ForeWord Reviews

EDUCATION

Test Success! How to Be Calm, Confident, and Focused on Any Test
Ben Bernstein
Spark Avenue
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Mention the word "test" to students, and a number of them will avoid eye contact, laugh nervously, and tense their shoulders. The higher the stakes, the greater the level of anxiety. Telling them to relax and study hard rarely helps, though it is the only advice most teachers and parents are able to offer. Fortunately, educator and clinical psychologist Ben Bernstein gives all involved a few more tangible tips that will assist anyone who is anxious about taking tests, both literal tests and the metaphorical ones that pop up daily.

Bernstein argues, "the common misconception is that doing well on tests is simply a matter of mastering content [subject matter]." An often overlooked factor is the test taker's state of mind when studying and actually taking the test. Using the three-legged stool model, the author convincingly illustrates how three crucial aspects of one's well-being—body (calm), spirit (focus), and mind (confidence)—work together to promote success when studying and taking tests.

The book's ten chapters correspond to that model and include exercises that encourage readers to try strategies that will help them accomplish balance. Breathing techniques, relaxation exercises, questionnaires, and reflective prompts are provided. For example, in the chapter "Working the Model," an exercise focuses on analyzing the tests faced earlier in the day, including how one responded to them. Woven within each chapter are the real-life stories of individuals Bernstein successfully coached. One interesting example involves Imbal, a dental student, who has trouble with confidence during clinical exams until she tries the "Clearing Space" exercise that rids the mind of negative intruders.

Though written for high school through higher education students, there are also chapters devoted to teachers and parents. The information in the chapter aimed at teachers does not always seem to match the theme of the book, but it does point out that teachers are tested daily, and it urges them to use the models and to exhibit "the stepping stones to great teaching," such as modeling respect and being responsible by having "the ability to respond" when a student is not doing well. The chapter for parents is excellent in its attempt to encourage them to be

supportive of their test takers by trying to understand their needs. It also challenges parents to reflect on how they might be contributing to their child's stress levels.

The book ends with a brief overview of Bernstein's models and a list of resources. Well-written and helpful, *Test Success!* will complement other study aids nicely.

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