

I think intelligence is a really tough thing to define. My mother considers me “a smart cookie.” That being said, I can assure you that I am astoundingly unintelligent in a number of ways. I would say my main, recurrent source of stupidity happens at least three times every day, where, almost miraculously, I sip my coffee too early every single meal, effectively murdering all of the taste buds in my mouth. Sometimes, I can literally hear them weeping. It would be difficult to define this fruitless act of self-mutilation as intelligent, even by the very loosest of standards.

But I do I think that intelligence is really tough to define. I think intelligence comes in a lot of different flavors. And, I think that oftentimes we are too quick to put what’s we think is smart in a box. I think that we like to say, “Oh, he reads a lot, so he’s smart,” or “Oh, well he has high test scores, so he’s a smart kid.” But then we see someone paint a phenomenal painting, we’re not as quick to say, “That’s evidence of intelligence.” My history teacher in high school used to tell us an anecdote about a student who he had taught who was the worst student in human history. For whatever reason, he just could not conceptualize history. Couldn’t remember a name or a date no matter how hard he studied and never got over a D on a test. But then he would get out on a basketball court, and he was a whole new person. This kid could see the basketball court in a way that no one else could. Everything about basketball was just perfectly intuitive to him. In less than thirty seconds, he could make up a play that couldn’t fail and equally quickly read what the other team was doing with their play, and he was such a gifted captain that if you saw him out there you couldn’t in a million years say that this kid was stupid.

But that's what his grades showed. And this is hardly the only example. There are people with incredible social intelligence who couldn't get three questions right on an SAT but can meet someone for the first time and be best friends with them in five minutes because they just have a way with people. There are people out there, much to Mr. Vinnie's chagrin I'm sure, who have such poor grammar skills that they couldn't get a full sentence down on paper, but they could compose a piano piece that would leave listeners speechless. It was Albert Einstein, the poster boy of smart people, who once said, "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Well about ten months ago I was feeling a lot like that fish. I was sitting in my advisor's office, and I told him that I want to be a doctor. And he said, "Awesome" and handed me what appeared to be a novel to congratulate me for making such a big decision, and it was actually, a list of the requirements for becoming a doctor. And so, suppressing the urge to vomit on the floor, which would have been gross and extraordinarily embarrassing, I stepped out of his office, and for the first time I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it. I had always known that trying to be a doctor was not going to be the easiest thing in the world, but I'd also always been sure that I could do it. Then all of a sudden I thought, "Maybe not." I looked at the list of classes. There was a lot of chemistry, and we all know that chemistry courses were designed by God as a means of carrying on his punishment against the children of Adam and Eve for the original sin. There was a lot of biology, anatomy, and virology, all of which would be tough. And then there was, of course, the requirement to take two physics classes

because as a doctor you have to calculate the velocity of a patient entering the hospital to determine the likelihood that the situation is an urgent one or just a checkup.

And finally at the bottom of the requirements were recommendations like taking internships at hospitals and labs during the summers and doing medical research at graduate schools, things that would give you an edge over the hundreds of thousands of other students applying to medical schools. I looked at the bottom of that list and I thought, "If I can't measure up to a lot of other students in those classes, I'm going to do the other stuff really, really well. I'm going to do the internships and the volunteering and whatever else it takes, and I am going to be a doctor." And so I was thinking about this summer and where I would go to study or research or whatever. I would spend this whole summer working tirelessly and then the summer after that and the one after that. And I was starting to look forward to this summer like you might look forward to, ah, getting all of your teeth pulled out or stuffing your head in a bag of emergency laundry. And it must not have been ten minutes until I got a call from one extraordinarily lonely Jack Reigeluth. After talking about his new raccoon friends for about 25 minutes, Jack offered me a job as a counsellor at Pasquaney, and without thinking for a second I said yes. Of course I'd be a counsellor Pasquaney was one of my favorite places on earth. I loved the hillside, loved all the people there, I loved how much I was able to be myself and grow and relax, and by my sixteen-year-old summer, I even loved tub. But despite all that, I immediately regretted my decision. I knew this meant that my whole summer would be Pasquaney. And while that would be exponentially more fun than studying and research, I would lose an entire year of building up my resume for medical school. So, I retracted my initial response. I told Jack I would check with my parents to make sure

they hadn't already made too many plans for me, but I knew that I would just hang up and then call back in a while and tell him, sorry, I can't come back this summer. I did call my parents just to check in and see how things were at home more than anything. I called, and my mom and dad picked up on speakerphone. I figured I'd tell them I got offered the job anyway. I thought they'd be happy about that even if I was going to turn it down. So I said, "Hey Dad and Mom, Jack called today and offered me a job at Pasquaney. I'm going to turn it down because I've got the internship stuff to do this summer, but I thought you guys'd like to know." And then, after fourteen years of education, my dad taught me the most important lesson of my life in thirty seconds. The phone was quiet for a minute. I thought we'd been cut off, and I was about to call them back when my dad said, "Thomas, I did those internships. I did the research and the testing and the studying, and now I've been a doctor for almost thirty years. I can tell you that all of that was important, but the single, most valuable experience for me as a doctor was Camp Pasquaney. You can learn medicine anywhere, but to learn how to value other people, to learn how to respect and trust people no matter where they're from or what their background is, to learn how to be a good friend to someone who needs it, to learn how to put other people's needs before your own without expecting anything back and how to bring those values with you are the lessons that really matter. Those are things that you just can't learn from a class or a book or a test. Those are things you learn at Pasquaney. I called Jack back and said, "Thanks a lot for the offer, and I'll see you this summer. I'm coming back."

Since then I've thought about what my dad said for a long time, and I came to the conclusion that maybe medical schools, colleges, business schools, job applications, are measuring fish by their tree-climbing ability. I think that we're taught that what makes you good at a job, more than anything, is knowing an unreasonable amount of sheer facts about it. A lot of you will be taking standardized tests in the near future. The unfortunate thing about comparing the talents and skills of millions of people applying to colleges is that the easiest way to differentiate between them is by using numbers. And so the easiest way to measure someone's intelligence is with quantitative information, just sheets of numbers. Job applications, not all that different. Show me years of experience. Show me diplomas. Show me degrees. For the rest of our lives people are going to be reducing us to easily comparable pieces of information, and there are going to be a lot of people telling you that what matters and what will make you happy is just getting those numbers up. Thinking about that can make you a little hopeless. It's easy to forget that more than someone with a great test score or credentials, people need people. Pasquaney teaches all of us that life is more than being better than the people around you. Camp teaches us that it's so much more fulfilling and gratifying if we're constantly trying to make the people around us better. If we're helping our peers and supporting them and trusting them to do the same for us, that's how we really grow. We don't need people in think tanks who are brilliant and forward-thinking but haven't had the human experience to cooperate with and trust people in a team. We can't have teachers who know every iota of United States history but can't communicate with their students in an engaging and helpful way. We don't need doctors who know a dictionary's worth of infectious diseases or the names of every bone in the body but

can't convey real sympathy for a patient or a patient's family. We need people like you all. Do not squander the time that you have here. Don't waste this chance to discover that intelligence isn't just reading quickly or doing complex mental math. You're smart and you're unique because, unlike millions of people out there, you know that you're not the only one that matters and that the impact you make on the people around you is how you will be recognized. Don't waste this chance because thirty years from now your son might call you up without any idea of what gives him worth in the world and the things you learn here will help you give him an answer.