

An Investor Scholarship Program

Harry Strachan, January 4, 2021

There were twelve cousins in the third generation of the Strachan Roberts Clan, my five Strachan Walker brothers and sisters and my six Robert Strachan cousins. These siblings and cousins generated in the 4th generation gave me over 30 nephews and nieces.

Around 1995 with many of them going off to college, I decided to set up partial scholarships for each of them that met the qualifications, one of which was following a college level course of study likely to help them realize their full potential.

The total potential scholarship of \$20,000 was divided by the number of semester or quarters of the 4 year program. My rules for the scholarship made it clear that I was an investor not philanthropist. To earn the scholarship, each nephew/niece sent me their plan for the coming semester. This included the courses they'd be taking but a lot more, what they planned by way of work to help pay for school, their extracurricular activities including social service, what their plan was for exercise and sports, and what activities for fun and a good social life..

At the end of each semester they had to send me a report of their grades and their actual vs planned activities in order for the scholarship to be renewed. With the report they'd send the plan for the coming trimester and I'd renew or suspend the scholarship depending on how things had gone.

Often, we'd review the plan together by phone or in person and they would ask for feedback. If I felt they weren't taking their work seriously, we'd discuss what was happening and the problems. In two cases I decided to suspend the scholarship. If they were doing well, I praised them and even created a way they could earn 120% of the scholarship in the next semester by betting on their grades.

In a family of many doting uncles and aunts, I feared I was the "hard ass." I was not shy telling them "*You are a Strachan, you have inherited good genes and much talent. You know you are not living up to your potential. If by next semester you haven't ..., I am taking it away.*" I also tried to be lavish with praise when they exceeded their and my expectations, and always remained positive about their potential.

To my surprise many continued bring me their plans long after the scholarship had ended using me for a sounding board. In this way I developed a close personal relation that still exists as they have entered mid-age and successful careers. Several later told me that

they experienced my high expectations for them as an honest belief in their capacity. My willingness to engage felt to them like “real” love.

During those years there were time when I thought, “*Harry, look at all the work you have created for yourself, reading plans and reports and having meetings. You should just have given the scholarship and let your secretary send the checks.*” In hindsight, though, that investment of time has paid huge dividends in positive family relations.

Several good friends have tried this “investor-oriented” approach to scholarships with their children or relatives and found it useful. I recommend it under the appropriate conditions.