

Transformation and Family Life

I once asked a class of young people for a good definition of a leader. One student said she thought a good leader was a person who was an overall **good example** for others to follow.

I gave them a hand-out called “Exemplary Leadership,” and I asked what they thought “exemplary leadership” might mean. Another student quickly answered, “**An example of a good example.**”

Actually, that’s not such a terrible definition!

How do you develop exemplary leadership? Two researchers, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, identified what they call the Five Fundamental Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership. (1)

- Model the Way
 1. Find your voice by clarifying your personal values.
 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
- Inspire a Shared Vision
 3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their shared aspirations.
- Challenge the Process
 5. Search for opportunities to by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.
 6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.
- Enable Others to Act
 7. Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals, and building trust.
 8. Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.
- Encourage the Heart
 9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
 10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Their five fundamental practices match up perfectly with the five principles of transformation that teenagers in my own research study identified:

- Model the Way: **Service** by walking the talk
- Inspire a Shared Vision: **Reflection** on same goal, same direction
- Challenge the Process: Diversity brings creativity in **Learning**
- Enable Others to Act: Shared **Leadership**, top and bottom
- Encourage the Heart: Physical and emotional **Support**

Family Matters

I would even take these exemplary leadership practices one step further. I think a case can be made for applying these principles to family life.

Model the Way

Children imitate the actions they see, more readily than they remember and obey the words they hear. If we tell our children not to lie, but they hear us lying to our neighbors or our spouses, they will learn to lie. They will imitate what we do. If we keep our living rooms and kitchens messy, they will see no reason to pick up their toys.

If we want our children to respect others, they must observe us treat each other respectfully. They will imitate our words, our gestures, and our tone of voice. If they see us care for our pets with tenderness and patience, they will learn that all living things have feelings and worth.

If they see us forgive each other and reconcile after an argument, they will know that second chances are part of life, and they will not be afraid to come to us and apologize when they have done something wrong.

We never give them a hand-out with the words to the Happy Birthday song. We never show them an overhead with the process: light candles on cake, sing song, blow out candles, clap, eat, open presents. We never deliberately “teach” them, but by the age of four, they know the drill. They have seen it modeled with each member of the family, so they know what to expect.

Inspire a Shared Vision

Visioning is a mental activity, since it depends on our ability to use our imagination. It’s also an emotional activity, because it creates anticipation and motivation to make dreams come true.

Visioning how the family might celebrate Christmas or spend a vacation day are exercises of the imagination that might bring excitement or motivation to save money or demonstrate extra good behavior.

Naming family values is another way to inspire a shared vision. “Our family is an honest family. We talk about things that bother us.” Or “Our family is a loving family. We hug a lot.” Or “Our family is a caring family. When we see someone who needs our help, we try to help.” Saying, “It’s just how our family does things” became more real to me when I heard my own children explaining it to others.

Challenge the Process

Every family has family traditions of some kind. Our family has “birthday week.” We celebrate each family members’ birthdays for a whole week. Their actual birthday might be the first day, the last day or a middle day of Birthday week, so the person whose birthday is being celebrated never knows when it will begin.

The first day of birthday week is always “Announcement Day.” When everyone lived at home, the announcement was usually a paper banner hung in the living room. Now that everyone is scattered, announcements usually come by phone or email. Once I received an announcement power point!

Then we have theme days like “Cat Day” for my son Ralph who has a cat, or “Dog Day” for Michael and Megan who own a dog. We have “email day” or “crazy phone day,” my personal favorite and a must-do. Everyone leaves voice mail messages pretending to be someone else. I have received messages from famous actors, the president, the pope, even people who have died. I never know who is actually calling, because the family is so good at imitating voices. And sometimes they even get their friends to, call so it’s really confusing!

Other family traditions might include eating certain kinds of foods on certain holidays, or saying certain phrases when certain things happen.

Children enjoy rituals, because they like the security of knowing a specific thing will happen a predictable way. They are especially fun if they are different or even silly and pointless. You can tell the value of a family ritual when a son or daughter goes to college and worries about how a certain ritual will be continued.

Enable Others to Act

When I was a kid, we used to have family meetings. We would get to discuss how to share chores, what foods we would have at a summer picnic, and whom we would like to visit on a Sunday afternoon.

When my brother’s daughter was a still a baby, my sister-in-law would carry her to the dresser, where two outfits would be laid out. Even before Bernadette was old enough to understand what a choice was, Heidi would dress her in whichever one she touched first.

When our two sons were old enough to understand the concept of giving away family money, we would donate to the charities we believed in, and then we select another three or four that we could imagine supporting. We would tell the boys the amount of family money we could afford to spend, and we showed them the literature for the new ones we

were considering. And they decided if they wanted to give all the money to one, or some money to each, by looking over the information and talking about it.

The point is this: eventually, our sons and daughters will be making their own decisions without our help. In order to give them lots of experience, it's never too early to start teaching them the skills of decision making. It's always good to practice looking at options, asking good questions, considering different points of view, making a choice, and living with the consequences.

Encourage the Heart

There are a hundred ways we can encourage the hearts of our children. And just as many ways to discourage them! Life is so busy, it's easy to forget how much attention they need. Parents finding opportunities to give one-on-one time to each son or daughter is an excellent way to stay close and create memories. Some families have a weekly "date" with one of their kids – the kid gets to choose what they do for a certain amount of time or money.

We used to have one "kid-prepared meal" every week. That meal was planned in advance (sometimes researched throughout several cook books!), so the ingredients were bought or found, and cooked with one parent. IT was the one night the kids didn't have to help with clean-up. We still make the Fettuccini Alfredo recipe that Michael found – it's as good as any we've ever tasted in a restaurant!

When I was a kid, my dad worked in New York on Saturdays. We each took turns going to NY with him, so we had car time, and eating lunch time. I remember those days as being so precious and fun.

Mixing Business and Family

Exemplary Leadership works just as well at home as does on the job.

We're not asking supervisors to treat their staffs like children. But there are some workplaces that feel as comfortable as home.

We're not asking parents to run their homes like a business. But there are some skills that will help children cope better at home – and at school, on the playground, and in real life as they grow up.

After all, as supervisors and as parents, we really want to be a good example of a good example.

Notes

(1) Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (1995). *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

(2) Calderone-Stewart, L. Visit www.tomorrowspresent.org

Also see:

Calderone-Stewart, L (2004). *Changing Lives: Transformational Ministry and Today's Teens*. Dayton, OH: Pflaum. (Note: This book is currently available only through the Tomorrow's Present website.)

