



# STUDY GUIDE

## TROPHIES ARE FOR WINNING

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**KEY TERMS:** competition  
work

winner  
best

accomplishment  
success

<b>NOTE-TAKING COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <u>during</u> the video. Include definitions and key terms.	<b>CUE COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <u>after</u> the video.
<p>What drove Mr. Jones nuts, and drove him to practice more and work harder when he made the UCLA team?</p> <p>According to Mr. Jones, what is the road to victory paved with?</p> <p>How many times did the LA Galaxy lose a championship game before finally winning one?</p>	<p>Why are participation trophies bad?</p> <p>What lessons did Mr. Jones learn from his failures?</p>

## DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Jones states, “Participation trophies. I’m not a fan. They’re bad for kids. Bad for parents. Bad for society.” In what ways could participation trophies be bad for kids, parents, and society? Explain. Do you agree with Mr. Jones’ point? Why or why not?
- Mr. Jones goes on to lament that, “...today, kids get a different message. Losing? No big deal. Showing up? That deserves a trophy.” Why do you think that kids today get a different message than the one Mr. Jones got when he was a kid? What do you think are the motivating factors behind the new message? Explain.
- Later in the video, Mr. Jones explains that, “This belief – that just showing up is an accomplishment – is self-destructive. Because the pain of losing is part of what drives one to improve.” What might the long-term consequences for young people be of the message ‘showing up is an accomplishment?’ Do you agree with sending this message to young people? Why or why not?
- Mr. Jones later points out that, “In the real world, you’re rewarded for achievement, not effort. Promotions don’t go to the employees who did their best. They go to the employees who did the best.” Why is this difference of ‘doing your best’ versus ‘doing the best’ such an important distinction? Explain. Do you agree with Mr. Jones’ supposition that participation and performance in sports activities at a young age are reasonably analogous to the ‘real world’ later on? Why or why not?
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Jones asks, “But what if the kids can’t handle losing? What if it’s too painful? That’s the whole point. It’s your job as the adult, as the parent, to help them understand that losing – that not getting what they want – is a part of life. Nobody likes to fail, but it’s inevitable and it’s the only path, ultimately, to success.” In what ways could a parent help a child to understand and to cope with the reality of losing and ‘not always getting what you want?’ Do you agree that it’s the parent’s responsibility to do that? Why or why not? Why do you think that so many adults have such a difficult time facing young people whose feelings have been hurt by loss or failure, and have such a difficult time teaching young people to deal with those hurt feelings?

## EXTEND THE LEARNING:

### CASE STUDY: Benjamin Sledge

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “How Participation Trophies Created a Purposeless Generation,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What does the author claim has ‘...created a subconscious sense of entitlement?’ What does the author state the people in his army platoon didn’t know how to deal with? What did the author and his brother do with the ‘lesson in resiliency’ and ‘mental grit’ that they developed? What is a eucatastrophe? What is a dyscatastrophe? What was the important side effect of the author’s friend cultivating resiliency? What is the last important point that the author makes at the end of the article?
- What problems are parents who advocate for participation trophies trying to avoid? Do you think that teaching people how to cope well with losing and failing is better for them than pacifying their feelings would be? Why or why not?
- Which points made in the video are supported by the points in the article, if any? Explain. What are some common traits, qualities, and values that the presenter of the video and the author of the article both promote, in terms of learning to better one’s self?



# QUIZ

## TROPHIES ARE FOR WINNING

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- 1. The road to victory is paved with \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a. losses
  - b. gold
  - c. winning
  - d. money
  
- 2. How did Mr. Jones get to be a starter on the UCLA soccer team?**
  - a. He sat on the bench and waited.
  - b. His parents knew the coach.
  - c. He pushed himself to be better.
  - d. He never got the chance to start a game.
  
- 3. What are kids told today?**
  - a. If you don't put in the work, you won't get ahead.
  - b. You're rewarded for achievement, not effort.
  - c. Nobody likes to fail, but it's inevitable.
  - d. You're a winner even if you come in last.
  
- 4. Who are participation trophies good for?**
  - a. Kids
  - b. Parents
  - c. Society
  - d. None of the above.
  
- 5. The pain of losing is part of what drives one to improve.**
  - a. True
  - b. False



# QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<https://medium.com/personal-growth/how-participation-trophies-created-a-purposeless-generation-5da047955e8>



Benjamin Sledge

Storyteller | Veteran | Creative Liar | Designer. I bleed stories about my own shortcomings and adventures.

<http://heartsupport.com>

Dec 13, 2016



## How Participation Trophies Created a Purposeless Generation

Sitting in the bleachers wearing my bright orange uniform, I examined the trophy in my hand. The small gold man was taking aim to shoot a basket. The design was simple and only the name of my basketball team — The Cowboys — had been engraved at the base. My brother and I sat perplexed, both examining our trophies. Just moments prior, we had dribbled across the court floor only to be pronounced dead last in our league. Our season record was one win, followed by a string of humiliating losses.

Sensing our disappointment during the car ride home, my parents decided to pull in at our favorite pizza joint to lift our spirits.

“Mom?” I said before getting out of the car. “I don’t wanna play basketball anymore.”

When we got home, I put the trophy on my shelf along with my other 1st and 2nd place trophies for karate and soccer, but it felt wrong. The first couple karate tournaments I ever competed in were a disaster. I lost every single fight and got beat up pretty bad. I even spent some time crying in the bathroom. After such a monumental beatdown, I resolved to train harder and win the next time. But I lost in the following tournament too. Eventually, after a year of training, I emerged victorious. I would take home third place and a black eye to prove it. And yet, here stood this basketball trophy silently proclaiming loss after loss, but somehow worthy to sit on the same shelf.

A few days after receiving my participation trophy, my brother and I said nothing and removed it from our shelves. We put it in a cupboard where it remained for almost a decade, until I discovered it after coming home for Christmas, and promptly threw it in the trash.

Just like me, many in this generation grew up with participation trophies. But for all the so-called “positive reinforcement” they received growing up for simply “trying,” many feel completely lost or purposeless despite the amount trophies they won. Post-college they entered an economy in decline and discovered that even the entry level jobs pay less than what their counterparts made during the dot-com boom (in 1998, the average college graduate could expect an entry level salary of \$40,387).

“Follow your dreams!” was the mantra chanted while growing up. Under the tutelage of Steve Jobs, we were encouraged to pick careers we were passionate about or nothing at all. We believed that the American Dream was attainable. Just work hard and get an education, right?

However, in the midst of an era of self-help books and feel-good media personalities, we also harnessed the power of technology and speed. As such, we are now a culture built on speed. When the iPhone was first released, people were amazed we could have internet on our phone. Edge satellite internet service was entirely suitable for our needs back then. But how many of us will now abandon a web page if it takes more than a few seconds to load? And if our phone ends up on the dreaded Edge network instead of LTE? Forget it. Your phone is worthless. *Didn’t get that packaged delivered in 2 days as promised by Amazon Prime?* Now I want my money back.



PC Load Letter? What the !@%# does that mean!?

Because of this conditioning and almost two decades of participation trophies, it's created a subconscious sense of entitlement and a belief that what we want/deserve should be delivered at lightening speed.

Is it any wonder then that we have hoards of people completely dissatisfied with their lives? What can be done?

## **The Resilient Spirit**

The first thing my drill sergeant told our platoon when I joined the Army was:

“None of you are special snowflakes. You are all worthless turds. I don't care if your daddy was Rockefeller. We will rebuild you and turn you into a polished turd.”

My platoon did indeed consist of the wealthy. But it also consisted of the working poor, gangbangers, the middle class, and borderline criminals. My drill sergeants were correct, though. Many of us hadn't learned the lessons necessary to handle what was about to be thrown at us. We didn't know how to deal with disappointment, failure, and suffering. Especially when it happened long term and repeatedly.

On one particular occasion, we spent an entire day being hoarded in and out of classrooms. Once in the classroom, we would scream Army creeds at the top of our lungs. Without fail, a drill sergeant would claim someone wasn't loud enough or they had caught a soldier not participating. *Who were these assholes?* we wondered as eyes darted around the room in exacerbation. Everyone would then file out of the class and be forced to exercise until someone puked or passed out. Then it'd start all over again.

People quit after that day.



Sometimes it was sand...with fire ants.



This routine continued for days on end, until the platoons thinned out. Even then the absurd punishment lingered until the day we graduated. Eventually, most of us got used to it and even managed to get some good laughs in the midst of suffering. We had learned to recover from misfortune, failure, and disruptive change in our lives.

This lesson in resiliency, along with what I learned from my parents, would help my brother and I only further develop mental grit. When we got defeated, we trained more. When we failed a test, we studied harder. When we got turned down for jobs, we kept looking or took low-paying entry level positions to build experience. It 100% sucked. It wasn't fair all the time. But we learned not to waste even the worst catastrophe.

## The Eucatastrophe

In JRR Tolkien's short essay entitled "On Fairy Stories," he coined a term entitled "eucatastrophe," meaning a sudden turn in an unhappy story to result in a favorable one. He says the following:

The joy of the happy ending...is not essentially "escapist," nor "fugitive." ... It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance [eucatastrophe]; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat...giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief...When the sudden "turn" comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam [of hope] come through.

For many that got participation trophies growing up, we never experienced the *dyscatastrophe* (sorrow and failure). We still won, even though we had lost. Now that we're in the real world, you don't get trophies for trying or jobs because you have a degree. If you lose enough you get fired (Texas head coach Charlie Strong discovered that). You don't get the girl or the boy because you swiped right either. It takes time, perseverance, and resiliency. Because we believe we cannot face the *dyscatastrophe* or have been wandering in it for longer than anticipated, we give up. Our lives lose that intrinsic value and the human spirit hard wired for the *eucatastrophe*. We want the happy ending. We're just not willing to work to get there or suffer unjustly to have it happen. Oh, and it better happen now..because things that lag are worth giving up on.

## Passion and Low Paying Jobs

A few months ago, I met a friend at an absurd hour at a local coffee shop. We were the only ones in the shop except for one other person. It happened to be another friend I knew who had recently graduated from college. When I asked him what he was doing up so early in the morning he told me:

"I get up early most mornings to work on my passions. I can usually get in about 2-3 hours before I leave for work. I don't really like my job, but it pays the bills, and I still get to come home feeling full at the end of the day."

Needless to say, my jaw dropped. Here was your average college graduate shirking the norm to cultivate resiliency and the side effect was worth and purpose. Like others in the participation trophy era, my friend got a low paying job out of college. But instead of waiting for an opportunity to fall in his lap, he was creating it. He went on to share he hears "no" and fails pretty often. It just makes him work harder and get up earlier.



It's no major revelation that many of us are displeased with the state of the world and our economic prospects. Some of this is rightly so. However, some of this we have reaped on ourselves in the name of comfort. Without the dyscatastrophe, we cannot experience the joy of the "turn" in an otherwise bleak story. We cannot learn from our mistakes if we keep getting handed trophies when we've lost. It sets us up for disappointment. We begin to believe maybe we really are a failure when we've won so much in the past. Sadly, many adults today are just now experiencing this reality instead of learning how to grow in the midst of hardship and the patience necessary to thrive and develop.

The human spirit is hard-wired to be resilient. If we begin to use these trying times to mature in the midst of hardship, many of us will discover the meaning we so desperately crave.

Hell, we might just find the eucatastrophe in the middle of a job we hate.