

# What is More Important Than Digital Skills?

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What are the essential skills to teach our children? To answer this question, we first need to ask a deeper question: What do we really want for our children? Do we want them to become the founders of the next Google? Do we want them to become genius software engineers? Do we want them to become billionaire investors thanks to their knowledge about the digital space?

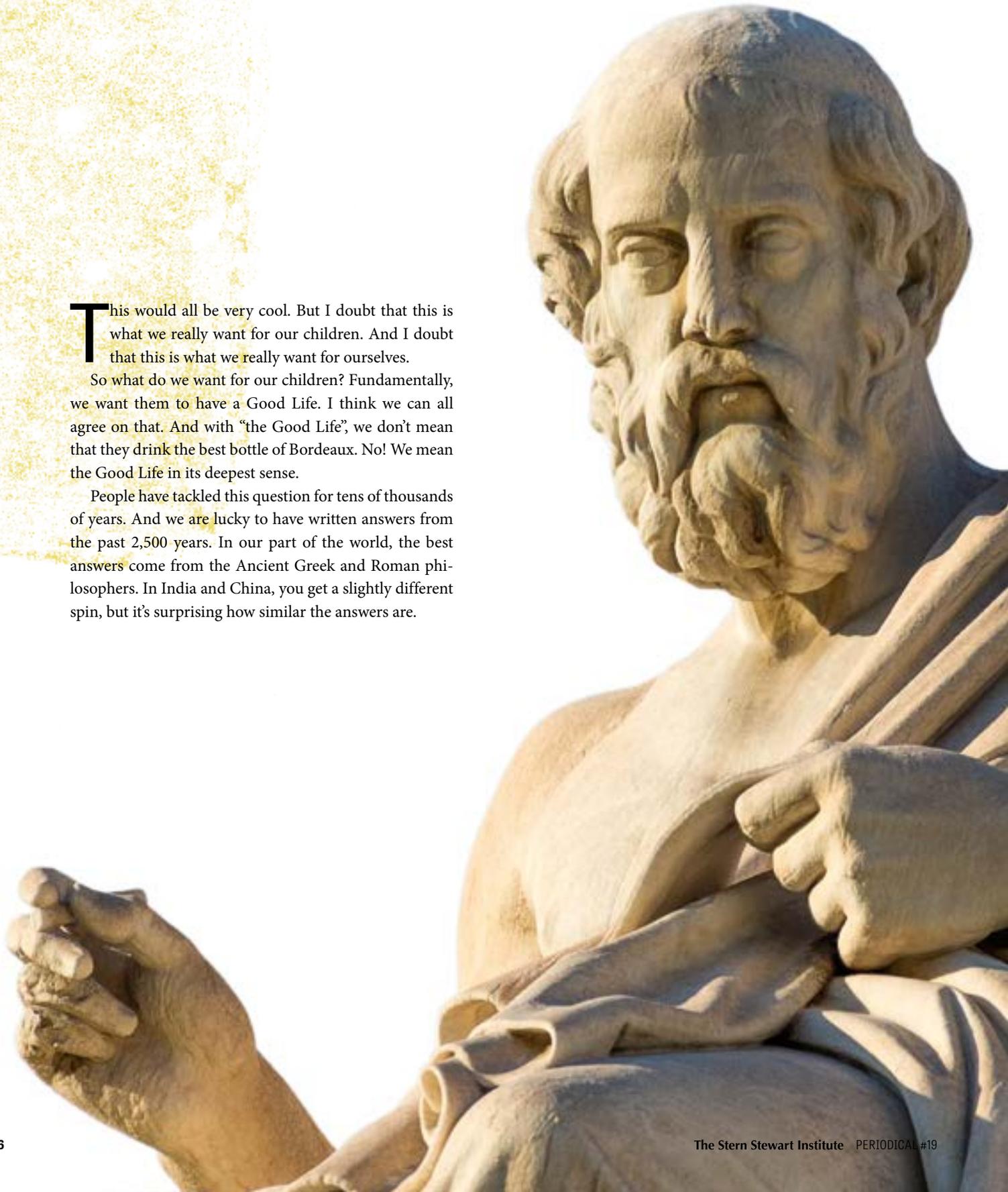


**Rolf Dobelli**  
Founder  
WORLD.MINDS

This would all be very cool. But I doubt that this is what we really want for our children. And I doubt that this is what we really want for ourselves.

So what do we want for our children? Fundamentally, we want them to have a Good Life. I think we can all agree on that. And with “the Good Life”, we don’t mean that they drink the best bottle of Bordeaux. No! We mean the Good Life in its deepest sense.

People have tackled this question for tens of thousands of years. And we are lucky to have written answers from the past 2,500 years. In our part of the world, the best answers come from the Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. In India and China, you get a slightly different spin, but it’s surprising how similar the answers are.



## Ataraxia against anger

So, what did these philosophers mean when they talked about the Good Life? Two things: Eudaimonia – which translates into personal growth, flourishing, the love of learning. And, second, Ataraxia – which translates into tranquility and equanimity (basically the absence of toxic emotions). You’ll achieve both of these components – by the training of Character. I’ll get to this strange word in a second.

There is a remarkable non-correlation between leading a Good Life and money, between leading a Good Life and status, between leading a Good Life and IQ, even between leading a Good Life and digital skills.

We all know people who lead fantastically wonderful lives full of personal growth and the absence of toxic emotions, who are not millionaires. And we all know billionaires, big cheese CEOs and tech entrepreneurs who lead perfectly miserable lives – lives that we would not wish on our children.

It would be idiotic to focus of digital skills, just because “digital” is the paradigm du jour. It would be as if in the 1950s, we would push our children to accumulate skills in plastics manufacturing, in the 1920s to become electricians or 500 years ago to learn all there is to learn about the printing press.

## Digital graveyard – where dreams end

Moreover, there is a severe selection bias in how we think about “digital”. The media reports only on the big winners – not on the many losers. We read about Larry Page but not about the 1,000 failed attempts to create a better search engine – all by individuals who have great digital skills. To get an unbiased view, we need to visit the graveyards of failed companies, failed projects and failed people. But nobody reports on them. So, we live under the illusion that digital skills lead to greater and more frequent economic success than they actually do.

Our children need to understand that, as long as you create value for other people, it’s very hard to fail. If our children understand this, they’ll be economically fine. And the only way they can screw up their lives (and we can screw up our own lives) is by skimping on Character.

*THERE IS A REMARKABLE  
NON-CORRELATION  
BETWEEN LEADING A  
GOOD LIFE AND MONEY.*

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## *CHARACTER IS THE ONLY FIREWALL.*

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### **Character is like golf**

Now, Character is greatly misunderstood. Character is not some big airy, mystic concept that comes for free with age. It is fundamentally a roster of learned skills – of mental tools and specific behaviors. You could also describe them as if-then-rules: “If I find myself in this situation, I will think and act in that manner.”

For example: If you find yourself in the grip of envy (an extremely toxic emotion), someone who has developed Character skills will use some of these learned skills to quickly diffuse the situation. Or: If a journalist asks for your opinion of something that is outside your circle of competence, you will refuse to answer (and not fall prey to your ego and overconfidence).

Just like you practice your golf swing, you have to practice your Character skills. And the more you train these skills, the more automatic your response to specific critical situations will be. The Greeks understood this

very well. As did people like Benjamin Franklin or Markus Aurelius.

Character becomes more important than ever. Why? Because you want to be prepared to face artificial intelligence (AI) agents who will try to manipulate the hell out of you. Character is the only firewall between you and the onslaught of AI agents.

Because the world is a volatile place, specific professional skills can depreciate in value very quickly. So, what essential skills to teach to our children? Skills that will never, under no circumstance, lose their power. And these are Character skills. Digital is merely a side show. ▀

