

03/07/2001

Academic success is not handed out on a platter

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I AM an American professor who has been teaching information technology for 26 years.

I have been in Malaysia for the past seven months, teaching and consulting at the Multimedia University in Cyberjaya.

The English expression "tough love" means to care about someone so much that you are willing to tell them things they may not want to hear but which are for their own good.

I think the Prime Minister's two speeches to the Umno delegates last week were wonderful examples of tough love.

Dr Mahathir obviously cares a great deal about the success and empowerment of the Malay people, so much so that he was willing to say some frank and difficult things.

He may be taken to task for these comments, but that is the danger of tough love - in being brutally honest we leave ourselves vulnerable to criticism.

For me, the comments that hit closest to home were those regarding education, especially the hard work and dedication that are a necessary prerequisite for academic success.<sup>7</sup>

Last semester, I had the unhappy task of failing about 35 per cent of the Malay students in my two computer science classes.

This failure rate had nothing whatsoever to do with innate ability; instead, it had everything to do with attitude, effort and commitment.

The Malay students in my classes were very lackadaisical towards their education. For example, the absentee rate among Malay students was routinely 25-30 per cent, rising to 50 per cent or more for the 8am session.

When I pleaded with students to come, I was told by many that they did not like getting up that early for classes!

However, you cannot learn if you do not attend classes and listen carefully to the lectures.

I would rarely have Malay students come to my office for help, even when they did not know how to solve a problem or had just failed an examination.

Worst of all, when students were given a difficult project, far too many of them took the "low road" and simply copied the work of others.

It is not hard to explain how to succeed in your studies - attend classes, do reading, complete the assignments, study hard for examinations, and seek help when you are having difficulties.

This is not "rocket science" but common sense. Most important is the realisation that success will not be handed to you and will not come easily.

On the contrary, it requires dedication, commitment and long hours of good old-fashioned hard work and study.

I hope that all current (and future) students will read these speeches and heed the "tough love" words of the Prime Minister