



Four lessons worth remembering

My daughter turns 18 in a few days. When she started school 13 years ago, I told her to remember just three things.

The first is simply that I love her. Whatever comes after that is secondary – I know every reader will agree that a parent’s love for a child is greater than any other. I also want her to remember this in key moments: even if she messes up, I’ll always love her – and help her if she needs it. I will also forgive any mistakes she might make if that’s what it comes down to.

Second, I tell her to just do her best – no-one can do more than that, after all. This point is one of the key takeaways from *The Four Agreements*, a self-help book by Mexican author Don Miguel Ruiz, which I came across more than two decades ago. The message is so simple that it appears somewhat trite, but I find it powerful because it helps you reconcile possible failure with circumstances beyond your control. It also places a cap on ambition: yes, we all think we can take over the world when we’re young, and that’s a good thing, as it engenders focus and hard work and ultimately drives humanity forward. But, realistically, for every winner there will be many others who have to settle for second best.

Third, I want her to enjoy whatever lies ahead, even if it’s one of life’s great challenges. Chances are that she’ll look back one day and realise that it was a defining moment, even if it was stressful at the time. This is a throwback to the message a lecturer gave my final-year class in the 1980s: he said we were bound to get to the exam room better prepared than those around us from competing universities (thanks, of course, to his superior teaching) – and so we might as well enjoy the moment, as this was our chance to excel.

Three things became four around the time my daughter became a teenager. The trivialities of early childhood were replaced by more meaningful achievements, such as getting into a decent high school



Winners: Temba Bavuma lifts the ICC Test Championship mace after the Proteas won the World Test Championship final at Lord’s Reuters/Andrew Boyers

after a rigorous selection process. So, point four is that I’m proud of her, and I always want her to remember that – even if she fails at something (as long as point two remains intact, of course, and she can look me in the eye and confirm that she has done her best).

To the Proteas

I’m thinking about all of this today, not only because a significant birthday is coming up and my only child will soon officially be an adult, with all the rights and responsibilities attached to that.

I’m also thinking about it because I’ve just spent four days at Lord’s, watching the Proteas perform brilliantly under pressure and Temba Bavuma lift the ICC Test Championship mace in front of an appreciative crowd. It felt like a home game, some of the players said, and I can confirm that there were indeed more South Africans than people in attendance.

Point one: I love this team as much as I have loved every South African cricket team before it, including all those who failed gloriously.

Point two: in session after session, I witnessed how they did their best against the top team in the world. Having said that, I

have no doubt that Allan Donald and Lance Klusener were also trying their best at the time of *that* runout 26 years ago.

I won’t go into all the events in between ... by now, you’ve been reminded of that enough.

I don’t think it was easy for the Proteas to enjoy the stress of the occasion, given all that’s gone before. But the ultimate joy on the faces of the team and thousands of supporters who didn’t want to leave the ground hours afterwards will stay with me forever.

And of course, we’re all extremely proud of them.

When a South African national team performs well, there is something existential about it – it transcends sport and becomes life-affirming in a way that other nations will never understand. Or do others around the world experience it in the same way?

My daughter was sitting next to me when the winning runs were scored – a shared memory we’ll treasure for the rest of our lives.

And my final message to the Proteas? Just always remember: four things! ✘
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