker • Outstanding • Applicable aptitude for leadership • Creative • Enduring

All of these are laudable characteristics and qualities to be cultivated in our children and our community can aspire.

David S. Glaser
dpjj@schoolchoice.org
314.721.4422, ext. 3013
Transportation to and from school is provided by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation. The phone number for the transportation staff is 314.721.8657 for advice. If your child is not at the bus stop a full 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival time and he or she misses the bus, it will be the parents’ responsibility to get the child to school for that day. The transportation office does not send alternative transportation in such instances. For the safety of all children, students must obey general safety rules as those established by the St. Louis Public Schools which publishes a handbook outlining driver, student and parental responsibilities and listing penalties for violations which can include a student being removed from riding the bus either on a temporary or permanent basis. If a bus suspension occurs, it becomes the parents’ responsibility to transport the child to and from school (including activities) for the duration of the suspension.

Parent Responsibilities
Transportation rules may vary depending on the district’s policies. Parents should provide their child with an emergency contact number for the child’s safety. Parents are also responsible for ensuring their child is properly supervised while at the bus stop. Parents must ensure their child arrives at the bus stop at least 10 minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. Parents should also ensure their child knows their bus number and bus stop information. If your child is not at the bus stop a full 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival time and he or she misses the bus, it will be the parents’ responsibility to get the child to school for that day. The transportation office does not send alternative transportation in such instances.

General Safety Rules
• Obey the driver promptly.
• Smoking, eating or drinking is not permitted.
• Remain seated until the bus arrives at your stop.
• Refrain from using loud or obscene language.
• Do not damage the bus/cab in any way.
• Do not throw objects on the bus/cab or out of the windows.
• Do not extend head, arms, legs or hands out of the windows.
• Do not tamper with the emergency door except in the case of a real emergency and only under the instruction of the driver.
• Frightening, scuffling or creating loud disturbances are not permitted.
• Avoid the Danger Zones next to the bus where the driver can’t see you. This distance is approximately 10 feet around all sides.
• If you must cross the street after you get off the bus, wait for the driver to signal you and then cross in front of the bus.
• Don’t try to pick up something dropped near the bus because the driver might not see you.
• Remember that other motorists don’t always stop for a stopped school bus. Use extreme caution when getting on or off the bus.
• Never run back to the bus, even if you dropped or forgot something.

Emergency Communication System
To improve communication with parents regarding transportation and their child’s participation in the Student Transfer Program, the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation uses a telephone broadcast system, similar to the one used in many participating school districts.

EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION
The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) uses the Parentline system, similar to School Messenger, to quickly send all households and parents a pre-recorded message by phone within minutes of a transportation emergency or unplanned event that could significantly delay a child’s pick-up time or drop-off time. These emergencies include traffic jams, bus breakdowns, inclement weather, mechanical failures, etc. The service may also be used from time-to-time to communicate general program announcements or reminders.

Your child’s school will also continue to separately announce school closings due to inclement weather, via the media or through the Parentline system. Additionally, the school may have its own system for communicating closures or delays. This system will be automatically sent to all students’ homes in the event of an emergency. VICC will use the same system to notify families attending the affected schools in addition to making the standard media announcements. For this system to best operate, it is imperative that you keep your phone number up to date. If you are not aware of any future changes in your home and/or cell or alternate/emergency phone numbers.

Transportation Information
School Starts August 17, 2016 for St. Louis Magnet Schools

Ready to Assist Transferring Families
Recruitment Staff
The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) staff is available Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. to assist families with the magnet school application process and to answer general questions about the St. Louis Magnet Schools. Additionally, the recruitment staff can submit parents’ requests for magnet school transportation arrangements. The recruitment staff can often provide answers to specific questions parents may have or help put parents in touch with the individuals who can best answer their questions.

Counseling Staff
The VICC counseling staff also includes five counselors who can assist families with issues related to school transfers. Counselors generally are assigned according to the first letter of the student’s last name. They can be reached by calling 314.721.8422, and dialing their extension number below, or via email.

Recruitment Staff
Lori Merlo, 314.721.8422, ext. 3012
Imelda Scott, 314.721.8422, ext. 3027
Mary Schaefer Meehan, 314.721.8422, ext. 3016

Counseling Staff
A-C Vickie Williams, ext. 3011
D-H Laurne Mitchom, ext. 3020
I-M Jennifer Christy, ext. 3027
O-R Mildred Scott, ext. 3027
S-Z Mary Schaefer Meehan, ext. 3016

School Messenger
To improve communication with parents regarding transportation and their child’s participation in the Student Transfer Program, the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation uses a telephone broadcast system, similar to the ones used in many participating school districts.

This system is provided by School Messenger, allows VICC to quickly send all households and parents a pre-recorded message by phone within minutes of a transportation emergency or unplanned event that could significantly delay a child’s pick-up time or drop-off time. These emergencies include traffic jams, bus breakdowns, inclement weather, mechanical failures, etc. The service may also be used from time-to-time to communicate general program announcements or reminders.

This system will simultaneously call a home and one additional cell phone or alternate number for each school family who needs to be contacted and will deliver a message from Tami Webb, transportation operations manager, or another official with the transfer program. Calls will be delivered to both live (in-person) parents and answering machines. Calls not answered and busy signals will be automatically retried by the system two additional times in 15 minute intervals after the initial call.

Your child’s school will also continue to separately announce school closings due to inclement weather, via the media or through the Parentline system. Additionally, the school may have its own system for communicating closures or delays. This system will be automatically sent to all students’ homes in the event of an emergency. VICC will use the same system to notify families attending the affected schools in addition to making the standard media announcements.

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Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) complies fully with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a law that affords parents and students 18 years of age and older certain rights with respect to the student’s educational records. A copy of the FERPA statement is included in the VICC student handbook, which can be requested by calling 314.721.8422, ext. 3012.

The handbook is also available on the VICC website at www.choicecorp.org. Click on the link for “County Residents Currently Enrolled in City Mag- net Schools,” and then click on “Magnet School Handbook.” The full policy will be published in the next issue of the Parent Link.