

DO HARD THINGS: DISCLAIMER(S)

Do Hard Things

A teenage rebellion against low expectations

© 2008 by Alex Harris & Brett Harris

On sale April 15, 2008

This is an uncorrected proof. Please note that any quotes for reviews must be checked against the finished book. Dates, prices, and manufacturing details are subject to change or cancellation without notice.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Excerpted from *Do Hard Things*

Copyright © 2008 by Alex Harris and Brett Harris

Used by permission of WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group, Colorado Springs, CO

All rights reserved.

DO **HARD** THINGS: TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Part I: Rethinking the Teen Years

Chapter 1. Most People Don't...

A different kind of teen book

Chapter 2. The Birth of a Big Idea

Rumblings of a rebellion

Chapter 3. The Myth of Adolescence

Exposing the low expectations that are robbing our generation

Chapter 4. Purpose and Potential

Reclaiming the teen years as the launching pad of life

Part II: Five Kinds of Hard

Chapter 5. That First, Scary Step

How to do hard things that take you outside your comfort zone

Chapter 6. Raising the Bar

How to do hard things that go beyond what's expected or required

Chapter 7. The Power of Collaboration

How to do hard things that are too big for you to do alone

Chapter 8. Small Hard Things

How to do hard things that don't pay off immediately

Chapter 9. Taking a Stand

How to do hard things that go against the crowd

DO **HARD** THINGS: TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part III: Join the Rebelution

Chapter 10. Generation Rising

Creating a counterculture from scratch (and a dash of salt)

Chapter 11. A Thousand Young Heroes

Stories of new beginnings, impossible challenges & the teens who are living them

Chapter 12. World, Meet Your Rebelutionaries

Transforming your mission from a decision into a destiny

Notes

Acknowledgments

Contact the Authors

This is an uncorrected proof. Excerpted from Do Hard Things, © 2008 by Alex Harris & Brett Harris. Used by permission.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form. WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group.

Chapter 4

Purpose and Potential

Reclaiming the teen years as the launching of life

Raymond is eighteen years old and lives in Baltimore, Maryland. His parents divorced when he was fourteen and Raymond is involved in everything you can think of: smoking, drinking, drugs—even drug dealing. He moves from house to house, crashing with various friends, and has struggled to hold even the most basic jobs.

When he looks at the direction his life has taken, he expresses regret. “When I first went to high school my understanding was like, ‘Wow, this is the time to party. It’s high school, and everybody’s supposed to party in high school.’ But I don’t know,” he says. “I wish I wouldn’t have thought that.”

Raymond insists that he’s not going to do drugs forever. He plans to sober up, get his GED, and move on with life. Someday he hopes to own a car dealership and sell BMWs. To help keep his dream alive, he subscribes to *Dupont Registry*, a magazine about luxury cars, houses, and boats. When he’s older, he plans to go to church more, too.

“I think about my future a few times a week,” he says. “What do I want to do with my life? Do I want to sit around and be a pothead all my life?” Heck no, he says.

And so why not change now?

“I don’t know,” Raymond replies. “I’ve thought about it, but I kinda look at this as the summer to have fun and party. I’m eighteen, and since I don’t live under my mom’s roof, I can be out as long as I want. So I’m like, ‘This will be a summer for fun, I’m gonna party and have fun this summer.’ Then after that I just want to sober up and be clean and get my life together and straighten up.”

“But I don’t want the future to get here too quick,” he adds. “I still want to be able to live life and have fun.”

There’s probably a little bit of Raymond in all of us. Do you see him in you or in people you know? His views reflect the thinking of so many in our generation. Like many teens, he figures that he has plenty of time. At any point in the future, he can decide to clean up, grow up, and pick up his life as if nothing happened.

But is he right about that?

Is it really as simple as flipping a switch, or is Raymond in for a rude awakening? Will he go down as one of those guys who thought he was getting what he wanted out of life, only to realize he was actually wasting his teen years and putting his future at risk?

In this chapter, we’ll take a quick look at a whole group of people like Raymond. In fact, we’ll even give them a name. Then we’ll show you the huge opportunities they’re missing out on. But just to warn you: we’re going to use words Raymond probably wouldn’t like. Because we describe these huge opportunities as five kinds of hard things that have the power to launch us from where we are now to our best possible future.

But first, what do we mean when we talk about being launched?

Failure to Launch

We took swimming lessons when we were kids, but growing up in the rainy Pacific Northwest, we didn’t really swim a whole lot. In other words, don’t

expect us to demonstrate any nifty strokes or perform crazy flips off the high dive. It's not happening.

One thing we did learn, though, was that diving boards have a "sweet spot." If you take a big leap and land on it just right, the diving board will launch you up into the air and down into the pool in a perfect swan dive. You hope. Of course, if you miss the sweet spot, things don't work out so well. Your body jolts, the board clunks, and you bounce, teeter, and careen into the water. You may even do a belly flop. In fact, if someone is watching, you're guaranteed to do a belly flop.

But back to the big picture. Do you see it?

The pool is your future life. The diving board is your present life. The Myth of Adolescence would have you think that now is your time to party beside the pool. But the fact is you're already on the diving board.

The whole purpose of the diving board is to launch us, with purpose and precision, into our futures. We will either make a successful dive into adulthood, or deliver something closer to a belly flop—a failure to launch.

In his book *Thoughts For Young Men*, J.C. Ryle wrote, "Youth is the seed-time of full age, the molding season in the little space of human life, the turning-point in the history of man's mind." In other words, what each of us will become later in life largely depends on what we become now. Are we taking that seriously?

1 Corinthians 9:24-25, the Apostle Paul writes, "Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training (emphasis added). They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (NIV).

We are convinced that the teen years are the primary time God has given to us for "strict training." We can hear Raymond saying, "Strict training! You've got to be kidding!" But stick with us.

In Proverbs 20:29 it says, "The glory of young men is their strength."

Did you catch that? At no other time are we better positioned to decide who we will become. Our strength—sharp minds, energetic bodies, and flexible schedules—is our glory. We are not likely to have this same set of strengths ever again. By choosing to use our teen years for strict training, we can choose to set direction, develop character, and build momentum for an amazing future.

But what happens when we fail to use our teen years for strict training? What does a “belly flop” look like in real life? Unfortunately, it’s not too hard to find out.

The Rise of the Kidult

In 2005, *TIME Magazine* ran a story on “kidults,” a new breed of adolescents in their mid- to late-twenties and beyond, who offer convincing evidence that the modern concept of adolescence is not a biological stage, but a cultural mindset. It doesn’t stop when you graduate from high school, or when you turn twenty-one.

“Everybody knows a few of them,” the article pronounced. “Full-grown men and women who still live with their parents, who dress and talk and party as they did in their teens, hopping from job to job and date to date, having fun but seemingly going nowhere.”

Kidults generally have neither clear direction nor a sense of urgency. “Legally, they’re adults, but they’re on the threshold, the doorway to adulthood, and they’re not going through it,” says Terri Apter, a psychologist at the University of Cambridge. In other words, they’re standing on the end of the diving board, but they won’t jump in.

And it’s not just in America. Countries around the world have developed names for young “adults” like this: they are called “Kippers” in England, “Nesthockers” in Germany, “Mammones” in France, and “Freeters” in Japan.

“This isn’t just a trend, a temporary fad or a generational hiccup,” the article warns. “This is much a larger phenomenon, of a different kind and a different order.”

But we shouldn’t be surprised. After all, kidults are the logical result of the Myth of Adolescence, which encourages teens to view adulthood as spoiling the fun of the teen years, rather than viewing it as the fulfillment of the teen years.

Being taught to avoid growing up doesn’t help us launch into adulthood. At best, it leaves us hanging on the end of the diving board—stuck in the childishness and irresponsibility of adolescence. At worst, it leaves us floundering in the deep end of the pool—unprepared for the exciting challenges of life.

We received this email in July of 2007, but it represents many conversations we’ve had with people in their twenties, even early thirties:

I had my own idea of fun, which was too much recreational reading, too much playing video games, too much of my own thing. To this day, I’ve never held a job, and I’m still living at home. My lack of real life skills has had some very negative consequences to a relationship that is very important to me.

When I was a teenager, 26 seemed like so far away, but my bad decisions then (to do nothing) are affecting my life now in some pretty serious ways.

I’m an example of how low expectations and our “if it’s fun, do it” culture can mess things up, and I’m living proof (as are the others out there like me—still living at home, doing very little but still dreaming big) that adolescence truly can be extended past the teen years.

Kidults are a tragic example of the Myth of Adolescence in action. And the consequences aren't limited to your teen years. After we shared Raymond's story at a conference in Indianapolis, a man (probably in his mid- to late-forties) approached us. With tears in his eyes, he told us, "I'm Raymond. That story you told is exactly who I was."

He explained how he had done well in school when he was a teenager. His high school had a three-class structure for each grade and he was in the top class every year. Because school was going so well, he thought he was free to party and experiment with drugs. But more than twenty years have passed, and he's still struggling with the repercussions.

"I thought the teen years were my time to party," he said. "And I've been paying the price ever since. I don't want teens today to make the same mistake."

The good news is, we don't have to! As we saw in the last chapter, what is "normal" today is actually a cruel exception—a myth. The teen years have not always been thought of as a time to waste, and teens haven't always been ripped off by low expectations. But at the same time, there is hope, even for kidults. As we encouraged that man in Indianapolis: It is never too late to start doing hard things. William Wilberforce, one of the greatest rebelutionary examples who ever lived, wasted the first 25 years of his life on parties and social extravagance. And yet he went on to be the unrelenting force behind the abolition and emancipation of slaves throughout the British Empire.

How did he do it? First, God broke through and changed his heart. Immediately, Wilberforce was filled with a profound sense of regret, bemoaning the "shapeless idleness" of his past and "the most valuable years of life wasted, and opportunities lost, which can never be recovered." But second, Wilberforce chose to do hard things. He threw himself into study and serious work. For over forty years he fought against slavery in the British Em-

pire, and through his unwavering efforts, saw it abolished shortly before his death. Few men have left a greater mark on history.

So there is good news. God offers grace and redemption to those with wasted pasts. But let us never presume upon God's grace by wasting even a minute of what Wilberforce rightly called "the most valuable years of life."

The Genius of Hard Things

Remember George, David, and Clarissa from previous chapter? We left George as official surveyor of Culpepper County at age seventeen. David was in charge of a prize ship at age twelve, calmly keeping an unruly captain under control. Clarissa was nursing smallpox patients and overseeing a classroom of students at seventeen. Each of them clearly used their teen years to train and to launch. How did it serve them?

After three years as surveyor in Virginia, the governor appointed George to the state militia as a major, a high rank. Then, when word came that the French were entering Ohio territory, George was ordered to lead a mid-winter expedition over hundreds of miles to assess their strength and to warn them to leave—which he successfully did.

By age twenty-two, George had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and by age twenty-three, he was Commander in Chief of the entire Virginia militia. You may have heard of what he did later in life, too. Exactly twenty years later, George became the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, later becoming the first President of the United States—George Washington.

Dave's full name was David Farragut, the U.S. Navy's very first Admiral and hero during the Civil War. His courage in the face of heavy enemy fire in the battle of Mobile Bay won him lasting fame—but it was far from his first act of bravery. He had prepared for that moment ever since his childhood days as a cadet on the Essex.

Clarissa is better known as Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. Her desire to serve others started when she was eleven years old caring for her brother David, and it only grew from there—to the sick in her village, to the children at the school where she taught, to thousands of wounded men in the Civil War, and later to millions through the American Red Cross.

There's a reason we still know the names and stories of men and women like George Washington, David Farragut, and Clara Barton. They invested their teen years in a way that shaped them into the history makers they later became.

Most of you probably weren't surprised to hear how George, David, and Clarissa turned out. That's because, inside, all of us know that the teen years aren't some mystical period disconnected from the rest of our lives. For good or for bad, they will launch us into the future—our future.

In the stories of George, David, and Clarissa we see that embracing responsibility and challenges in their teen years was genius. Why genius? Because doing hard things as teens prepared them for lives of incredible impact—lives that came with additional hard things that they wouldn't have been able to accomplish otherwise.

We need to be honest with ourselves. Is how we're spending our time right now preparing us for what we hope to become in the future? Are we doing things now that will equip us for greater things God may have for us to do? These are the fundamental questions for this season of our lives.

A historian once wrote that George Washington "became the man he strove to be." That statement is not only true of Washington; it's also true about us. We will all become the men and women we strive (or don't strive) to be.

George, Dave, and Clarissa put into practice advice from the Old Testament: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lamenta-

tions 3:27). As young people they made a habit of overcoming obstacles—forging the determination and character that empowered them for the rest of their lives. Again, that shouldn't surprise us. After all, that's how effort works. That's the genius of choosing to do hard things.

Let's close off this chapter by looking at what we mean by “do hard things.”

Five Kinds of Hard

We call the following five categories the “Five Kinds of Hard.” They aren't secret, mystical or helpful just to some—or even just to teens. They're God-given opportunities powered by God-given principles that work for everybody. If we launch into these opportunities now, we'll see powerful results—both now and in our future.

The examples we cite under each category are just that—examples. They are not intended to exhaustively define “hard things” for you, but rather give you a picture of the incredible variety of hard things available for us to do.

So here we go. Five different kinds of hard things:

1.) Things that are **outside your comfort zone**. This could include activities like public speaking, learning a new skill or expanding an old one, traveling to new places, and meeting new people. Anything that takes you outside of the rut of your normal day-to-day, week-to-week activities would fall into this category. These actions can challenge us because they are unfamiliar or even scary, but they usually end up being some of our greatest memories and they always end up growing our comfort zone for the future.

2.) Things that go **beyond what is expected or required**. For example, say you only need a C to pass a class, but you aim for an A+. You are not content to “do no harm”—you purpose to do good. You might volunteer to clean up after the church breakfast, stay late at work without pay to help a friend finish a job, or perform household chores you aren’t even assigned. These actions are hard because they rest entirely on our own initiative. No one else will make us do them. Because of this, they are almost always the accomplishments that we feel best about.

3.) Things that are **too big to accomplish alone**. These are usually big projects like organizing a rally, making a film, forming a teen ministry to the homeless, changing your school’s policy on a key issue, campaigning to get a shock jock off the air, or starting a band. They could also include really big causes like fighting modern day slavery, abortion, or poverty and AIDS in Africa. We are passionate about them because God has placed them on our hearts. In order to be effective in these kinds of projects we must be able to share our passion with others and recruit them to work alongside us.

4.) Things that **don’t earn an immediate pay off**. These are tasks like fighting sin, working out, doing your schoolwork, and obeying your parents. They are hard because you won’t see much progress from one day to the next and because, especially at the time, it can seem like you’d be happier if you didn’t do them. Also, these are often tasks that no one else sees and that don’t win you recognition or praise—things like

being faithful in your spiritual disciplines, expending energy on good study habits, or driving the speed limit (even when you're late). But you do them because they are right, not because they have an immediate payoff. In every case you will be better off long-term, even though the things are "hard" or distasteful in the short-term.

5.) Things that **challenge the cultural norm**. These choices go against the flow—dressing modestly, saying "no" to pre-marital sex, holding unpopular positions on issues like homosexuality and abortion, refusing to watch R-rated movies, sharing the gospel with others, or living as an obvious Christian. These choices are hard because they can cost you popularity and friendships. In some countries they could cost you your life. In order to accomplish things in this category, we have to care more about pleasing God than we do about pleasing people around us. But the payoff is huge: If we do them, we can change the course of history.

Starting next chapter we'll be going in-depth with each of these categories. We'll help you overcome common obstacles that stand between you and the accomplishment of these hard things. And we'll show you how teens around the world are attempting and accomplishing hard and exciting things for God.

You'll meet a fifteen-year-old girl whose small idea launched an online project impacting thousands of people around the world; a fifteen-year-old guy who raised over \$20,000 with a group of four friends to provide clean water for children in Africa; a seventeen-year-old who heads a Grammy-nominated band; and many other teens leading rebelutionary lives at home,

at school, at church, and in their communities. These young people are rebelling against low expectations by choosing to get every possible benefit out their teen years in creative, responsible, and highly effective ways.

As you read through the five categories, you probably thought of some hard things you've already done. If so, we're asking you to throw yourself into doing these things with a new level of passion because they are unique challenges God has prepared for you—because it's what you were made to do. We're asking you to live, not your easiest life, but your best life according to God.

Five simple but power-packed choices help make that possible. That's what we want to look at in more detail next.