

LEADERSHIP IN YOUR FAMILY

I work as a corporate trainer, and it is not unusual for both men and women to express difficulty in communicating with their teenage children. Recently a very senior Public Servant told me "I find it easier to communicate to State Cabinet than I do my 15 year old son". A paradox of life is that the two most important leadership jobs in the world are given to people without any training or instruction: politicians and parents.

Parenting mostly has to be learned just as leadership in any field has to be learned. The same leadership skills used to lead a community, a team, or a Corporation can be used in your own family. No matter how old you or your children are, you can still learn how to be more loving, more supportive, more caring, and more unconditional within your own family. Take the leadership initiative with your children now, whatever age they are.

Many parents immerse themselves in work where they can measure their productivity by budgets and outcomes. It can be difficult to put the same energy and value into your children because the results are harder to measure and the task often seems thankless. Immersing yourself in your work, outside your home, can be highly appealing.

*If fathers work more than sixty hours a week when their
kids are growing up, they will fail as fathers,
damage their daughters and cripple their sons.*

*Steven Biddulph
'Raising Boys'*

Many people are coming to understand that there is a lack of integrity in being unable to communicate well with their children, despite being effective in managing or contributing to a business. Many now realise that all the financial success in the world does not hold a candle to the love and support of a child and being there when they need you.

A teenager, Sal, recently told me that both her parents work full time, working long hours. Sal admitted to being uncommunicative and rebellious but when her mother won an award for excellence in customer service, she switched off even more. Her Mum was awarded overseas trips twice a year because she was so good at looking after the needs of the customer. But Sal's Mum didn't take the time to give Sal excellent customer service. She never came home before 8pm and when she did she was tired and cranky. Sal was despondent and uncooperative toward her parents because she wanted a piece of what her Mum's customers were getting.

Balancing your life between your work and your children is challenging. Take time to schedule family discussions. Put them into the diary and count them as important as any other meeting. Let your children lead and support the process.

When your child comes up with an idea that you taught them and claim it as their own, let them feel the strength of their achievement.

It is sad to hear parents talk of how they reared their children without any reference to the child's influence on them. The process is very much an education both ways. People who open themselves to the wisdom and influence of the young are brighter, more passionate and more open-hearted than those who rigidly believe that child-rearing is a one way education.

Reconnect with the positive aspects of your own 'inner child' and in doing so discover an easy and effective way to help connect with your own children. There are many great aspects of the 'child within' and these are the things that need to be taken into adulthood - fun, joy, a feeling of wonder at something new, spontaneity and giving of unconditional love. Express these aspects of child-like wonder yourself, and encourage your children to express them too. They open us up to humour, reduce stress and increase quality of life. By reconnecting to your 'inner child', you open the door to seeing things from your children's' perspective - wonder, humour, being grounded, having faith - and you will lead them more effectively as you both look at things with freshness and creativity.

Children and teenagers often tell me they don't feel heard. That parents spend their time correcting them and telling them what to think, feel and do. A single father told me about how, when on his weekends with his son, he takes the opportunity to let his son know his values and world-view. I said to him "How old is your son?"

"16", he said.

My response was "He already knows your values, now it's your turn to listen to him".

Lie on the bed with your child, suspend judgment, just listen. It is the listening that builds the relationship with teenagers, not the telling.

Allow your child to lead you sometimes. Ideally, leadership in families is like a game of charades where everyone gets a turn to lead the group. Every situation creates a new leader depending on the expertise, clarity and creativity needed for the task. Have faith in your children's ability to show you the way sometimes.

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