

Preface

*It's all a dream we dreamed
One afternoon long ago*
— Robert Hunter

In 1988, after twenty years of involvement in the sport of tennis, I had a simple realization: The premature introduction of competition into the learning process compromises all aspects of education both on and off the court. This insight applies to all learning in any field. For a majority of people, introducing competition before we have achieved proficiency in *all* of the fundamental mental, emotional, and physical skills inhibits the pursuit and attainment of excellence in any subject, sport, skill or art, while simultaneously destabilizing self-esteem and diminishing both long-term potential and present enjoyment.

I have been on a long journey seeking answers to deeper questions about humanity's place in the world, and the fundamental problems confronting our species and our world. After years of searching piece by piece for the answers, the puzzle has finally come together for me. These fundamental problems arise and are passed on in the way we teach and learn. By introducing competition into every facet of our lives – in sports, education, business, politics, and even interpersonal relations – we undermine our ability to attain excellence, and perpetuate the very problems we seek so desperately to resolve.

In *Evolutionary Education*, I illuminate the negative side effects of competition, show the detrimental effects of a competitive educational system, and suggest a way out. Through a program I call *Effortless Learning*, which I describe in detail in the course of the book, competition takes its rightful place as an advanced aspect of an activity — an option, not a requirement. Effortless Learning can help us develop excellence on every level whether or not we choose to compete. Those of us who devote ourselves to this path of excellence-based non-competitive education will have all the skills — mental, emotional, and physical— to contribute to a brighter future and resolve the enormous challenges facing humanity. At the same time, we will be able to have more fun and enjoy everyday life more fully.

What I am proposing isn't theoretical, pie-in-the-sky conjecture. A viable, working program of evolutionary education is in place. I have been teaching the highly competitive sport of tennis since 1974, helping many men, women, and children learn the game and become winners — if that is what they desire. Since October of 1992, however, this program has been based entirely on a non-competitive model of learning. In other words, there is no competition while people are learning how to play the game. My research in the fifteen years since I removed competition from the program, which has included nearly ten thousand hours of on-court observation of close to a thousand different students, demonstrates that a non-competitive learning system can lead to tremendous success — even when people compete. Effortless Learning can set us on the path to a more successful, productive, cooperative, and joyful future.

Evolutionary Education is an invitation to join in a most important task – moving past our aggressive, competitive nature, whose dark side has led to inequality, war, poverty, injustice, abuse, and widespread mediocrity and malaise, toward a new era of

cooperation, innovation, excellence, peace, and joy. Reading this book will encourage you to search out your piece of the puzzle in the next stage of our human evolution. It will show you how to develop greater skill and excellence in your chosen field of endeavor. And that will make you happier and more fulfilled, while making your world a better, more humane place to live, work, and play.

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