

Local high achievers back a national survey which shows that leadership skills first flourish on the school sports field

PUBTalk

Making it big is a question of class

Does it necessarily follow that the head boy or the captain of the rugby XV is automatically destined for the boardroom? ALAN COOKMAN asked customers in Yates's in Newcastle.

DID all business high flyers first show their mettle as scholars? Not necessarily, according to those I spoke to in Yates's. Many felt that showing leadership qualities at school was no guarantee of a dazzling career in business or elsewhere.

In fact, sometimes it's the ones who make least impact at school who go on to find success in life outside the classroom.

Graham Hunter, 71-year-old retired security officer, from Grasmere Avenue, Clayton, cited the example of his own son, who was unable, due to an accident, to shine at school.

"My son was badly burnt when he was 10 or 11 and was in hospital for a long time," said Graham. "It unsettled him psychologically and he got left behind at school to the extent that he had hardly any education to speak of. He left school early, but by the age of about 20 he began to develop and is now running his own business and doing very well."

Graham and others made the point that many successful businessmen made millions without ever being able to read or write. They can hardly be said to have made their mark at school.

Another Graham — Graham Grady, a 56-year-old retired engineer, from Church Lane, Hanford — was more cynical: "I don't think it is just a matter of intelligence or having a good brain. People who get to the top in business are often people who know how to work the system and get round the rules and regulations. I don't think it has much to do with leadership or education; it's just that these people know all the angles."

But his friend Des Barlow, a 57-year-old retired construction worker from Diarmid Road, Hanford, did accept that successful scholars could become successful businessmen. "I think if you show leadership qualities at school it is bound to be a stepping stone to success in later life," said Des.

"These people are going to get on in life, generally speaking. They've learnt the lesson that life is about being able to take orders as well as give them."

The manager of Yates's, one of the busiest venues in the town, is Samantha Hibbert, who is only 27. "I was really very quiet at school, always taking a back seat," said Samantha, who lives in Waterloo Road, Hanley. "It's not that I was shy or lacked confidence, I just wasn't a leader. "It wasn't until I was about 16 that I started to become more assertive.

"However, although I wasn't a leader myself, if I was looking to employ somebody I must say that I would look for somebody who had shown leadership qualities at school."

High-fliers who run, jump and kick their way to the top

By Business Correspondent Christina Sawvas

LEADERSHIP may be something you are born with, but for industry chiefs and entrepreneurs in North Staffordshire it probably first showed up on the sports field.

New research reveals most captains of industry were already ambitious at school, having one or more leadership roles from an early age.

The report says successful businessmen and women were not only top performers in class but were popular with their peers and had a range of interests.

But well-known faces in the local business community believe their ambitions became more apparent on the sports field.

Millionaire Mo Chaudry, chief executive of WaterWorld, believes failing academically at school was a turning point in his life. In contrast, his sporting abilities shone through and he draws a lot of parallels between sport and business.

"I didn't have any positions of responsibility at school other than sport. I was captain of the cricket team, I played rugby and did athletics.

"I wasn't a prefect. I was a rebel and actually used to ignore the prefects. I think sport reflects personal attitude and aptitude. You have to be organised and you must be able to gain the respect of your peers. Playing sport gives you a feeling of control and confidence, which filters through into working life.

"I don't think you can get very far without education but confidence comes from sport. You are only as good as your last performance. And in business you're only as good as your last decision. You can't afford to think you know it all.

"If your face and your name fits, you are likely to be head boy or girl. But ambition comes from the heart, something inside you that says, 'I need to work much harder'. Having setbacks gives you that extra drive.

"I was perceived to be quite bright and didn't even have to sit an entrance exam. I began top of the class and, by fifth year, I was bottom. I went off the rails and failed all of my O-levels except one.

"From then on I endeavoured that I would not fail at anything I put my mind to."

Bryan Carnes, chief executive of North Staffordshire's Chamber of Commerce laughs at the memory of his report from Ravensmead School, which was then Raven's Lane County Primary, in Audley.

"I was a little lad of seven and my parents were puzzled that I'd been accused of 'over-exuberance'.

"But, looking at the reports now, I realise how perceptive my teachers were. I was more interested in sport than studying. It makes me wonder what I could have achieved if I'd applied myself."

Mr Carnes went on to Newcastle School, a state grammar school at the time. He admits he lacked ambition in terms of a career and certainly didn't expect to get where he is today.

"I was never looking to be made head boy. I was too naughty. I was a prefect but most people were.

"I wasn't ambitious at all. The only thing I was concerned with was getting into the cricket team. I was also vice-captain of the hockey team. I suppose if you are made head boy or girl you are dedicated and prepared to work hard but you are not necessarily a born leader."

Paul Sherratt, of Arthur Boulton & Son solicitors, in Burslem, was made head boy at the same high school as Mr Carnes.

"I think my personal qualities led me to becoming head boy. I was very ambitious at school and I did take responsibility and this has flowed through into my adult life. These characteristics are evident in the positions in which I hold now."

The face-to-face interviews with 105 British captains of industry, carried out by market research group Mori, gave an insight into the role that youthful ambition and confidence played in their success.

About 60 per cent of business leaders said they have always been ambitious and 65 per cent admit they would rather lead than be led. Only five per cent of directors and executives questioned in the survey of FTSE 500 companies and large private businesses say they had no leadership role of any kind at school. A substantial majority are what the report calls "reluctant heroes" playing down their achievements.

Christine Dyson, a specialist in employment law and partner at Knight and Sons solicitors, in Newcastle, said being pushed at school has led to her career success.

"I was very lucky. I went to a Catholic grammar school in Bury, which was a convent school, but nuns didn't teach you needlework and cookery. They expected us all to become leaders of industry. If I hadn't have gone to that school and been given that kind of encouragement, I don't think I would have been as successful in my career."

Dawn Gibbins, chairman of Sandbach specialist flooring outfit Flowerete, was left disillusioned when she was told her childhood ambition of becoming a vet would not materialise because she was not smart enough.

She turned her talents to other things and has seen her business go from nothing to having 200 employees in 20 countries with an annual turnover of £25 million.

She believes that to be a successful entrepreneur, you have to have it in your character.

"It takes guts and a lot of self-confidence. You must be prepared to take risks."

Ms Gibbins attended Congleton Girls Grammar School. "I didn't hold any positions of responsibility. I did really well in my early years. I was top of the class but then it went downhill. I wasn't even a prefect.

"I did enjoy sports, though. I played hockey and netball and I was really good at discus."

Ms Gibbins is the youngest businessperson to be awarded the MBE for services to industry.

● Achievers: from top, Mo Chaudry, Bryan Carnes, Dawn Gibbins and Paul Sherratt



● Leadership: captains of industry may have excelled on the sporting field as youngsters, like modern heroes Jonny Wilkinson and David Beckham

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Crying foul in clampdown on pet hates

SHOVELLING up one of the nation's pet hates is big business for district councils who take out whole days with enforcement crackdowns, spend thousands of pounds in advertising campaigns and deal with hundreds of complaints.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council has even been shortlisted to receive an award for its commitment to make sure pavements, parks and canal tow paths are free of stinking dog mess.

It comes after Keep Britain Tidy revealed that in the West Midlands, 110 dog owners were given £50 on-the-spot fines for not cleaning up after their pet in the last six months. And while the annual cost of shovelling up stands at £22 million nationally, in the West Midlands councils are spending on average £127,000 each a year. That compares with £11,000 in the East Midlands and £73,000 in the north east.

According to the city council, education is the key to its success in stamping out dog mess problems.

It could not give a final cost for tackling the problem because it is part of a £2 million street-cleaning budget, but in the last year 72,000 educational leaflets and 100,000 disposal bags have been given out.

In addition, the city council has put up 180 specialist bins at a cost of £25,785, while a further £7,620 is spent on FIDO — a portable street-cleaning machine specifically designed to deal with dog fouling.

Dog mess is a perennial problem in our canine-loving society. As Stoke-on-Trent City Council is recognised for its successful and innovative schemes to rid the city of this unpleasant blight, ALISON MARSH reports on attempts to clean up dog dirt across the region.

A spokesman said: "If only one owner lets a dog foul the same area three times a day, in only a few days that area has a real problem.

"We hope our continuing education programme will tackle this."

Newcastle Borough Council launched a series of crackdowns on owners who let their dogs foul in public and two dedicated dog wardens associations to hammer home the message of responsible dog ownership. The issue ignites strong feeling in communities. In 2003 there were 245 complaints about dog mess in the borough, and 250 the year before.

Since April 2004, dog wardens have handed out more than 400 poop scoop bags and two environmental rangers are to be recruited this year to help spearhead a crackdown on a range of different types of anti-social behaviour plaguing families including fly-posting or failing to pick up the mess left by their dog. In 2003, the authority prosecuted six people and eight dog owners last year.

A spokesman for Newcastle Borough Council said: "We run special

initiatives which deal with the issue of dog fouling and enforcement. We also visit schools and community groups carrying out awareness days for responsible dog ownership.

"We cannot quantify how much the service costs. It depends on the cases and how much costs are recovered. We won't hesitate to prosecute but it is seen as a last resort."

Although people are complaining about dog mess in Stafford borough, there have been no prosecutions in the last two years.

A spokesman for Stafford Borough Council said: "We have received 140 calls in the past year from people in the borough complaining about dog fouling. We have not carried out any prosecutions in the last two years because of the problems in getting enough evidence together for a court case."

Congleton

Borough Council is currently reviewing all areas in the borough that are affected by irresponsible owners.

The borough's towpaths are popular with dog-walkers and surveys show residents rate these areas as some of the worst hit by dog-fouling. As a result, a representative from British Waterways has been called in to talk to the council and see what can be done to stop dog mess on canal sides.

Mike Parsons, chairman of environmental select committee, said: "We are currently reviewing the situation at the moment after carrying out a survey which revealed it is a very real problem indeed."

The borough council was unable to release any figures relating to how much is being spent on clearing up dog mess as they are currently being reviewed.

Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council spends £50,000 a year on anti-dog fouling measures.

Sixty-two owners have been fined over the last year for letting their pets foul on paths.

Ron Clarke, the borough council's business manager for street cleaning, said: "The measures that

we are taking, along with the fixed penalty scheme and government and public condemnation of this form of anti-social behaviour, are having the desired effect."

Twenty-one owners have been hit with £50 on-the-spot fines since the orders were introduced in the Staffordshire Moorlands two years ago. But no-one has been fined in the past six months and council officials believe owners are now heeding their warnings.

Councillor Terry Gibson, district council cabinet member for the environment, said: "The on-the-spot fines have sent out a clear message this authority will not tolerate people who do not clear up after their dogs."

East Staffordshire Borough Council, which covers Uttoxeter, has launched a bus advertisement campaign.

Since April last year the council has issued one caution over dog fouling and has one planned prosecution for this month. Another case is pending and could result in a prosecution or caution.

Kim Realf, enforcement officer, said: "We recognise there is still a problem throughout the borough and a need to tackle it.

"We see the bus advertising campaign as an ideal vehicle for raising awareness of dog fouling and the fact that it's an offence not to clean up the mess left by a dog."



● Clear message: Terry Gibson