

It's Not About the Trophies



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When I was a sophomore in high school, I joined the debate team. I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but from the beginning, I loved the thrill of competition. All of the hard work of practice debates and hours of research paid off when we were at tournaments. I developed a new confidence and a winning attitude.

I will never forget the great pride and exhilaration my partner and I experienced as we accepted the first place trophy in the city-wide novice debate competition. It was near the end of my sophomore year, so I was able to admire the trophy in our school trophy case for the remainder of my high school career.

Imagine my surprise when, years later at a high school reunion, I discovered that this treasured prize was nowhere to be found. Our small, all-girl Catholic high school had merged with a nearby all-boy school and our trophies had disappeared.

Trophies are important, don't get me wrong. Being awarded that symbol of victory was thrilling. And carrying it back to school for the trophy case filled us with pride.

However, I have come to realize that more important than any token, and even more important than winning, I had received many, more enduring gifts from participating in debate and speech tournaments.

I learned to do solid research. Regardless of what path you take in life, no matter where you stand on any given issue, learning how to read, digest information, and formulate your own opinions is a valuable skill.

I learned how to disagree without being disagreeable. The job of a good debater is to present a convincing and persuasive argument in a civilized and organized way.

I learned to stand up and be heard. Confidence in many instances, won the round.

I learned to work with a team. My partner and I were a team. Our school club was a team. The year we won the novice championship, a team from our school made it all the way to nationals. We traveled together, studied together, did research together, and practiced together. We supported each other whether we won or lost.

And today I know that it is not about the trophies. It is not even about winning. It is about suiting up and showing up. It is about stretching your brain and developing your speaking skills. It is about finding your voice; for once you have found your voice – a prize which will never be lost!

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