

Good evening.

My name is Nick Johnston, and tonight I am speaking about what science fairs really mean to students.

Aside from winning that elusive gold medal at the national level, there are many aspects of science fairs that are highly positive for students.

After talking this over with some of my science fair friends, it has become clear to me that the science fair is less about what you win and more about what you learn along the way.

Back in grade 8, I remember talking to the IB counselor at my school about science, and my tentative plans of entering the field. She told me that I should enter the Regional Science Fair. At the time, I was a pretty quiet kid and I remember thinking to myself that the science fair was for people who messed around with tin cans and strings, and competed to build the largest volcano.

But I listened to her, and the following year, in grade 9, I decided to enter the fair.

I made a project about sending data packets over plant roots, and thought it was pretty cool, but didn't really know what to expect.

Was I in for a surprise.

There weren't any volcanoes – kids were actually doing innovative research including projects designed to clean the world's oceans, provide innovative uses for solar power and even cure cancer. And while some of them admitted they didn't know everything about the field they were working in, they all believed they could make a contribution to a better world.

I also realized that 'science geeks' like me were actually really well rounded - this changed my perspective of life, and helped me develop socially.

Since none of the other kids seemed to be bothered by doing the impossible, I decided that next year I would try to do something nobody had done before. I would pull out all the stops and create a project that would amaze everyone.

I applied for and was accepted to Team Canada ISEF with my project on "Computer-Aided Telepathic Communications". But by the time we departed for Los Angeles, my project wasn't even close to working the way I wanted it to, although I had spent an enormous amount of time on it.

After seeing some incredible projects at ISEF and talking to their creators, it became clear to me that the best projects were the ones that the creators weren't quite happy with – all of them seemed determined to want to make it just a little bit better. So, I knew I was on the right track.

While I was there, I met other people who were also working with EEG for their projects. One in particular, David from Minnesota, won a trip to visit the CERN Hadron Collider in Switzerland. This made me even more determined to continue working on my project and try again next year.

More importantly, I had made a friend.

I kept working on my project and this year went to the Canada Wide Science Fair in Charlottetown. My project was actually working, albeit not perfectly. I had spent a lot of time improving my project, but not as much working on the presentation. I got some great feedback from the judges and leaders.

From this fair, I learned that being able to communicate your ideas and results is just as important as the science itself, in the science fair and the real world.

Getting feedback from the many volunteers made me start to think about all the people who had got me to that point. Ms. Lynn Porpaczy , my mentor from my school, Ms. Karen Morley at the South Fraser Regional Science Fair, Ms. Patti Leigh from the Science Fair Foundation.....I could go on all day!

In particular, it occurred to me that Mr. Favian Lee and Ms. Nadia Williams had volunteered an entire week of their personal time to take us to Charlottetown. And unlike a hockey tournament or a scouting event, they were not there for their own kids, but us Science Fair students. And this volunteer process repeats itself dozens of times in BC and across the country.

So the last, but not the least thing I learned from my science fair experience is appreciation.

On behalf of the science fair students I would like to say a sincere “Thank You” to all the volunteers who make this happen for us.

Thank you.

3minutes, 3 seconds