Letters

LETTERS

When ambition outruns character

We are raising a very ambitious generation. That is not a weakness. Our children want to excel. They want to lead. They want to achieve more than we did. Parents sacrifice greatly to give them better schools, wider exposure, and brighter futures. Society applauds achievement. Schools celebrate distinctions. Universities reward innovation. But in the race to succeed, one important question must not be ignored: What happens when ambition grows faster than character? We are sending our children back to school in Senior One and Senior Five. Soon, we will be preparing others for higher institutions of learning.

However, I want us to keep reflecting on our parenting journey and the nation we are building. What kind of society are we becoming? And more personally, what kind of adults are we preparing in our homes? Moments of joy can steer good memories, but moments of grief have a way of slowing us down.

Ambition is powerful. It motivates children to work hard and dream boldly. But ambition alone does not teach empathy. It does not automatically produce integrity. It does not cultivate restraint. A child can be intelligent and still lack compassion. A young adult can be strategic and still lack moral boundaries. A professional can be accomplished and yet lack conscience.

Many homes unintentionally communicate that winning is everything. We compare siblings. We measure children against peers. We speak of success as if it were the ultimate proof of good parenting. In such an environment, children may begin to believe that falling behind is equivalent to failing in life. When pressure intensifies, some young people learn to hide mistakes rather than admit them. They may compete harshly instead of collaborating kindly.

If integrity is not intentionally elevated above applause, ambition can slowly detach from responsibility. Decisions do not end with the individual who makes them. They echo into families, into communities, and sometimes into the lives of children who must carry consequences they did not create. Let us calm down and teach children to value life more than winning all the time.

Character is rarely built on graduation day. It is formed quietly, in ordinary family interactions. It grows when a child tells the truth, even when it is uncomfortable. It deepens when parents model honesty in small matters like finances. It strengthens when children see adults apologise and take responsibility for mistakes.

Parents must go beyond correction and enter conversation. When children lie, we should not only "punish" but also discuss trust. When siblings quarrel, we should not merely separate them but help them understand each other's hurt.

Our education system does an excellent job of sharpening intellect. It trains analytical thinkers and competitive achievers. But intellect without conviction can be misdirected. History consistently shows that intelligence alone does not prevent harm.

The goal of parenting and education should not simply be to produce capable individuals, but safe human beings. Children must understand that success without integrity is fragile. Influence without empathy is destructive. Achievement without conscience eventually collapses. We must raise children who ask not only, "How far can I go?" but also, "Should I go there?"

Balancing ambition and character requires deliberate effort. We must redefine success in our homes. Celebrate honesty as loudly as high grades. Applaud kindness as visibly as competition wins. Let children see that character earns approval, not just performance. We must model restraint. Children observe how we speak about others, how we handle conflict, and how we respond to temptation. If they see us compromise values for convenience, they learn that ambition justifies shortcuts.

We must teach long-term thinking. Every decision carries consequences beyond the present moment. Helping children imagine the ripple effects of their choices even in adulthood strengthens their conscience. It trains them to consider not only personal gain but collective impact.

Every generation reflects what it was taught to value. If we prioritise speed over depth, results over integrity, and recognition over responsibility, we should not be surprised when imbalance appears. But if we anchor ambition in moral clarity, we raise adults who are both capable and compassionate.

As we pursue excellence for our children, may we not neglect the deeper work of shaping their hearts. Ambition is a gift. Character is a safeguard. One without the other is incomplete. The responsibility rests with us.

Dickson Tumuramye,
tumudickson@gmail.com

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