

The Real Parent Trap

As parents we want to give our children everything, especially if we didn't have it as a kid. And while it may feel good to be able to give them everything they want, giving all that material stuff may not be good for them in the long run. As a matter of fact, it may be killing their motivation.

Have you ever had to work really hard for something? How did it feel when you actually achieved it? Wonderful right! There was a certain joy in your accomplishment; like "Look at me... look at what I was able to accomplish!" Well, every time you say yes to those material things you are robbing, stealing, that sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from your children.

Take a look at all your successes, all the challenging opportunities you had as a young adult, all the failures that became wonderful successes. Why take that away from your children?

John and Mary worked long and hard to build a successful business. "Growing up on a farm was tough." John explains, "There was never extra money. When I was young, I wanted to play little league. All I needed was the uniform, but I missed 3 games before I made enough money to buy one. I swore right then and there that I would never let my children struggle the way I did." And he never did. John gave his children everything, all the goodies that he didn't have. Money was no object. As soon as his children would ask for something it was there for them.... all the goodies.

It never occurred to John that he was spoiling his children and robbing them of the opportunity to learn through struggle.

In one of our meetings, John was complaining how he wished his kids were motivated to do "something, anything". "Coming to the office once in a while would be a good start," he says.

He couldn't understand why his kids who went to great schools, (that he paid for and gave generous allowances while they attended college) had no motivation to work.

It was through our conversations that he realized that he, by giving them everything they wanted growing up robbed them of all their motivation. Giving them everything they wanted took away the driving force. His realization, (he describes it as a V-8 moment) has changed how and when he says "yes".

It's difficult to say no to our children, especially when all the other parents are saying yes. And God knows there are so many things to buy out there, especially when money is no object! Parents can find any number of reasons to indulge children with material things, there's guilt (that was always mine), ignorance, fear, insecurity, wanting them to love you best,etc. We as individuals are not perfect, and there never was a manual for parenting. Believe me; parenting would have been so much easier with a manual. And certainly, the media doesn't help.

But what to do? Back to John. He and Mary took the time to discover their core values. They realized that their values included family unity, responsibility, honor, love, faith, leadership, compassion, and philanthropy.

Knowing your core values will give you the guidance you need and a place to stand when you say “no”. Then by all means set the example. There is nothing worse than a parent saying one thing and doing another. Actions speak louder than words. If one of your core values is being responsible, then you must show responsibility. If a good solid work ethic is important...then you must work. Find what you love to do and do it. If you want your children to find their passion or calling... and have work that is meaningful and brings them purpose, then you need to exemplify this. Be curious, show creativity and enthusiasm for your work. Be the example. Share it at dinner or whenever you can with your children. Show them your attitude- your good attitude. Remember that one of the most important ways we learn is by example. Be that good example.

It's ok to say NO. Protect those valuable, precious opportunities that children must learn to want, to fail, and to battle disappointments. Allow them to learn life's hard lessons; and be better for it. Don't rob them of the opportunity that may save their life. Support them. Be generous with your gifts of time, love, guidance, and experience. Be a good mentor for them. Resist the urge to indulge your children's whims, but on occasions of your choice surprise them with generous gifts. Make it special and memorable. Spend time with your children helping them create a journal of life's experiences. Create good memories.

You have the financial means to raise your children any way you want. Guilt, apathy, insecurity, ignorance has no place here, they are not an excuse for you. Tie the money to the achievements and make the gift or money enough to fit whatever they accomplished.

Life gives each of us specific challenges and experiences to prepare us for adulthood. You are not your child, and your child is not you. You became who you are because of your life experiences. Allow them to become who they are by experiencing all they can. Don't short circuit the long term benefits they can provide. This will be an uphill battle but aren't they worth it. In the end don't you want what is best for them? You may not get much support today, but in the end, they will be all the better and grateful for it.

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