

Parenting like I know what I'm doing

AnnMaria De Mars & Maria Burns Ortiz.



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PREFACE: HOW YOU LIKE ME NOW?

Over the past 10 years, we have written over 1,000 blog posts. Most of those were written by me (AnnMaria), but Maria would argue hers were of higher quality. Four years ago, in response to an article in the Wall Street Journal *"Why Chinese mothers are superior,"* I wrote a post *"Why American mothers are superior"* because that was a more professional title than *"F\$%& you and the horse you rode in on."* Maria has told me this book was for parents and we could not have swearing in it. Hmph. So... that blog post got re-posted on Tech Crunch, and I received hundreds of comments between that site and my own blog, some of which agreed with me and some said, *"Who do you think you are? That Tiger Mom's kid got accepted at an Ivy League university and played at Madison Square Garden. Except for one Olympic medal, what have your kids done?"* Let me answer that, but first, let me emphasize that the point is NOT that my kids are so much more successful than yours, so you should listen to me. No, if you read the first two articles here, you'll realize that the real lesson is that we are all figuring out this parenting thing as we go along. None of us really know what we are doing. Maria and I are sharing our thoughts and experiences here with the hope that you, dear reader, may benefit.

MY CHILDREN

Maria graduated cum laude from New York University at age 20. Since then, she has been published by some of the largest media outlets in the world (such as ESPN.com), been both National Association of Hispanic Journalist's Emerging Journalist of the Year and National Latina Business Women of LA's Rising Star of the Year. She also co-authored a book on the New York Times Bestseller List, won Sports Book of the Year for the United Kingdom and is CEO of 7 Generation Games, for which she won best Media and Entertainment Company at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit. She is also married and the mother of three brilliant children.

Jennifer received her B.A. in history at age 21, worked for a few years, and by 24, had her teaching credential and master's degree from the University of Southern California. She has taught in inner city middle schools for six years in the second-largest district in the United States. She is a terrific teacher and her students rave about her years later. Jenn is married and the mother of one amazing baby.

Ronda competed in two Olympics in judo, won an Olympic bronze and world silver medal. She then went into mixed martial arts, became the first UFC Women's Champion and defended that several times over. After a few movies and TV shows, she signed a contract with the WWE for professional wrestling. She co-authored a best-selling book in her spare time and invested in several startups. She is married and the stepmother to two boys.

Julia, the baby, graduated summa cum laude and as president of the senior class from the college preparatory school she attended on an academic scholarship for four years. She then headed to the east coast to attend a small liberal arts college where she has an academic scholarship and a spot on the soccer team, which just won its conference championship.

At the moment, they are all doing well. Does that mean that if you follow our advice we will guarantee that your children will be a success? Nope. As you'll read, I don't even guarantee my own children won't ride a motorcycle through city hall tomorrow. However, as a statistician, I think I can honestly say that some of these ideas might increase the probability. Of the turning out well, not the motorcycle riding, that is.

THE POST THAT STARTED IT ALL

I really did not have time to write this today, but two articles I read made me drop what I was doing. First was the Wall Street Journal article by a Yale law professor who says Chinese mothers are superior because they produce more mathematical and musical prodigies.

The reason, she says, is because none of them accept a grade less than an "A", all insist their child be number one in the class, they don't let their children be in school plays, play any instrument other than piano or violin, etc.

She says that this whole thing about people being individuals is a lot of crap (I'm paraphrasing a bit) and gives an example of how she spent hours getting her seven-year-old to play a very difficult piece on the piano. She uses the fact that the older daughter could do the same piece at that age as proof this was reasonable.

There are a few areas I would take exception with her article. First is her grasp of mathematics and logic. It is clearly impossible that every child in China is number one in the class, unless every classroom in the country has a thirty-way tie for first. Second, as my daughter asked, "*There are 1.3 billion people in China. None of them ever got a B?*" Third is the issue of claiming your parenting is such a great success when your children are not yet out of high school.

I don't teach at Yale, but I do have a Ph.D., have published several articles in academic journals, founded two companies, and won a gold medal in the world judo championships. I raised three kids to adulthood. As for the companies, they paid enough to support the kids in what they wanted to do. That individualism crap?

Well, the first one went to NYU at age 17, graduated at 20, and if you google Maria Burns Ortiz you'll find everything from her acceptance speech as Emerging Journalist of the Year to her stories on Major League Baseball investments in Venezuela for ESPN to Fox News Latino. Plus, she has a good husband and she is a wonderful mother. She never took piano lessons but she is an amazing writer.

The second daughter, the Perfect Jennifer, received her Masters and teaching credential from USC at 24, after taking a couple years off after her B.A. in History. She teaches at an inner-city school in Los Angeles. This isn't her fall back plan in a bad economy. This was

her first choice profession and her first choice school. They are lucky to have her and she's happy to have them.

My third daughter was in the last two Olympics, won a bronze medal in Beijing and has now gone professional as a fighter in Mixed Martial Arts. Ironically, she was the one that played bassoon and attended a science magnet. She volunteers at a school in Watts, where her older sister did her student teaching.

And STILL, I would not venture to lecture other people on how superior my parenting skills are because a) there have been times when I could cheerfully have smacked each one of them with a two by four and only my maturity, Catholic faith and felony assault laws of the state of California stayed my hand and b) as Erma Bombeck said, no mother is arrogant because she knows that, regardless of her other accomplishments in life, at any moment she may get a call from the school principal saying that her child rode a motorcycle through the auditorium.

If I got a call like that, I wouldn't even be surprised. I would just reach for my credit card to give the principal the number over the phone and go searching the house for my two by four.

The second article I read was by Vivek Wadhwa, in Business Week, who said that Chinese and Indian engineering programs graduate several times MORE students than the U.S. but the quality of these students is generally much poorer than American students.

When I was in graduate school, I used to think arguments such as Wadhwa's were just sour grapes from American students who couldn't cut it, and their teachers who let them slack.

Then, I graduated, became a professor for many years and an employer. I see exactly the differences Vivek describes between American and many international students. When I ask the latter questions such as, *"If you were going to redesign programming language X, what would you do?"*

They will tell me what X does in great detail but not answer the question.

American students are more likely to jump in with ideas about how to change X, replete with statements like *"X sucks because..."*

My twenty-five years of experience agrees with Wadhwa's research findings in that the international students I have met are far less likely to question results. Of course, this isn't

true of all of them. It's silly to generalize to every member of a nation of a billion or half-billion people.

American students remind me of the nursery rhyme:

*There was a little girl
Who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead
And when she was good
She was very, very good
And when she was bad
She was horrid*

My husband is brilliant. This is why I married him. He went to UCLA on a National Merit Scholarship, double majored in math and physics, then went on to graduate work in physics. He taught himself Calculus in elementary school, then taught himself as much physics as he could before going to college. His parents pretty much let him do what he wanted to do, which was read physics books.

My older brother has a degree in Computer Science from Washington University in St. Louis. Like most of his friends, he majored in computer science because he was really interested in math and computers. When we were in college, around 1975, I saw my first "personal computer." One of my brother's friends had built it from parts.

I'm a statistician because I really love statistics and, fortunately for me, it pays money.

In America, people in math, computer science and other sciences generally chose those fields because that is what they want to do. They have a genuine interest, to the point of passion, and will often spend crazy hours working in their labs.

Chinese and other international students often spend crazy hours, too, but not as often for the same reasons. A lot of times it's because of a language barrier – and they have my respect. I spent a year as a student in Japan. As a professor, I once taught a Directed Studies in Psychological Research course in Spanish. Functioning in a second language is damn hard.

The international scholars I know, far more often than American ones, chose their field for practical reasons. They could get a job. The salaries were good. Their parents really wanted them to become a doctor/ engineer.

Sometimes, these Chinese (and other) students change while in America. Not always. Lots of middle managers like people to do exactly what they're told. Not always the best thing for business, but perhaps best for the comfort and convenience of that manager.

Schools really like people to do what they are told, and universities just love having graduate students who will pay high out-of-state tuition, teach for low wages, or even work in the lab for free. *Hey, don't blame us if 30% of the students we admit are from other countries, they did the best on the tests AND had a 4.0 GPA. You should have studied more, you lazy slackers!*

Someone ought to ask WHY we are measuring what we measure. These tests we give, and the other admissions criteria were not handed down by God. (I know because I did my dissertation on intelligence testing. Most of these tests come from The Psychological Corporation, Pearson Education and the Educational Testing Service. God doesn't work at any of those places. If you don't believe me, call their switchboard and ask for God's extension.)

Why does it matter if your child is a musical prodigy? What the hell difference does it make if your child can play some complicated piece on the piano at age seven?

My youngest daughter, the world's most spoiled twelve-year-old, plays drums. She practices about an hour a week. She likes the drums. I want my daughter to play an instrument, if she is interested, because it might be something that brings her joy as an adult.

She is on the student council and, this last report card, she brought home her first B+ in a year. We kind of grumbled about it, but that's all. High achievement is important in life, but it is not all of life.

WHY does it matter so much if you have a 4.0 GPA? I did not have the best behavior or GPA as either a high school student or undergraduate. Looking back, I wonder whatever possessed the admissions staff at Washington University in St. Louis to look at my SAT scores and overlook everything else, but I will be forever grateful that they did. I doubt many universities would admit a student like me today, particularly not at age 16.

What I did have was an intense desire to learn about the world.

As an undergraduate, I took a graduate course in economics because it sounded really interesting and asked the professor's permission to enroll.

He happened to have been chair of the Council of Economic Advisers (under Richard Nixon, but he was still a great professor nonetheless). I also took courses on Urban and Regional Economics where I got to see real-life applications of matrix algebra.

My point (and by now you may have despaired of my ever having one) is that my undergraduate education gave me the gift of professors willing to respond to my

interests, enough time not to interfere with my relationship with the library, and classmates I argued with for the pure intellectual exercise.

When my youngest child is ready for college, I will look for a school that will give that to her. If it is an Ivy League school, that's fine.

Dr. Chua is raising her children to fit into the Ivy League mold.

Me, I'm raising my children to be themselves and to mold the world to fit.

How is that working out

There isn't a day goes by that I don't think several times, "I love my life."

So, it works well for me, and for my family, all the way down to the two-year-old granddaughter whose latest favorite saying is, "I a lucky kid!" (Well, right after, "Grandma, buy me an iPad for Chrissmas!")

Dr. Chua's definition of success is to have children who are musical and mathematical prodigies.

Mine is to have children who learn well, live well and love well.
She's a success by her standards as I am by mine.

(But I still won't be surprised if I get that call from the principal.)

PARENTING LIKE I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING (OR WHERE WE GOT OUR TITLE)

Two-plus years ago, we decided to launch a blog on our site dedicated to parenting. After throwing around various titles, we settled on “Parenting Like I Know What I’m Doing.” Because let’s be honest, no one completely knows what they’re doing when it comes to raising kids. (Not even those people who write the books on how to parent.)



We started “Parenting Like I Know What I’m Doing” because a lot of our audience on social media as well as our users are parents, and we realized that writing about the startup life isn’t necessarily super-relevant to people outside the various Silicons — Valley, Beach, Alley, Prairie (no, seriously, Silicon Prairie is a thing — and apparently there are several of them). We wanted to expand to provide more content that would appeal to more people who come to our site.

PLIKWID — yeah, that acronym shockingly never really caught on — is going to be about, as the name suggests, parenting. AnnMaria referred to it as kind of a Mommy Blog, but to me that implies an ability to do anything that you could put pictures of on Pinterest, alas the Pinterest gene is one I’m seriously lacking. (But if you’re into Pinterest, we actually have a 7 Generation Games Pinterest page — but it’s run by someone else on our team, not me.)

That said this book (which draws from its namesake blog) is be about our experiences, reflections, random observations and occasional rants as they relate to raising small children while working fulltime/running a company/launching a startup.

If you are coming here looking for dinner recipes or cute crafts, this isn’t going to be the place. But don’t leave just yet.



While we're not much on crafting or cooking, we'll tackle plenty of other topics surrounding raising humans from the first-person perspective. We'll run the gambit from helping your kids pursue their passion to how not to be a crazy sports parent to finding cool learning games for your kids to juggling kids and work to sending your kid boarding school to asking *"Seriously? How many times do I have to say, 'Get off the iPad?!"*

Feel free to relate or read and feel superior that you are doing this parenting thing so much better than I

am. (AnnMaria says if you feel superior to her, you can suck it.) The reality is we're partially just making it up as we go along.

And if you have ever promised your children they could have Cheetos for breakfast if they just went to bed now *for the love of God* or if you have ever put your daughter's hair in a bun while rushing her out the door in the morning because then hopefully no one will notice that you didn't get to brush it out because she was screaming like a banshee, then we might be kindred spirits – so you should feel right at home here.

PARENTING: NOBODY REALLY KNOWS WHAT THEY'RE DOING

These days, I cannot turn around without seeing a billboard, poster or article with my third daughter's name on it. She was the first woman signed by the UFC, and will be the first woman to headline a pay per view event in mixed martial arts.

Interestingly, earlier this year, I wrote a post with the tongue-in-cheek title "Why American Mothers are Superior," in response to an article in the Wall Street Journal about why Chinese mothers are superior, profiling Amy Chua and her book that lectured American parents on why their children are so inferior and they are not getting into Harvard because they don't have that Chinese mothering, so there!

I got a lot of haters, both here and on Tech Crunch, where the post was also featured. Many of them asked who did I think I was, after all Dr. Chua's daughters are much more accomplished, what did mine ever do? Besides graduating from NYU at 20, winning Emerging Journalist of the Year, teaching at Tufts, graduating from USC, getting a scholarship to a top prep school, winning a world title – not much.

Now that the four darling daughters are all doing well, everyone is emailing me and asking for my advice. I even have a book of my own coming out in 2013. Never fear, it's not on mothering. It's not even on statistics. It's on matwork for judo and mixed martial arts.

As darling daughter #3 sometimes goes around the house singing, "How you like me now?"

So, what is different? Seriously, if my oldest daughter wins the Pulitzer next year, does that make me qualified to tell everyone else how to run their life and that if their kid doesn't get into Harvard or win the Olympics they suck as a parent?

The truth is, nobody really knows for sure if they are doing the right thing. My daughters often tease me because I always wear a medal with St. Jude, the patron saint of

desperate causes. Every parent feels desperate sometimes, I think.

With the economy tightening, more and more people see getting into a “good” college as the ticket to a “good” life. I’m very empathetic. The Spoiled One is attending boarding school because we thought it was a great opportunity for her, in no small part because the academics are stellar. When she made First Honors the first quarter (3.6 – 3.99 GPA), I wanted to know why she did not make a 4.0.

Unlike her roommate, who is, coincidentally, from China, Spoiled-a-roo studies less and plays more. On Tuesday, I watched her and a couple dozen of her friends play soccer for two hours. No referees, no adults on the field except two coaches who were there to chaperone. The kids switched sides when they felt the teams were uneven, screamed and cheered themselves when they made goals. I watched for a while but I was told, *“Mom, parents don’t watch scrimmages. We’re PLAYING.”*

I made her bring her books home, and I have been speaking to her in Spanish every day because I think Spanish is one of her poorer subjects (as in she might possibly get a B+ in it), and I am NOT happy about that. On the other hand, she went to the Posadas at church last night and tonight she went to Sky Zone with her friends and jumped around on a trampoline for an hour.

Was that right? Should she have been practicing soccer drills or studying geometry? God knows she has that home situation that is supposed to be what kids need to succeed in mathematics and science – a female role model in a technical career, two parents with graduate degrees ready to help her with any homework problem, a dad who has been buying her electronic kits and science books since she was in preschool.

If she does not get all A’s this semester, beginning of her freshman year, then maybe she won’t get into Harvard or Stanford. I realize that I don’t care. If it means my child does not have a childhood, does not get to play, then maybe that’s not the place for her to be. Or maybe I am ruining her chances to be the first female president.

I think there are some near guarantees of how to NOT raise a child – that is, don’t beat your children, don’t beat your spouse, don’t be an alcoholic, don’t be homeless. There are some obvious things to do – read to them, hug them, tell them you love them. Beyond that, there is not yet the killer prediction equation that predicts success with 100% accuracy.

In large part, I believe, that is because the definition of success varies.

As one of my favorite poets, e.e. cummings said, *"It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are."*



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YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW: THOUGHTS ON PARENTING

My friend stopped by to ask if our family was going to enter a team in a local charity walk/run for suicide prevention. It's the sort of thing we would do, except that I'm in Kansas City that weekend with the kids from the middle school volunteer judo program I run and Ronda is in Brazil right now so I don't know what her plans are. Maria is busy being pregnant. It's possible that Jenn and Julia might enter. I will have to ask them.

Then, my friend said, *"You are such a good mother. Your children turned out so well. You should write a parenting book."*

There are a couple of reasons not to do that. The main one is that I am really busy working on building another company right now. My day job is making games to teach math, and I really like doing it.

Then there is the fact that Julia is only 16. Although she looks like a winner so far, who knows, maybe she will ride a motorcycle through the school gym tomorrow wearing nothing but a shit-eating grin. All indications are to the opposite, but one thing I know for sure is that there are no guarantees in life. [Julia: If you are reading this, don't even think about it. I will skin you alive and tack your hide over the front door as a reminder to your nieces not to be so stupid. Love, Mom]

That being said, to a large extent, whether it is parenting, sports or business, you sow what you reap. My children aren't perfect. I'm not perfect, and there have been times when I wanted to smack them upside the head.

Throughout their lives, though, I have tried my best to always put my children first. Sometimes it might not have seemed that way to them, if I was flying to Washington instead of helping them with a science project. But I sincerely believed that the money I made for private schools and universities was more important. I also thought having a role model of a mother who had a career would be a benefit to them.

I suspect that when Ronda was young she resented the fact that I did not fly around the world and coach her, nor did I take out loans to pay for her competition around the world or a lot of other things some other parents did. There was a reason behind that.

With three other children, I was not willing to sacrifice all of the time with them and the amount of money we would lose from me not working.

I had seen families where everyone focused on one child who was supposed to be gifted - and maybe was - to the detriment of the others. It never seemed to turn out well for anyone. The "gifted" child felt pressured but also entitled, and the other children felt cheated. The parents are resentful the favored child doesn't appreciate it. I could go on. It's just a hot mess.

Maybe my book would be very short if I ever wrote it: Do what you believe is best for your children, even if it's a lot of work, even if you really would rather do something else at the time.

Actually, that would be pretty much my same advice whether it is winning in judo or building a business. Do what you think is most likely to achieve that goal – even when you're tired, even when you don't feel like it.

If you are right even most of the time that this drill, tournament, proposal, design or decision is what you should be doing, then in the end all of that sowing will pay off.

SOMEBODY ELSE'S DREAM

When I get some time next year, I'm planning on writing a book on parenting with the title "Somebody Else's Dream." There are a lot of parenting books out there that tell parents how much we suck, either just in general or in comparison to other cultures, whether it is the French, Japanese, Chinese or whoever is supposed to be sucking less than us this year. I wrote about this a while back in response to a Wall Street Journal article saying that Chinese mothers are superior.

In fact, the title of my post two years ago was tongue-in-cheek. Not only do I not believe that any nationality has a monopoly on good parenting, two other titles I have considered for the book are "Nobody really knows what they are doing" and "Marching confidently through the fog." (I'm pretty sure a publisher would veto the last one as not obvious enough.)

It's a bit ironic that two years ago when my blog post was re-posted on Tech Crunch a number of commenters said, *"Her daughter got admitted to Harvard. What have your daughters done?"*

Um. Yeah.

What bothers me about the books and articles exhorting us to have children start studying 10 hours a day from preschool until they score perfect SAT scores 15 years later, is that your children are living YOUR dream. *Isn't that everyone's dream – to get into Harvard, go to medical school, get a job at Google and make a LOT of money?*

Um, no.

Some people said they agreed with me that there is a difference between success and happiness, and while giving up sports, sleepovers and focusing on doing well in every subject, regardless of interest might make people successful, it won't always make them happy.

In fact, my point isn't only the difference between success and happiness but also that success isn't only defined by how much money you make.

I think I'm fairly successful. My bills are paid. I've been able to support four children through education at private schools. I live in a nice neighborhood by the beach where it hasn't snowed since the last ice age. There are people who are surprised when they come to our house and find we live in a three-bedroom townhouse and not a big house with a sprawling lawn. I find that interesting because how big of a place do three people need?

Watching the Olympics this week really drove this home. There are a lot of sports I had never heard of, and even though they were fun to watch - like skeleton - I would never want to try them. Yet, for some of those athletes, just being there was a success.

When I competed, I never understood those people who were just happy to be there, whether it was the world championships, national championships or the Olympics. I was there to win and would have considered anything less than a gold medal a failure. Lately, though, it has occurred to me that my attitude is no more rational than those people who consider me unsuccessful because I have chosen to spend my money on sending my children to the Olympics, NYU and USC rather than buying a Mercedes and a house in the suburbs.

Like those people at the Olympics, I have arrived where I wanted to be.

If my children can say the same when they are in their fifties, I'll have been a great success as a parent.

SCHOOLCHILDREN QUESTIONS FOR STATISTICIANS

It must be that time of year because I was asked to speak at two different schools in downtown Los Angeles this week, one elementary school and one middle school. The Perfect Jennifer probably won the coolest teacher award for getting her younger sister, a world champion in mixed martial arts and subject of a made for TV movie this summer to come talk for career day.

However, after the mobs of autograph seekers had departed, there were still plenty of questions for the old mom, just as there were at the elementary school in MacArthur Park (yes, the same of disco song and gang fame).

Here are some of my favorite questions and the answers that I gave.

Were you always a math genius?

I was not a particularly good student. I got in trouble a lot for fighting and I wasn't all THAT interested in school. I think I started being interested in math when I was in the sixth grade just because the math teacher (Sister Marion) was really nice and some of my other teachers were really mean. I mean, really mean, like throwing stuff at me. It's true, I was an annoying child, but still. Since I liked her, I liked her class, so I studied harder for it and did better.

Is your mother proud of you?

Yes, I believe she is. I've gotten a lot of education, started a company that does good work, been a teacher and been able to take care of my children well, so I would say, yes, she is proud of me.

What do you dislike about your job?

I really had to think about this one, and for a long time I could not think of anything. Then, the Perfect Jennifer reminded me that sometimes I have to go to North Dakota in the winter. That is the one thing I don't like about my job, when I have to go somewhere it is really cold because I hate cold weather.

What was your Plan B?

I had to think about that, too, for a while. I finally said that I really like being a statistician and the work I'm doing. If what I'm doing right now doesn't work out,

if the grant that I'm currently working on doesn't get funded, if my game I'm working on doesn't sell, then I think I will just try again. It's like my daughter Ronda (who spoke earlier in the morning) said. Someone asked her in an interview once, *"You've won every match so far in your career with the arm bar in the first round.*

*What are you going to do if you try the arm bar on someone one day and it doesn't work?"*She replied, *"Well, I guess in that case, I'd probably try again."* (In fact, if you saw her last match, that is exactly what she did.) So, I said, I think my Plan B would be to try again to succeed as a statistician.

What do you like about your job?

Everything. I like traveling. I like working with really smart, nice people, which is all I work with anymore, because if they are jerks, I just turn down the contract and don't work with them. I like the fact that every project is something new. Sometimes it's seeing if a program works. Some days it's trying to catch fraud. Other days it is teaching a class. I like the fact that I don't have to get up before 10 o'clock in the morning.

Finally, I told them this:

"If you don't remember anything else I said or that anyone else said today, remember this, because it took me a long time to figure it out. Don't EVER believe that other people are smarter than you, that they have some special kind of math brain that they can get it and you can't, that everyone knows more than you. If they do know more than you, it is just because they worked at it longer and harder. And if you work long enough and hard enough, you will get to the same place. Don't believe you need to be a certain race or age or look a certain way to start a technology company and be successful. It just is not true. I used to think that way, that people who are really good at math were not people like me, certainly none of the math professors I had in college or people I saw on television talking about starting companies looked like me. None of that matters. Now I write the sort of things that I could not imagine even understanding when I was young. I toss it off like it's nothing, and it IS nothing because I've been doing it for twenty years. Math, martial arts, programming – anything – you just bang away at and you get it eventually. Why do you think they call it hacking?"

FOUR THINGS STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE LEARNED IN SCHOOL BUT DIDN'T

As I'm approaching 55, I am planning on doing a series called **55 things I have learned in (almost) 55 years**. As I was thinking about all of the things I have learned in five and a half decades, I got me thinking about what students should have learned in school but often didn't. Since I had work to do, I couldn't think about it all day, but here are the top four.

1. Say what you mean.

I don't know who those teachers are who reinforce students for using longer words, longer sentences and writing more pages, but I hope someone finds them and beats them senseless with *The Elements of Style*, which nearly a century after it was first published I still think is one of the best books on writing out there.

When you write:

In the experiment under discussion we utilized two conditions in the manner such that one group of the subjects referred to in the preceding paragraph received no treatment, that is, they were what is referenced as the control group. The other group, that is the second group, which was the group receiving our treatment described in the section under procedures which follows is hereafter referred to as the treatment group. A treatment group is defined by Academic-Guy (2012) as ...

Instead of:

Subjects were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group.

You may think the first example makes you sound intelligent and well-educated. It doesn't. It makes you sound like you learned English by watching the Power Puff Girls and imitating Mojo Jojo. People – clients, your boss – are busy, and grant applications have page limits. The reason you get no reply is not because people are blown away by your intellect. It's because they either stopped reading/listen or died of boredom.

2. Don't be a pain in the ass.

I wrote a post about this called "Why the cool kids won't hang out with you." In brief, no

matter how smart you are, if you constantly run down your co-workers, flaunt the policies of your organization and are rude to your boss, at some point they will replace you with an equally smart person who is less of a pain. This may sound hypocritical because if you are a regular reader of my blog you are well aware that I swear, don't do mornings and, if I have to wear a suit, I charge extra. However, I work with clients that are cool with that.

Really Points 1 and 2 generally reveal a person trying to prove that he or she is smarter than the other people in the room. That usually reflects an underlying insecurity. I have met some absolutely brilliant scientists and businessmen/women. None felt the need to try to impress me. I was already impressed when I met them, and I'm sure that was the reaction they got from almost everyone.



3. Mean what you say.

If you say you will be in the office at 8 a.m., be in the office at 8. I tell clients I will be in by 9:30 or 10 if necessary because I know there is no way on God's earth I am dragging myself out of bed at 7 a.m. It's not happening. On the other hand, they know that if I say I will be in by 10, I will. If you say you can write programs in Perl or are experienced creating multimedia PowerPoint presentations, then when I ask you to do that, you should be able to do it. [I don't really need anyone to do either, so if you are applying for our summer intern position, you don't

need to mention these. It was just an example.]

4. Learn to code.

It doesn't matter what language. It's absolute bullshit that once you know one programming language you know them all, but it is certainly true that once you have the idea of loops, arrays, properties, methods, classes, extend, functions and a few dozen other key concepts, it will be much easier for you to pick up a second, third or fourth programming language. The Perfect Jennifer is an amazingly great history teacher. She is in one of the minority of fields where you can not do any programming and have a decent, stable job. Did I mention she is amazingly great and works an enormous amount of extra hours?

However, if you are planning on going into consulting, management or a large number of other fields, knowing how to code will help you immensely. Even our Chief Marketing Officer, who only focuses on marketing, has done a little coding and has some idea of

the constraints of developing a new product. I'm so convinced of the personal and professional value of learning at least a little bit of programming that I have gone back to requiring it in my statistics courses.

Often students don't learn to code because they underestimate themselves. They believe programming is done by people who are smarter, more focused or in some way better than them. That's simply not true and learning to code will give them both more skills and more confidence.

So, those are four more things I have learned in (almost) 55 years and that I think any student graduating should learn as well.

YES, WE'RE SENDING OUR CHILD TO BOARDING SCHOOL

Generally, when the school principal calls, it's not a good sign. When the call begins, *I'm sure you weren't expecting this* ...It's usually an even worse sign.

In this case, however, he had called to say that The Spoiled One was being recommended for a scholarship to a boarding school. We had never considered boarding school for five seconds. She'd already been admitted to a private, Catholic girls school with a stellar academic reputation. It was the school we had picked out for her two years ago.



She'd done the campus visit, studied for her high school placement test, gone for her interview and gotten admitted. We'd even mailed in the registration fee. It was all set.

So ... I took a deep breath and said, *"We will go visit. That is as far as I am willing to commit."*

When I told the rocket scientist about this, he looked as if he had been kicked in the stomach. He had waited 42 years to have a child and wasn't at all ready to have her living somewhere else. Well, we did go visit. The school is in a drop-dead gorgeous setting. The student-teacher ratio is 10 to 1. The average SAT scores are 200 points above the national average. But still, she would be moving into a dorm, at fourteen years old.



Impatient with all of the agonizing and discussing, The Spoiled One stamped her feet for attention and said, *"I think you people are underestimating me."*

It's funny how many people now when we tell them that we are sending our child to

boarding school respond with a long pause, unsure what to say. Some have even gone as far as to ask if anything is wrong. We're not sending her to rehab, for Christ's sake!

In fact, one reason we were willing to entertain the idea of her living away from home five days a week is that she hasn't ever gotten into any real trouble. Right now, she has a 4.0 GPA for the semester, she's made honor roll every year, been on the student council for three years, plays soccer four or five times a week.

Boarding school is not the typical choice in this country, and she won't be going to school with a lot of typical kids. In fact, there are kids from over 20 countries living in the dorms.

The more we talked about it and visited, the more we could see her fitting in there. It's interesting, when I read posts from other West Coast parents they all say the same thing – they never considered boarding school, but when their child brought it up and they looked into it, it seemed like the right choice.

So, no, there is nothing "wrong".

Are we nervous? Of course we are nervous! I still can't believe it wasn't just last week that she was eight years old making her First Communion.

I have tried very hard never to hold my children back in life. I have taken a deep breath and put my 17-year-old daughter on a plane to fly across the country and enroll in New York University, which neither she nor I had never even seen and which sucked up half of my income for 3 1/2 years.

I took another deep breath and sent my 16-year-old daughter to Boston to live with the best judo coach in the country, so she could train for the Olympics.

I drove my nineteen-year-old daughter to San Francisco to start her junior year of college at San Francisco State. Two years after she graduated, I drove her back to LA to start her master's program at USC.

So, yes, I'm used to taking a deep breath and letting go.

As the saying goes, *"There are two things we must give our children. One is roots, and the other is wings."*

FORGET YOUR DREAM, KID. FOLLOW STATISTICS.

I saw this poster in a high school, supposedly said by a basketball coach:

People say, *"Follow your dreams."* I say, *"Forget your dreams, kid, follow math."*

He goes on to give the percentage of high school athletes who compete in college – 3.4% for men's basketball. By the way, 1% of high school athletes make it in Division I. Even if you make it to the college level, your odds of becoming a professional athlete are dismal – 1.1% of college basketball players make it to the major professional teams. Yes, that is 1% of 1%, so you have a .01% chance of making it onto the Lakers even if you are playing in high school.

If you are that 1 in 10,000 who makes it on the roster, your median salary will be \$3.7 million and you will play for around 4.8 years, giving you a career salary of around \$18.5 million.

Let's say you are a statistician with a Ph.D. With 5-9 years of experience, your median salary is around \$130,000. In my experience, it is going to be considerably less your first year but go up fairly rapidly. Let's say you have the sense to get some scholarship and grant funds to pay for your tuition – my total student loan debt was \$900 – and that you graduate in your 30s. I was 31 and that was with taking a few years out to work as an engineer. There isn't any particular reason you have to retire before 65 or 70. It's not like your knees go out and they fire you from your statistician job. I'm going to give a ballpark figure of \$150,000 a year average over those 36 years, which turns out to be about the median salary for a statistician who doesn't work in academia, according to the American Statistical Association. You're at \$5.4 million. That's not counting 36 years of health insurance, 401K and other benefits like not having a boss who is referred to as your "owner," which I personally find kind of creepy weird, but you also have to consider you don't get all the \$5.4 million at once, either.

So, let's present this to you:

You have a 1 in 10,000 chance of making \$18.5 million

You have a 55 out of 100 chance of making \$5.4 million.

You can only buy one ticket. Which lottery ticket do you buy?

Oh, by the way, did I mention you have a 90 out of 100 chance of making over \$3 million?

The coach's point was that you may be dreaming about a spot in the NBA, but you have a much greater chance of success in life if you spend your time in the math class instead of on the court. As a good friend of mine often says, *"Too many people confuse wishes with plans."*

So, you may dream of slam dunks in the NBA, but you would be a lot better off planning to take Calculus, several statistics courses and study a field like business, psychology, political science or epidemiology where you can apply those statistics.

You might think I don't have any heart, that I have no idea what it means to dream of being a successful athlete. Actually, you'd be wrong. I ran track in college. I won the world championships in judo. Then, the next year, I went into a Ph.D. program and specialized in statistics because, well, I'm good enough at math to see what had the better probability of paying off in the future.

There are SO many ways to learn and use statistics. That's another post, though. I'd best toddle off to bed since I need to catch a plane to North Dakota tomorrow after I go do a charity walk in the morning. Early morning and snow, two things I hate the most. But, life can't be perfect all the time. I think I can prove that statistically.

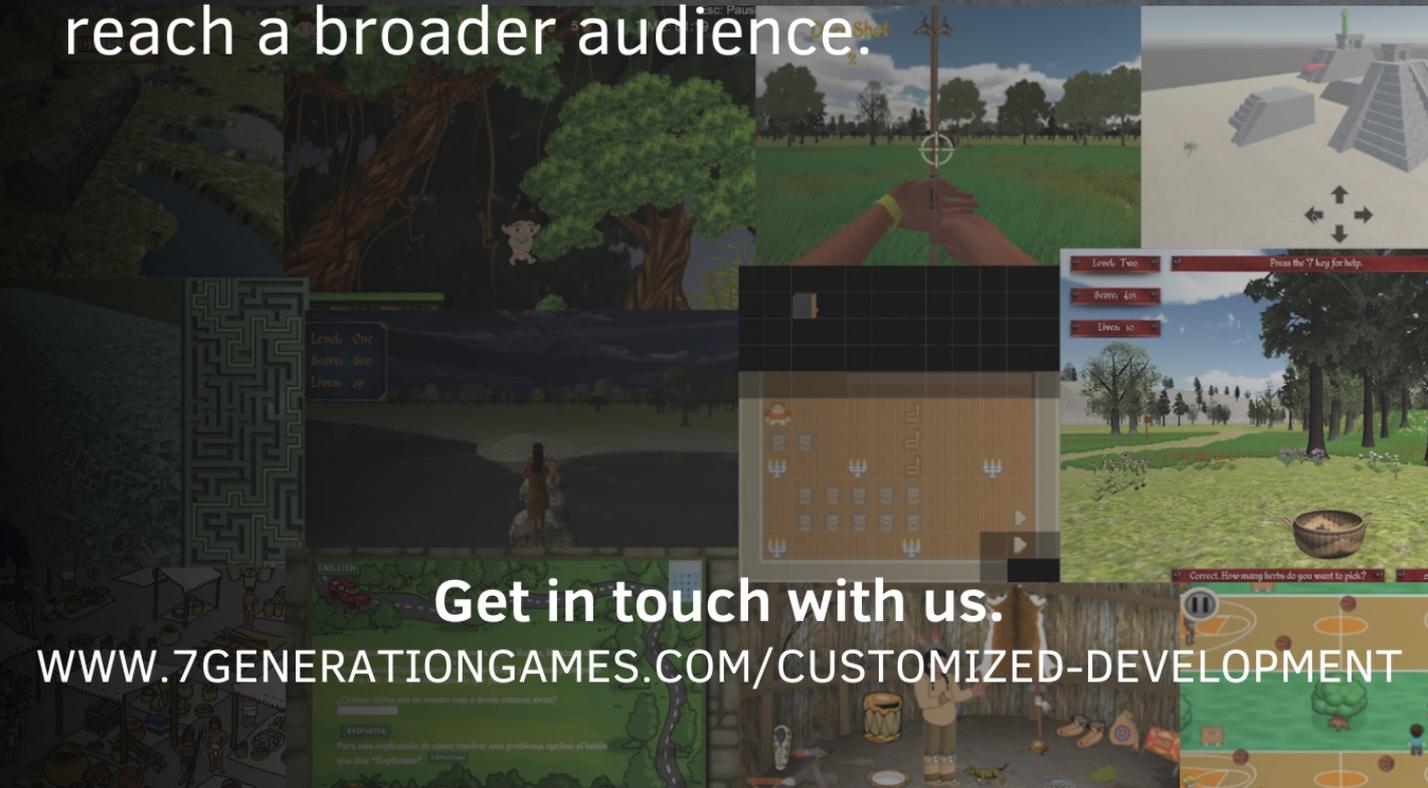


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CHILDREN'S COMPETITION: IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW, YOU'RE WRONG

Last week, Ronda and I were at practice at Sawtelle Dojo discussing the upcoming state championships. I said that I had not yet sent in Julia's application because I had left it up to her if she wanted to compete and she hadn't decided.

Ronda said, *"I think she should go. If you don't compete in a tournament because you are afraid you might lose, that just feeds on itself, and pretty soon you are afraid to compete in anything."*

I agreed with that, but I said, *"I really can't see the benefit of forcing an 11-year-old to compete in a state championships."*

Thinking about this, I realized here Ronda and I are – both with gold medals from the Pan-American games, Austrian Open, Canada Cup/ Rendezvous, U.S. Open, both having competed in the finals in the world championships, and a lot more. Neither of us is 100% sure of the right answer, with 20 years and several continents of international competition between us. That's when it occurred to me.

"This parenting s--- is hard!"

None of us know what is right with 100% certainty. *Are you putting too much pressure on your child or not holding high enough expectations? Are you letting your child give up on a shot at the Olympics or are you making sure that he/she focuses on education? If you don't force your child to go to practice several times a week is that accepting mediocrity, putting other priorities first or letting someone be a kid?*

As the saying goes, everyone knows the right answers in parenting until they have children. I used to be one of those coaches who complained about children who could be "so good" but their parents had them in every activity under the sun, "mediocre in every activity rather than excellent in one," we coaches would complain, self-righteously.

Now, I have a child who goes to judo three practices a week. She only goes to one

tournament a month, and I let her pick which one doesn't conflict with her friend's birthday party or going to see some new movie with Dad. She made straight A's last semester, was just re-elected to student council, accepted to the USC Science Camp for Middle School Girls, is in the Debate Club, takes piano lessons, and played on her school's basketball and volleyball teams. She could be a great athlete. What she will end up doing is anyone's guess.

I still hear coaches talking about parents who have their children in multiple activities *"just so they can get into a good college"* -- as if that is a less valuable goal than making the junior Pan-American team.

I am writing a book on statistical software, it's on SAS Enterprise Guide for researchers, if you are interested, which I know you are not. I mention it because I am progressing with glacial speed, although I *am* getting something written every day. I read a quote, *"I hate writing, but I love having written."*

Parenting is like that, although I do love everything about my children from the way they laugh to the fact that they are always thinking about what is going on in the world. Still, even years later, you're still not sure if your decisions were the right ones.

Ronda is 22. In a few weeks, she will buckle down and start training for the next Olympics, traveling all over the world and making her life happen.

Jenn is 23. In a few weeks, she will buckle down and start graduate school at USC, meeting people from all over the world and making her life happen.

Did I go wrong with one of them? Did I make a mistake? Well, I'm sure I made a lot of mistakes but I learned a few things along the way. It's like the scene from that movie, Pleasantville.

"I had the right house. I had the right car."

"There is no right house. There is no right car."

"It's not supposed to be like this."

"It's not supposed to be anything."

No matter how many degrees or medals any of us have, we all just do the best we can, wonder if it is the right way or if we should do something else. I wear a St. Jude medal all of the time except when I am working out. My kids ask about it from time to time. It's simple, really. It's a lost cause to think we can always have the right answer or do the right thing. The best we can do is buckle down, try our hardest and pray.

HOW TO RAISE YOUR CHILDREN TO BE GOOD PEOPLE

The title of this chapter is deceptive because it implies an answer. Anyone who claims to know how to raise children to be good men and women is lying. Most parents do the best they can. Then, there are a few people who are living proof that a parenting license test should be implemented. Hell, the damage you can do in a car accident is minor compared to how bad parenting can wreak havoc.

The marvelously talented Hans Gutknecht took this picture today of Ronda, Justin Flores, who is coaching her in judo leading up to her world title defense, and Josh Ramirez who was training with her.



It occurred to me that I remember when everyone in it was born (except me) and I was very happy today seeing what fine people they had grown up to be. My four wonderful children are doing wonderfully well at the moment so people ask me for advice.

To quote Shayna Baszler, *"I will not share with you the answers that I have not got."*

I asked Jake (Justin's dad) what he thought, and he said, *"I tried my best."*

Which sounds a lot like Shayna's answer.

Today, I was driving by a huge billboard advertising Special Olympics and I thought to myself, *I'm so achievement-oriented, I don't think I would be a good parent for a child with a disability.*

It was several miles down the road before it occurred to me that I had one child who had epilepsy and another who had developmental delays and required years of speech therapy. Never for one second did I consider either of them to have a disability. I just wasn't having it. This makes it sound like I thought things through, but not really.

It just never occurred to me that my children were anything short of amazing in every way. That is one thing that I know Justin's parents, Josh's parents and I did have in common.

If you think all parents think that way, I can assure you that they do not.

NOBODY REALLY KNOWS WHAT THEY ARE DOING

I have often threatened to write a book on parenting with the title: Nobody Really Knows What They Are Doing. The older I get, the more evident this is. In the last ten years, my daughters have done relatively well - graduated from NYU, masters from USC, scholarship to prep school, Olympic medal, world champion, journalist of the year, etc.

All of a sudden people are telling me what a great mother I was to them and asking my parenting advice.



Prior to all of that success, I was just the worst mother in the entire world out to ruin their lives. They were dropping out of high school, running away from home, passed out drunk at parties where I had tracked them down and carried them out of the house on my shoulders. (Not all of them and not all at once, and they will each claim that it was their sisters and they were perfect.)

There are a few things that I have, hopefully, instilled in my children. Since I was fortunate to spend the day with my two youngest, who (correctly) concluded that the Mother's Day gift I would most like was their presence, I spent most of it trying to impart to the littlest sister -- also known as The Spoiled One -- what lessons in life I most hoped she would learn.

Although you can't tell it by this picture, it was met with much eye rolling, sighing and pretending to fall asleep. However, I gave it my best shot, which is all I can do.

Here are a few lessons I hope they will learn.

Sacrifice what you want now for what you want most.

If you really want to pass the AP History Exam, you will study for it every night instead of watching vampire shows on Netflix.

Figure out what it is you really want out of life.

Even if you don't know at 16 or 18 years old -- and most people don't -- you should be making an effort to figure it out.

Being outstanding takes far more work than you think.

To be the best in something doesn't take 10% more work than being good, it usually takes twice as much work.

Strive to be the best at something.

Regardless of the economy, there is never a surplus of excellence and you will always have work.

Success takes far longer than you think.

The biggest factor in being successful at something is to just keep working at it. (Ronda added that although it seems like it's taking a really long time in the middle of it, when you look back, it really doesn't seem that long after all. Time is funny that way.)

Value your family over friends.

Friends will come and go in your life but your family will be there always.

Words mean things.

(I stole this line.) If you say you are going to meet someone at the Eiffel Tower at 2 p.m. on May 3rd, 2018, when that time comes, you should be there.

Give back.

You have a very privileged life in a beautiful state in a prosperous, safe country in a fairly well-off family. You didn't hit a double. You started life on second base. Appreciate that by helping whenever you can.

RAISING SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN: PART I

Last week, I met with a very nice writer from Sports Illustrated, who said to me, *"You must be really proud of Ronda."*

To which I answered, like I always do, *"I am very proud of all four of my daughters. Maria is a successful journalist, graduated from NYU, has two beautiful children and teaches at Tufts University. Jenn teaches at an inner city school and has a masters from USC. Ronda has been to two Olympics, won a bunch of awards in judo and is now Strikeforce world champion in mixed martial arts. And Julia earned a scholarship to a top college preparatory school."*



The reporter said, *"That cannot come out of nowhere. How did you do it? What did you do to raise such accomplished daughters?"*

I have a stack of letters and emails in my in-box, all asking pretty much the same thing, waiting for me to come up with a good answer.

Here is my first crack at it.

How good of a parent you are and how successful your children are all depends on the timing. Sometime between the ages 15- 20, if you had asked each of my daughters about me, they would have told you I was out to ruin their lives, I did not care about them and I was a mean old woman.

If you asked the same daughters the same question ten years later, you would get a very different answer. I quote my friend, Lanny Clark a lot. He said, *"Life goes to the slowest winner."*

In other words, it doesn't matter who is No. 1 in high school chemistry or won the junior nationals at age eight. It matters who won the Nobel Prize or the Super Bowl.

Here is my first piece of advice on parenting, *sometimes you have to be the bad parent to be the good parent.*

I've been the mean parent who told my children they were wrong when everyone else was telling them they should be able to do whatever they want to do, *"Who is your mom to tell you that you can't jet-ski naked? She's just trying to run your life."*

I have been the evil person who when one of my daughters said (more than one of them on more than one occasion) *"How can you say what you just said? It made me feel really bad!"* – I replied, *"Good! After what you did, you SHOULD feel bad. Sometimes low self-esteem reflects an honest appraisal. You are NOT okay the way you are and you need to CHANGE."*

Don't sound like a very good mom, now, do I?

Never give up on your kids.

A lot of parents say, *"Oh, no, of course not"* - but they don't really mean it.

Just because you dropped out of high school does not mean that you can't be graduating from a top graduate school when you are 23. Wait -- what?

I don't mean that you have to do everything for your children. Quite the contrary. One of the hardest things is to stand by and let them take their lumps - *you* decided not to go to college, or that you want to take "a year off from everything." Okay, now you're broke. Sucks, doesn't it?

But... you have to be available to provide support again when your child is ready to stop doing whatever stupid-ass thing she was doing (and no, I am not calling out any of my daughters but just let me say, they all have given my grey hairs. This is why I have to pay the salon to dye my hair).

Even after your child did NOT win the state championships, and, in fact, dropped out of the sport altogether, failed a course and did NOT get into an Ivy League school, you still have to be there and try to get him or her back on track. I have heard parents say, *"I gave my child a chance. Now it is time for me to enjoy life, travel, spend money on myself."*

The time for that is after your child is out supporting himself or herself and has a good start in life. I know people who when their child turns 18 kick them out the door and say,

"I'm done." Or the first time their child screws up wash their hands and say, *"I'm done."* It's a LOT of work, money and sacrifice to raise children, and sometimes it seems as if some people are just waiting for an excuse to be done. Manny Gamburyan said something very wise on Twitter the other day. He was talking about training but it could apply to parenting just as well. He said, *"I don't quit when I'm tired. I quit when I'm done."*

RAISING SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN: PART 2

In the last chapter, I started to give some of my ideas on what it takes to raise successful children. It takes some luck. I also think it takes the willingness to be the bad guy sometimes.

Okay, I admit it, I was watching Hoarders, and the mother said, *"I just want to be the mother my child wants."*

The psychologist replied, *"Sometimes it's important not to be the mother your child wants. You have to be the mother your child needs."*

And, to take my favorite advice, not from a psychologist, but from Winston Churchill, *"Never, never, never give up."*

One of the comments on my blog was that perhaps I should use a different word for "successful," because that might be taken to mean being perceived well by other people. It's like the difference between character and reputation. As John Wooden said, *"Character is what you really are. Reputation is what other people think you are."*

Since I'm on the quote train, I'll go one more and mention Emmy Werner. She did a famous series of studies on children who came from extremely disadvantaged environment and nonetheless did well. She had to define what she meant by succeeded and she defined it as, "Children who lived well, learned well and loved well."

That is, they stayed out of jail, stayed out of rehab, weren't homeless, weren't on welfare living in the projects. They didn't fail any grades in school, were not in special education, were not behind in grade level and finished high school or some college (before anyone points out Ronda didn't graduate high school - she DID get a GED and go to college for a while and did fine in her classes). They had good relationships with their family and friends.

Basically, these are criteria that pretty much everyone can agree are good things. So, that is what I mean by successful and I think it is what most people want for their children. Another piece of advice (and I will say this probably in multiple ways in several other chapters): ***Put your children first.***

People say they do, but they don't. I don't give a damn what the neighbors think of me, people at judo tournaments or at my church. I care about what is best for my children. When Ronda was young, there were times when I would take her away from the rest of the class and work with her on something because I thought whatever was being taught was not what she needed to be learning right then. I was very, very fortunate that I was at Venice Dojo at the time, and I had told Trace Nishiyama (the head instructor) when we joined that I wanted to do this and he was okay with it. Some other people were not and complained that Ronda got more attention (yes, she did because it was my attention and she was my kid). I have liked many children that I have taught very much. Gary Butts' kids are awesome - smart, funny, athletic. Lanny Clark's kids are awesome. There are many kids I can name.

I have had people say to me, *"I don't treat my children special. I treat every child the same."*

I don't. I treat my kids like I love them more than yours. Because I do.

I could give a thousand different examples. We don't live in the biggest house or drive sports cars, but all of our children went to private schools. We had a nanny who was wonderful. When our children went to college or trained around the world, we sacrificed to pay for it. When Maria got accepted at NYU, Dennis and I both took on more work to cover the cost. When Jenn got accepted at USC, we just adjusted our budget and schedules so she could move home, make it to classes and her student teaching.

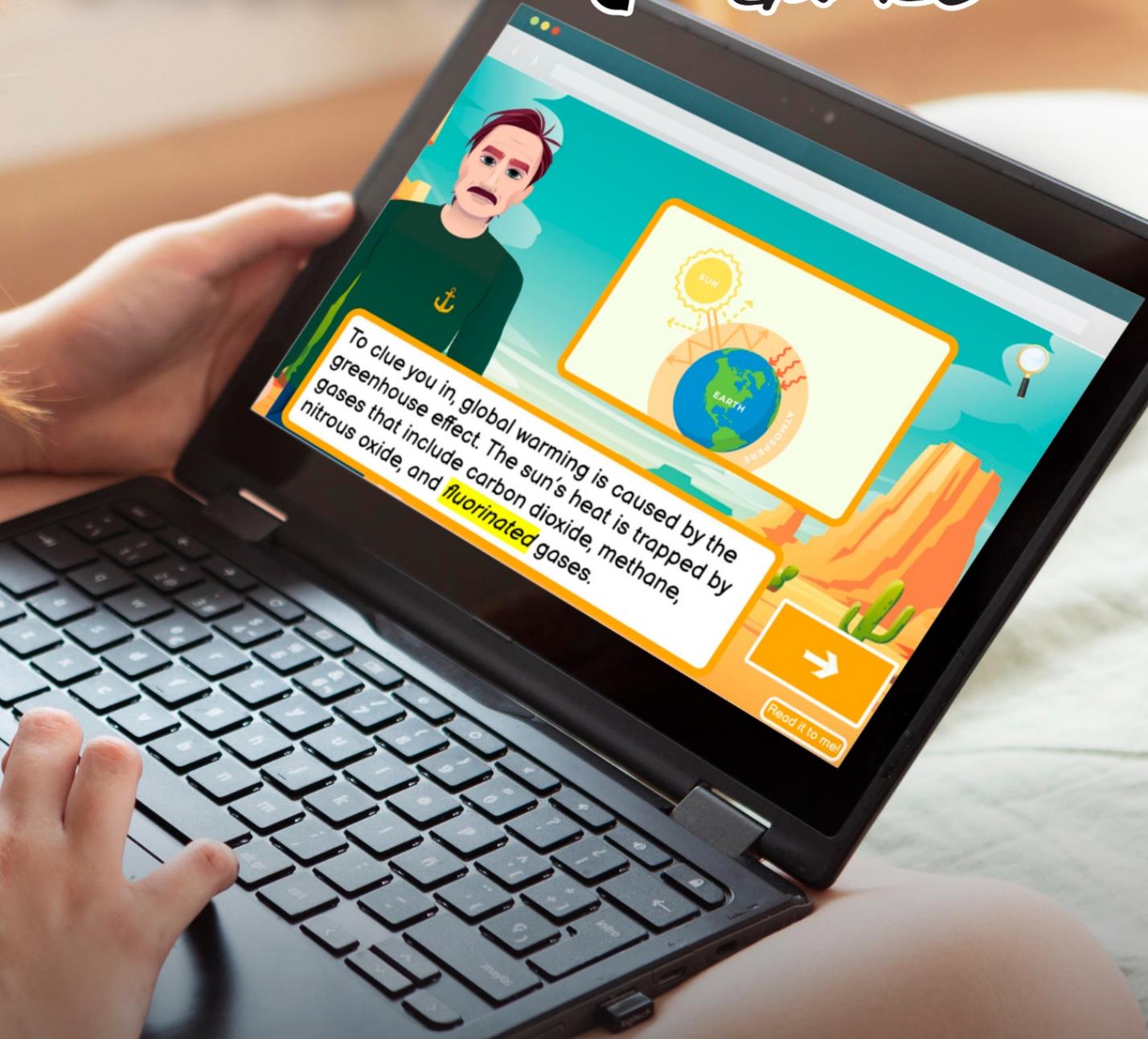
My point is not that you should do exactly what I did, but that you should do what you believe is best for your children, even if it is a sacrifice for you emotionally, socially or financially. Be honest about it.

I have seen parents force their kids to stay on a soccer team, at a judo club or apologize to a teacher not because it was best for their child, but because the parent did not want to face the other parents or coach and tell them their child was quitting the team. I know parents who insist their children study 25 hours a week from third grade through high school to get into an Ivy League school. Who are they really doing that for? To impress the other parents? Is it really for your kid? Really?

For the first time in 30 years, I have no children living at home and I have a clean house. I never stayed home and cleaned up. I took my kids to practice, hounded them to do their homework and ran a business to pay for what I felt they needed. I had a job that took me out of town much of the time, I didn't have dinner on the table every night and

my house looked like the before picture in a Clorox commercial. I know people who thought I was not a very good mom. **Those people can bite me.**

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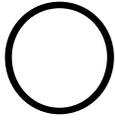
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PERFECT PARENTING IS OVERRATED



Over twenty years ago, when my children were about ages 8, 5 and 4, I wrote a chapter called, "Handling the triple threat: How to hold a job, raise a family and still be sane by graduation"



I could not find the book. My sister probably has it. She has taken it upon herself to be the family librarian and obtain a copy of everything any of us has published. She drew the line at Maria, though, because she has hundreds, maybe thousands, of articles in press.

One of my main points in the chapter was from Sandra Scarr, author of "Mother Care, Other Care" and much more famous for her research on black children adopted by white families. She wrote about her personal experience

being an extraordinarily productive author, professor, researcher and a mother.

One of her points was: Don't try to compensate by making organic, home-made baby food. Buy the kind in the store for 39 cents. Both are equally likely to end up spit up on the cat, and you can use the time you save for reading your child a book and relaxing.

There is no doubt that my granddaughters are brilliant. Emilia turned two years old last month. When the surprise birthday party for her sister was breaking up, she was very sad because she did not want the party to end. Aunt Ronda explained that she had to go and work so she could make money to buy things, like a monkey. Emilia asked, "*You have a monkey? Can I touch it?*"

This is NOT the typical conversation at 24 months. And no, Ronda does not have a monkey. She was trying to leave with the minimal amount of tears (but not the minimal amount of lies, apparently).

So, yes, the children are brilliant and maybe that has to do with Maria devoting most of her waking hours to them. Perhaps that is supposed to make me feel guilty because I did not do that, in which case it is a failure.

One of our earliest home videos was of my using the remote control to turn the TV off to try to get two-year-old Jennifer to quit watching Inspector Gadget. I swear, that child tried her hardest to watch TV eight hours a day. I probably let her watch it two or three hours a day while I got work done.

She grew up to get a minor in film studies and major in history at San Francisco State, followed by a master's at USC, and now she is the kind of history teacher you hope your child will have.

When my children were young, their father was ill, and I suddenly had to make both incomes for our two-income family. After teaching at the university all day, I would come home and work as a consultant. I told all of them, *"Unless there is blood on the floor, don't any of you talk to me after 10 p.m."*

My desk was downstairs and their bedrooms upstairs. I chased them back upstairs many a time and I felt zero guilt.

They turned out fine.

COACHING YOUR OWN KID: THE QUESTIONS TO ASK AGAIN AND AGAIN

I've always questioned the assumption that all parents of children who are active in sports are some kind of deranged "Little League parent" living vicariously through their children. Of course, there are some of those, but there are a great many more I've seen who are trying to figure out the best for their child, day after day.

What makes it even harder is that the answers to the questions change, so you have to ask yourself some of the same questions over and over again.

Let me give just one example:

Do I really have what it takes to coach my child? When your child is a beginner, if you know the basics of your sport, have patience, can get to practice once or twice a week and enjoy working with children, the answer is probably yes.



Now your child is a 14-year-old who wants to win the junior nationals. *Can you make it to practice four or five times a week? Can you get to the tournaments several weekends a year? Can you help your child analyze her strengths and weaknesses beyond the basics? Is your own knowledge of the sport at an advanced level? Can you teach your child to win with grace and lose with dignity?* No one is perfect but if you are pretty good on all of those dimensions, you'll probably be fine.

Now your child has a shot at the Olympics. All of the sacrifices your child has made, the hard work -- and your sacrifices and work, too, have paid off. *Can you make it to practice every day? Do you have other coaches, including strength coaches, technical experts, to help in areas where you aren't the best coach? How are you at video*

analysis? Setting up a training schedule that accounts for the season, pre-season and post-season? Can you take the time away from your other children, your job? Are you one of the best coaches in the country in your sport?

And those are just the questions you need to ask over and over of yourself, about one decision. We haven't even mentioned the questions you need to ask about your child yet.

This parenting stuff is hard.

I remember one day driving to practice and Ronda was at that age where she was always arguing with me about training, judo, partners and the universe. I finally turned to her and yelled, *"I'm doing the best I can! There's not a book for this, you know!"*

NOBODY SHOULD BE JUDGED ON A SINGLE DAY

I was reading Tom Peter's blog one day. (He wrote the books, "In Search of Excellence," "Wow!" and several other books on business). He commented on an article in Fortune magazine where the reporter, writing about someone at Goldman Sachs, said that his decades of work could be wiped out in a single day.

Peter wrote:

"Suppose my net worth was 100.000% wiped out this morning. I would be unhappy. Very unhappy.

But...

But if my net worth went to zero, the value of my last several decades of work would be precisely the same, for good or for ill, as it had been before the net worth tanked."

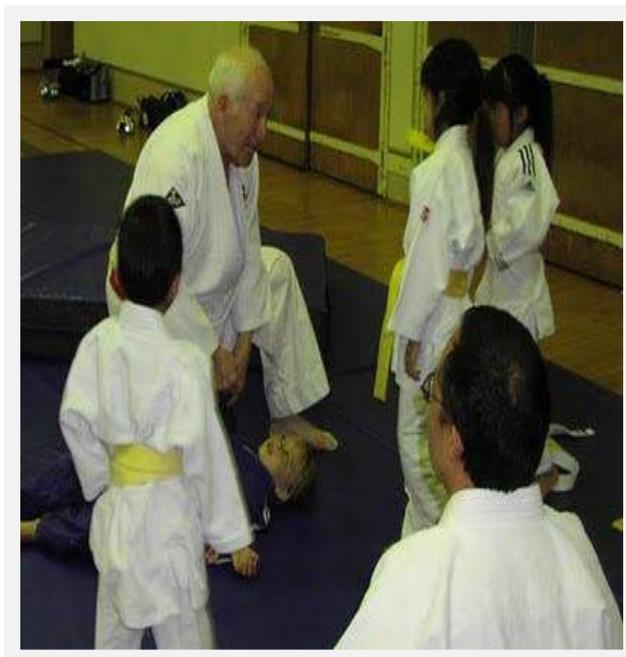
The same is true in judo, teaching, parenting, life. I see so many people incredibly stressed out because they act as if their net worth is determined by a single day. I can't really criticize them, either, because I am guiltier of that than most people. To this day, if I make a mistake, if I do the wrong thing and hurt a friend's feelings, if I don't know the answer to a statistical question, if someone I coach loses a match, I feel like a complete failure.

When I was younger, it seemed as if losing a tournament would be the end of the world and prove that I wasn't any good as a judo player, as a human being. God forbid that I do poorly on an exam, much less get less than an A in a class. I must be stupid. None of this makes any sense at all. I won a world judo championship. I graduated from college at 19, earned a Ph.D., just had another scientific article accepted for publication and am flying to Minneapolis next week to present on my latest research. The fact that I did not know the answer to that question yesterday, off the top of my head, regarding how Stata reads data in a parallel processing environment does NOT make me a moron. (Besides, it was the opposite of what you would expect.)

Maybe if you kill a bunch of people or molest small children that single day defines you as a bad person. Still, I don't believe anyone goes from Joe The Nice Guy to a child-

molesting serial killer in a single day. I think they work their way up to it by a lot of days of pulling the wings off flies and looking up dolls' dresses before they finally end up in full-fledged Silence of the Lambs mode.

SO many people quit judo, or at least the competitive part of it, because they put themselves under so much stress, acting as if their entire life is going to be defined by whether they win or lose on a given day. Look at this picture of Hal Sharp. He won the Emperor's Cup in Japan over 50 years ago. Is that what makes him a great judoka? Or is it the fact that he wrote *The Sport of Judo*, still in print decades later and the first book I, and many others, ever read on judo? Or is it the Kodokan Technique Program



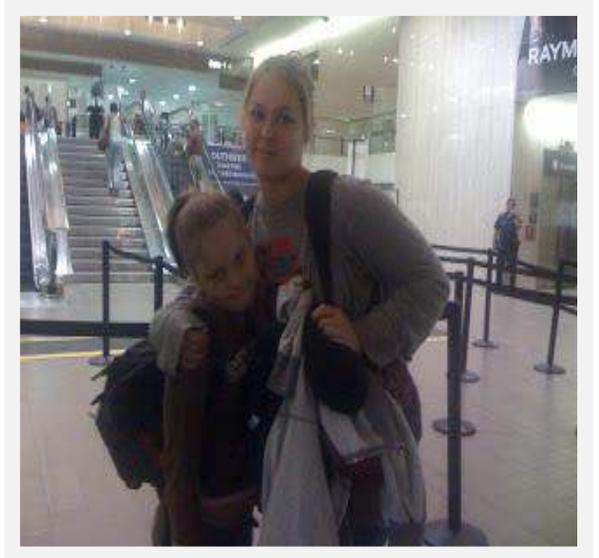
that he and John Moe are working on now? Or is it teaching at Gardena Dojo? Or is it all of the times he has volunteered to teach little kids? Or running his own judo club?

Of course, that's silly to even ask. It's all of those things. Today, I was just having a bad day, feeling like I had done a bad job as a parent, statistician, judo coach -- just one of those days when the small successes were outweighed by the small failures. Ronda, on the other hand, called me on the way home from having a particularly good practice and burst into singing that song from *Annie*, "The sun will come out tomorrow!"

The truth is, we're what we make of all of the days stacked on top of each other. With some people, like Hal, that can be a pretty tall stack.

INDEPENDENCE, BUTTERFLIES, JUDO, CHILDREN AND SEX

At 9 p.m. tonight, I dropped my two youngest daughters off at the airport. For the first time in twenty-two years, I will not have any children in the house for over 24 hours. Julia is ten years old and has been lobbying to be allowed to go somewhere by herself. She asked about a hundred times if she could go to the Mayo Quanchi judo camp in Rhode Island. I considered it, but when I found out that Ronda would be in Spain and could not go with her, I vetoed that.



Our compromise was that she went back to Boston five days early for the USJA Junior Nationals. She is going to stay with her oldest sister, Maria, and "help" Maria and her husband with the new baby.

Letting go does not come naturally to me. I don't feel guilt about it, either. In my opinion, too many people adopt a model of "low maintenance parenting" wherein if their child wants to try something against the parent's better judgment and causes too much trouble, Mom or Dad will shrug and let Janie fly to New York to visit a boy she met on the Internet or allow Joey to live on a diet of Red Hot Cheetos and Yoo-hoo, rationalizing, "Children are resilient."

I believe that it is a parent's responsibility to care for their children in every meaning of the word. When people ask me, *"What are you so worried about? What could go wrong if your child is staying with someone else?"*

My answer is, *"One hell of a lot more than when they are staying with me."*

While I am reluctant to have my children more than 50 feet away if I can help it, I realize that independence and thinking for oneself are crucial to a good life.

There is an old story often used as an analogy to adolescence.

A woman was watching a butterfly trying to get free from its chrysalis. The poor thing was struggling and seemed in pain. Taking pity on it, the woman gently pulled the chrysalis away. What she didn't know is that struggle is what pumped the fluids into a butterfly's wings. While the rest of the butterflies were fluttering around, that one spent the rest of its life with stunted wings on the ground - until somebody stepped on it.

Okay, well maybe I made up that last part about it getting squashed for dramatic effect. It's just a bug, and the story is probably all a lie and scientifically inaccurate anyway. The point, though, is that sometimes struggle is necessary and developing independence is a good thing.

Within judo, one of many factors stunting athlete growth, I think, is a lack of independence. This happens at the level of developing clubs and programs. So many instructors in judo have the overt or implied attitude that, *"You could never be as good an instructor as me. You could never have my knowledge."*

At 30, 40 and even 50 years old, we see many coaches as assistants to their sensei. In karate, I see instructors encouraging their students to get out and start their own schools. Often, if a judo player does that, the instructor is outraged, *"How dare he/she think of competing with me for students?"*

If you develop people who can go out and start their own programs, then good for you! You should be encouraging your students to do that, not putting yourself forward as so above them that they could never compete with your greatness. Get over yourself! In their twenties, I see too many judo players who could be good held back by coaches who refuse to let them think for themselves. This is NOT the same as saying they need to move away. As soon as a player shows a tiny bit of talent in this country, you have the vultures circling saying, *"You need a coach of elite players to grow. You must come to me."*

(Imagine this in a Darth Vader voice.) *That's a whole different topic.*

No, what I mean is that when I listen to most elite players talk about judo, I can hear their coach's voice. In fact, very often, they are saying, verbatim, words I have heard their coaches use. If their coach believes that gripping is the be-all and end-all of judo, they focus on that. If their coach emphasizes conditioning, they are the most conditioned athlete in the room. All of that is fine, but you need to be more than your coach. If you

are Jimmy Pedro the Third, or AnnMaria, Junior or Mike Swain 2.0, you are not going to be anything more than an imitation, and I see a lot of that.

At the Olympic Trials last weekend, I heard several coaches lament that a player would win, *"(Insert name here) ... just needs to do what they're told."*

When you are ten, that is true. You are being told not to lean backward on o soto gari, turn your head when you do seoi nage. As an adult, you need to think for yourself. Yes, a good coach helps immensely. However, if you have ten or twenty years of experience, this is something important to you that you have been doing much of your life. If *you* have traveled around the world, if *you* are the person in those positions on the mat - then you certainly ought to have thoughts to contribute.

It isn't an either/or proposition: that you know everything, which most teenage elite athletes believe; or that your coach knows everything, which many elite athletes in their twenties seem to believe. I was extremely fortunate that my own coach was only five years older than me. When I won the world championships, he was 31 and I was 26. Partly because we were close enough in age, he didn't adopt that "O-sensei" attitude. I would argue with him, and we would usually agree to try one way and see the outcome. For example, he wanted me to compete at 52 kg, and I thought I could win at 56 kg. We agreed I would try the heavier division and, if I didn't win, I would cut weight. Some of his ideas, like all of the matwork uchikomis, seemed a perfect fit for me right from the start, and I never objected.

In the end, you need to believe in yourself. A good coach brings you to that belief. Whether your coach was a world champion or not, you need to believe that you can go out and compete better than your coach ever did, that you can take everything he or she taught you, add more ideas of your own and be better than anyone in the world.

To me, when it comes to winning on the world level, two points are obvious:

1. Belief is strength.
2. There are no stupid champions.

People need to learn to be independent, to think for themselves, to believe in themselves.

As for what I am going to do with all of the children gone, I told them that we are going to have sex and do naked cartwheels in the living room. My niece Samantha objected, *"I don't believe that Uncle Dennis could do a cartwheel if he lost a hundred pounds."*

My daughter Maria added, *"I don't see Dennis doing cartwheels under any circumstances. But maybe he has secret tricks I don't know about."*

Well, I have to go now, Dennis is waiting in the living room.

THERE ISN'T A BOOK FOR THIS YOU KNOW! ON PARENTING AN ELITE ATHLETE

I found a journal under my bed in one of my bi-annual attempts at cleaning. A few years ago, a couple of parents of children a bit younger than mine encouraged me to write a book. I got as far as two pages, and then it fell behind the bed and things settled over it, kind of like what happened with those saber-toothed tigers that they now have on display at the La Brea tar pits.



Here is what I had written years ago:

There is a great big hole in the picture of parents in sports. Between the Little League dad and the figure-skating mom living vicariously through their children are the thousands of parents I have met. These are the moms and dads who take their child to 5 a.m. swim practice or who sit in grid lock L.A. traffic for two hours to get their children to practice at 7 p.m. They have to work all day. They are tired and sitting in that car on the 405 or on that bleacher at 6 a.m. is hardly the one thing in the world they most want to be doing by a very, very long shot.

Here is how it happens to most parents that you become the mom or dad of an elite athlete...

You are not the fanatic parent portrayed in the media. You have your own life, and you are happy with it -- or at least as happy as most people are, anyway. You have a job. You have friends, a husband or wife, maybe, and, of course, a child. You are pretty much like the rest of America.

Except... somewhere along the line, something happens and your story changes. You take your child to the local class, and she does well. You take her to the local meets and she wins. Everyone is having a nice time. Your house starts to fill up with trophies. Your child starts to get invited to "travel teams" or out-of-state tournaments. You start to

notice that your child is different. She does things other kids her age don't do. You probably notice it before anyone else does, because no one knows your child better than you. Other people will chalk it up to you just being another "Little League parent", but you know. You see this sport becoming your child's life.

Here is one of the first heartaches. You see your child lose, maybe for the first time, or the first time in a long time. I have never seen a world-class athlete who took losing well. You see your child walk out of the gym, sit down in the car next to you and burst into tears. You have the picture of your child standing on the podium trying bravely to smile, when her eyes are red from crying under the bleachers ever since the finals ended. Don't kid yourself that it is any easier if you have a son. At that moment, when you see your child's heart breaking, you resolve to do whatever you need to see that your child never, ever has to feel that way again. And so, here you are at the pool before dawn or on the freeway moving at 5 miles an hour.

Most people would think that having been a world champion would prepare you for being the parent of an elite athlete. Most people have no idea what the hell they are talking about.

Nothing prepares a parent to raise an elite athlete in any sport. There have been so many times when everyone else seemed to think they knew more about what my daughter needed than I did. There were a lot of days when five or six different people would call me up to tell me what I was doing wrong. Did I ask their opinions? No! And I just wanted to scream at them,

"There isn't a book for this, you know! I'm doing the best I can!"

One advantage I do have of being a former world champion is that I have been in this sport a very long time, long enough to realize that almost all parents will face the same challenges.

How do you tell if your child really is as gifted as you think? How can you know if you are letting a God-given talent slide or pushing a child to unreasonable limits? This is easier to see in timed events like swimming or track. If your child has broken his or her age group record every year since age six, you have a pretty good hint. But even in other sports, whether it's soccer or judo or tennis, there are still ways you can tell.

I think about my daughter Ronda. She came into a sport at age 11 and did not compete in her first junior nationals until 12. She qualified for her first junior international team at 14, her first junior worlds at 15 and her first senior U.S. team at 16.

There are probably 100 divisions in the junior nationals, by age group and weight, and

three national events and one junior U.S. Open each year. Out of those 400 possible gold medalists, what set Ronda apart? There are a couple of factors.

One is the conditions under which she was winning. Many of the kids who win junior nationals at 12 have been in judo six or seven years. With all of that training, they should be coming out ahead. Ronda had been competing for one year and was beating kids who had six times as much experience. Some children mature early, physically and mentally. They are essentially adults competing in the junior divisions. Ronda was not like that. She matured late in every way. At 12, she was such a skinny little beanpole that we called her Beanie. In fact, I still call her Bean. As the youngest child and having lost her father at a young age, she was pretty much babied. When she first came to live with him, Jim Pedro, Sr. said to me one day, "When my daughter, Tanya was 16, she was going on 21. Your daughter is 16 going on 13." Then he added, "But, God that kid hates to lose!"

If your child has not had every advantage in terms of private lessons, extra practices, starting years earlier than the competition (especially if your child's experience has been quite the opposite)...

If your child is not physically and emotionally more advanced than the other children competition (especially if your child is quite the opposite)...

...And your child is still winning, that is one sign.

The biggest sign I see, though, is that child who HATES to lose and doesn't think anyone on earth has the right to beat her. Years ago, I fought a 15-year-old girl in the senior nationals. I was supposed to win. I had been beating everyone. In fact, I never lost a match at 48 kg. This kid came out and tried to beat me. She didn't have a prayer. I was ungodly strong for that division. I just held her still, knocked her down and pinned her. But that isn't the point. The point is that she was the only person that day who really came after me trying to win. That kid, Darlene Anaya, from New Mexico, got a bronze medal in the 1984 World Championships at 48 kg (I grew. She didn't.)

Congratulations... I guess.... your child is amazing. Now what?

How do you get her the training she needs? How do you make sure she gets to enough practices, gets the cross-training in, gets the coaching she needs?

Are you thinking to yourself, "No problem. I would do whatever it takes for my child"?

Then you, my friend, are probably one of those people who have perfect theories about raising children, and no actual children. What if you have other kids? Ronda has three sisters. When Ronda won her first junior nationals, her youngest sister was a year old. How do you choose between paying for one child's college tuition or sending another to training camp in Europe or putting a third in preschool? Thank God, I was helped by some very, generous wonderful people who helped with Ronda's expenses.

One year, some idiot who thought he was a great coach approached me and started telling me in a very pompous manner all of the things he was going to provide for Ronda that she needed. Then, he asked me, very condescendingly, *"What do you think you need from our organization to help you?"*

I think he was very surprised by my reply, expecting I would say she needed a great coach like him. I said, *"You really want to help my daughter? What she needs is a carpool! She needs to go to practice seven days a week, and I usually work six days a week to make money to cover her trips and everything her sisters need, too. She needs a carpool to get to practice."*

No one ever helped get together a carpool. I did buy my oldest daughter a car for her 16th birthday on the condition she took her sister to practice twice a week. Ronda dubbed her "the chauffeur from hell." Maria often came straight from cheerleader practice to pick Ronda up, then drove to Hollywood and sat at Hayastan Dojo doing her biology homework while her sister practiced for two hours. It was a bit incongruous, Maria in her St. Monica's cheerleader outfit doing her AP homework, while Ronda went head to head with several guys who grew up to be fighters in the UFC. They couldn't have been more gentlemen to my daughters, though and it all worked out.

Then there are those other decisions you are going to face later on.

What do you do when your child outgrows his or her first team or coach, or the second one after that?

What do you do when your child needs to move away from home? How do you decide where is the best place to go?

Ronda left home at 16 to train for the Olympics, and there has never been a day go by that I haven't second-guessed that decision.

And that is the point at which the journal fell behind the bed..

WHAT WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN

Three seemingly unrelated things happened in the last twenty-four hours:

1. I received a link to a YouTube video of an acceptance speech by Maria, my oldest daughter, receiving the Emerging Journalist award.
2. I had a long talk with Hayward Nishioka, one of my judo heroes ever since I was a kid.
3. My two middle daughters, Ronda and Jenn, came home for Thanksgiving.

All of these events together brought into focus what we really should be teaching our children. As we went around the table at Thanksgiving dinner and gave thanks, each person began with, *"I'm thankful for my family and..."* I truly believe they meant it, too, and didn't just say so because they were afraid I would whack them in the head with a turkey leg.

Hayward and I were discussing judo (what else) and he said, *"If we produce someone who is a champion and they have a bad attitude and bad behavior, what have we really done for that person? I would say we have failed him."*

Maria, who is a sportswriter, has a daily window on the fleeting career of athletes, even Olympic and professional ones. As she asked me the other day, *"Really, Mom, if you meet someone who won the Olympics, say, in the shotput, what do you think? You probably think to yourself, that's nice. That probably took a lot of work. And that is ALL THE AVERAGE PERSON THINKS ABOUT IT. Do you think, 'Hey, I'd like to hire that person?' or be their friend? No, I bet you don't."*

They both had the same point. Now, I am as competitive as the next person. Okay, let's be honest, I am as competitive as the next person, their mother, father, sister, brother and Uncle Marv all combined. Still, I have finally realized the truth of what remarkably talented coaches like Jim Pedro, Sr., Hayward Nishioka and Martin Bregman have been telling me for years. *It is the journey and not the destination.*

When I was younger, I believed that people said it was all about the journey because they had not won the world championships or the Olympics, and so they said that it didn't matter to make themselves feel better. Now that I am older and occasionally smarter, I realize they said those things because it was true and they were right. How did my daughter figure this out at 25 and it took me until I was twenty years older than that? I chalk it up to her having better parenting than me!

Don't get me wrong. Winning is great. Winning is awesome. It is better than money, better than drugs, better than sex - okay, well maybe it is not better than sex. That might depend on who you are with and what it is you are winning. HOWEVER... with both winning and sex, no matter how great it is at the time, when it is over, it's over.

For judo, for competition, at the end of it, I gained a lot and I have tried to pass those gains on to my children. The great concern to me as a coach, and as a parent, is exactly the one that Hayward shared. Winning is by no means a guarantee that athletes will succeed in learning those lessons we want to teach. On the positive note, being less than a superstar as an athlete doesn't necessarily mean we failed to teach them the important values in life.

Ronda is on her way to the Kano Cup and should be in her second Olympics next year. When she was 14 or 15, she went to a camp at the Olympic training center. In the coach's notes on her, at the bottom of the page, he had written and underlined twice the words: "This kid fears no one!"

If you watched the video of Maria's speech, the presenter begins by saying, *"Maria does not possess the deadliest sin in journalism - fear."* Reginald Stuart, of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, said, *"Maria is very passionate about what she does ... she is focused... she never backs down."* Maria herself said, *"I decided wasn't going to back down... You do have a voice and you need to take a stand. You can't be afraid of what other people think. And I want to thank my mom... who is, for better or worse, the reason I am outspoken as I am."*

My daughter Jenn who was always pretty much of a homebody, moved to San Francisco as a 19-year-old college junior. Now, at 21, she graduates from college in a few weeks and has saved enough from her part-time job to be moving into her own, non-parent-paid-for apartment and starting her career.

These are the lessons I hope athletes learn from sports:

Work hard.

That includes doing the things you DON'T want to do, like running sprints uphill, taking classes in Earth Science when you are a history major or moving to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to get your chance as a sportswriter. Too many people confuse hard work with sweat or hours put in. Last week, my niece asked my husband when he came home how was his day at work. He answered, "*Work pretty much sucked. I was in meetings all day. That's why they have to pay you to do it. So you come into work, even on the days when you know it is going to suck.*"

Unfortunately, too many of our athletes fail to learn that hard work and discipline don't mean just working out hard on the days you feel like going to practice. It means working out even on the days you'd rather go to a prom, sleep late or watch a football game. It means working out even when some of the other people you have to practice with are kind of jerks or if you think the coach is a dick and doesn't like you. You'll meet people who are jerks your whole life, and no matter how awesome you are, some people just won't like you. (Look at me, for example, soul of sweetness and light that I am, some people still don't like me. Yes, hard to believe, I know.) Trust me, no one is looking for employees who brag, "*I come to work 80% of the time.*" Yet we have athletes who expect a kiss on the cheek and a box of doughnuts for showing up at eight out of ten practices.

Courage.

Aristotle said that courage is the virtue upon which all other virtues depend. As C.S. Lewis explained it, years later, if we don't have courage, then we are virtuous so long as there is no cost. If we are honest, but afraid, we do nothing. If we are hard-working and intelligent but afraid, we do nothing. Maria had the courage to speak out to those who tried to silence her. Ronda has the courage to face opponents around the world, opponents who many, in the U.S. and abroad, think she can never defeat. They are wrong, by the way. Jenn had the courage to move hundreds of miles away, on her own, to a city where she didn't know a soul, and make a success of it.

Never give up.

My little Julia is only 9 years old. Yesterday, we got the brilliant idea to ride our bikes to judo. Since she is only a little kid, it took us an hour. Then she worked out for the hour remaining of the kids' practice and worked with me for another half-hour of the adult practice until her father came and picked her up. She felt like giving up lots of times, I could see it in her face, but she didn't.

Finally, ***be thankful.***

All the teaching you get is not because you are some great prima donna talent. It is

because people in your family and community love you and cherish you. They are not lucky to be teaching you. You are lucky to have them teaching you. If you are really thankful, you will show it when you are older by teaching others, not because you are doing them a favor, but to repay the favor done to you.

I hope you're enjoying "Parenting Like I Know What I'm Doing." As we've said a couple of times already, there's not a book on how to parent. Now you might be asking yourself, *"Wait, isn't this exactly what that is?"* No, not at all. It's just *my* thoughts and experiences. Maybe they are helpful to you. Maybe they're not. I certainly don't have all of the answers. If I did, I'd be charging thousands of dollars a person to give seminars on it and living on my own private island, not giving it away as a free ebook. My children, at various stages, would have told you I have none of the answers, but ignore them.

NOW THAT WE HAVE YOUR ATTENTION...

Consider this the part where we say, *"We interrupt this program to bring you a word from our sponsors."*

Only in this case, the sponsor is also kind of us. These chapters are all adapted posts from my personal blog and our 7 Generation Games blog. We've written them because part of what we do every day at 7 Generation Games is try to make education better. And we know that's important to a lot of parents.



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they'd be content just eating marshmallow chicks all weekend.

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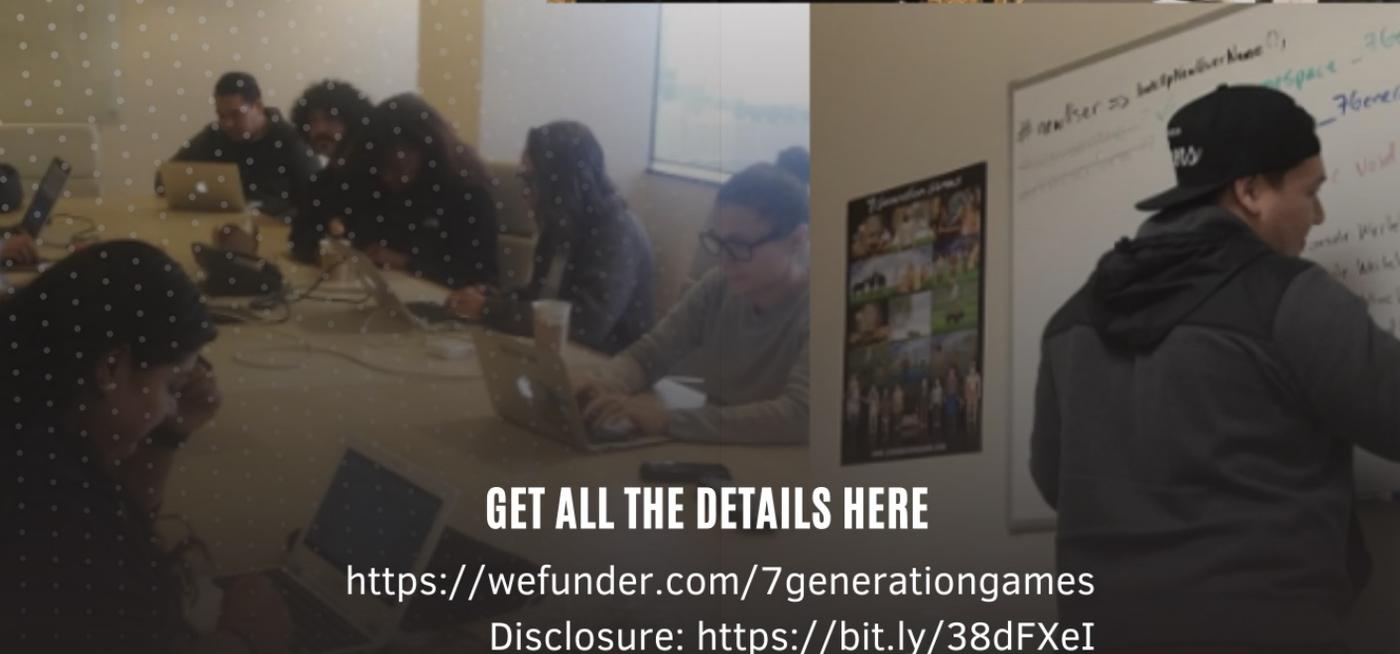
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HOW I KNOW BLENDED LEARNING WORKS

When my oldest daughter was 2.5 years old, she decided to learn the alphabet and had me drill her on flashcards until she got it down. Differentiating Z and S was the biggest challenge, but once she had that down then she was off.

We never worried about her doing her homework or studying for spelling or doing well on tests, she was just on top of it. (I would learn with my second and third children that not all children make the process so easy.)

However, after a while, I did start to worry about her in school. I worried if she was learning enough, being engaged enough. For the first couple of years in school, she just kind of breezed by, but it was transitional kindergarten/junior kindergarten and kindergarten, so I didn't really worry about it. I didn't expect her to be challenged by things like Shakespearean sonnets or geometry proofs at 5. I figured school at that age was mostly about learning not to hit the kid next to you.



Then, when she was about to enter first grade, we moved. It was the third move in as many years – and her fourth school in four years, having made the preschool to TK jump before that. We had a couple of Catholic schools on our list to look at (personally, as a product of Catholic education, that's the route we wanted to go) – but we stopped our search after the first. It was a small school that had recently received a grant to completely convert their curriculum to a tech-integrated program.

Blended learning is when part of instruction is done by the teacher and part is technology-driven– hence, a blend of both. As someone who not only worked in edtech, but who had spent a large part of my elementary school years either bored or shuttled between classes (going up a grade for some subjects and then participating my

grade for other subjects), I would have loved to have an option where I could go at my own pace – something that blended learning allows. I don't just pretend that I think "blended learning" is good because it's my job. I subscribe to it so wholeheartedly that it's the approach we sought out for our own children's education.

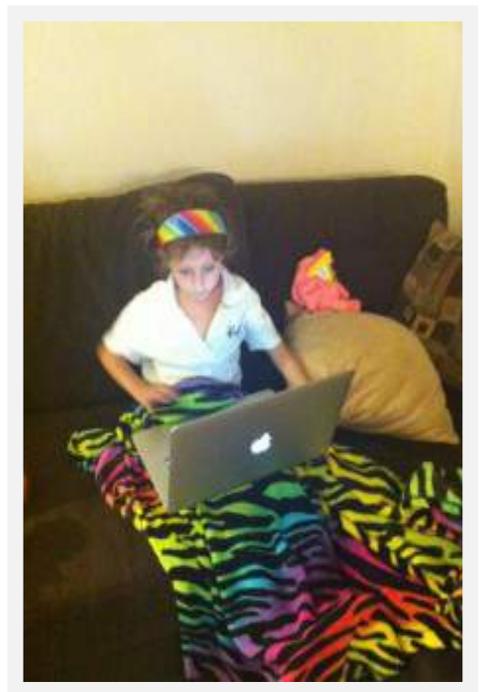
After hearing the principal talk about the program, the improvement the school had seen in tests scores and – most importantly to us – the level of student engagement they'd seen, we signed up on the spot.

But the real *aha!* moment came about a month or two into the school year, when our daughter came home and made an announcement:

"I like this school," she said. "For the first time, I'm actually learning things."

That a first grader (albeit a highly gifted one) was able to have this kind of insight was slightly jaw-dropping to me, but it was also amazing because it reinforced everything we are doing at 7 Generation Games and the choice that we had made for her when it came to school. And ever since then, it allows her to continue to flourish in ways that traditional approaches to education would have NEVER allowed.

In fact, when the next year, we made the very unusual request to have her skip a grade, it was in fact, her blended learning data that made her principal agree to the move for the first time in his 30 years in education – but making the decision to skip her a grade could fill another chapter altogether. Blended learning is what has enabled her to continue working at an accelerated pace, making sure she's challenged and engage in school versus dreading daily boredom. (Well, blended learning combined with highly supportive teachers and school administrators who refuse to accept that education has to be done a certain way just because "that's the way we've always done it.")



When I'm talking about the edtech sales process, one of the things I often point out is the difference between when an administrator is making a purchase and a parent. From a purely financial perspective, an administrator has to take a broad view – they don't make a purchase with just a single kid in mind, but weighing the interests of all the kids

in their school or district. When a parent makes a decision, it's the exact opposite: *"I'm buying this because I think it's good for my kid."*

There is a lot of data around blended learning and its efficacy. I have read a lot of those studies because I need to be able to cite them in my work life and to be in the know around the discussions that come up when you run an edtech company, to be able talk about the impact blended learning has had on thousands, even millions of kids.

Is blended learning a solution for every child and every issue in education today? No, because no single thing is. But how do I know blended learning works? Because I've seen it work for my own kid.

PARENTING PRODUCTIVE ADOLESCENTS: ADVICE

Here are my suggestions on how to raise children who aren't still sleeping in your basement until 3 pm and sitting on your couch eating potato chips and playing video games the rest of the time.

Just like sex, working is something you shouldn't wait until your child is old enough to be doing it to bring it up.

I'm not suggesting you put your 8-year-old to work as a chimney sweep or out on the corner selling newspapers like something by Charles Dickens. However, you should have conversations early on. Ask your children what they want to do when they grow up. It's fine if they don't know, but by the time they are 12 or 13, you should be talking about it more specifically. You want to be a pediatrician? You'll need to go to college and then medical school. You'd like to run a business? What kind of business?

Make sure you know the difference between wishes and plans.

I've asked eighth-graders what they want to do as a career and gotten answers like "baby doctor" or "sumthin with engineering." The odds are not great of you succeeding in a profession you can't even spell. It's more than that, though. Kids will know little more about a job than the title and tell people that is what they want to do as a career because it sounds like a good thing to say. As my lovely daughter Julia says, "You shouldn't decide to be a doctor just because you like Grey's Anatomy on TV."

The reason I said that you should be talking to your child about careers by age 12 or 13 is that many jobs require a college degree. Getting into a four-year college usually requires a minimum number of courses in math, English, science and foreign language. You can find the requirements for any reputable university online. Notice that they don't just say "three years of math," but that the math needs to include advanced algebra and geometry. Certain majors, such as math or physics, may require more.

It's pretty discouraging to graduate from high school and find out that you need to take *another year* of courses at a community college to get the prerequisite classes you need BEFORE you can even start on the four years for your degree.

Focus on academics!

Did you know that less than a third of eighth-graders are proficient in math? I'm continually surprised when I look at the performance of people on simple math tasks, whether they are in middle school or adults, they can't compute 20% of a bill for \$45. Divide by 10 and then double that amount. Divide by 5. Multiply .2 by 45. They can't figure it out.

The situation is almost as bad when it comes to reading and writing. If you can't write a two-sentence email without making two or three mistakes in grammar and spelling, your career options going to be limited.

No one wants to be the bad guy. No one wants to fight with their kids about homework. You should be looking at your kids' school work every night when they are in elementary school, and at least every week from middle school on up.

If they are anything like my kids, you don't even have to ask them to see their school work because they will leave their papers laying around the house.

Yes, all the way through high school, I did check their work from time to time to see how they were doing, not just what grades they were getting.

Here's my point: you can have all the heart-to-heart talks you want about independence, the dignity of work and self-esteem, but if your adolescent can't read or do math beyond the fourth-grade level, their career options are going to be limited.

STOP TELLING GIRLS THEY DON'T LIKE MATH

I recently saw the umpteenth tweet that linked to another article with a variation of a “Getting Girls to Like Math” post, and for the love of God, enough is enough.



I am so tired of hearing how girls don't like math. Or how they don't gravitate toward it. Or don't have an aptitude for it – we'd like to think that in 2017 no one says things like that anymore, but it happens. Or all of the 9 million other reasons why STEM majors and industries are lacking in female representation reflective of the actual world. Or the progress that's (not) being made on growing the numbers of women in STEM. Yeah, improving the numbers of women in your tech organization

or on your development team from 3% to 6% isn't really something to be patting yourself on the back over when 50%+ of the population is women.

And I'm not here with the answers. But here's one big place where we can start: Let's stop saying girls aren't interested in math.

Drop the lame cop out of how girls don't like math. First of all, lots of girls are interested in math. My 9-year-old loves math – as in does math in her free time, loves math. My mom loves math – as in gets excited about going to statistical analysis conferences and can't decide which session to go to because they all look so great, loves math. And that's literally just me rattling off the last two females I encountered today (save for



my 5-year-old who has yet to start kindergarten and who is already asking me to quiz her on $1+4$ or $1+3$ or $2+2$ is so she can excitedly give me the – usually correct – answer). I could go on and on naming a ton of women that I know who love math – and likewise, a bunch of dudes I know who don't.

I'm not at all arguing that there isn't a huge gap when it comes to women in STEM fields – there is. It's pretty pathetic that in 2017 this level of disparity still exists, but it does. And yes, closing that gap is something that there should actually be a push to do.

I'm not arguing that math couldn't be better taught – not just for girls, but for everyone – which is what we set out to do every day at 7 Generation Games.

But I am arguing that by repeating over and over this idea that girls “just don't like math,” we're doing a tremendous disservice to girls – not to mention society as a whole – when it seems like we're so open to accepting that as a fact as opposed to figuring out what that really means and why.

Whenever I go to speak at middle and elementary schools about careers, I open my presentation with the question, “*Who likes math?*” And girls hands shoot up every time – as many if not more than boys. The question isn't whether girls like math, it's about the 9 million other things that drive them away from it – like being told they don't like it, for one.

“Someone said girls don't like math?” my 9-year-old recently asked me.

“Yes, lots of people,” I said.

“Well, I'm glad no one ever said that to me,” she said.

And so am I.

LEARNING FROM MY KIDS LEARNING ON THEIR IPADS

There are no iPad rules or time restrictions when in flight. I'm not going to lie. My kids spend more time on their iPads than I would like to admit. We have "rules" around when they can and can't be used, but let's just say sometimes the enforcer of those rules needs to write a work email or cook (OK, microwave) something for dinner or have a cup of coffee for "two seconds without being interrupted" and she lets those rules slide. Look, it happens to the best of us.

I'm not going to say they never watch stupid videos of people opening boxes of toys (how is that such a big thing?!) or doing challenges that involve putting gross things on pizza, but seeing how they interact and learn from their devices also regularly reinforces to me just how effectively we can use technology to reach and engage with kids and the power to transform education by doing so.

Here's what I mean via pair of not-really educational and educational examples:

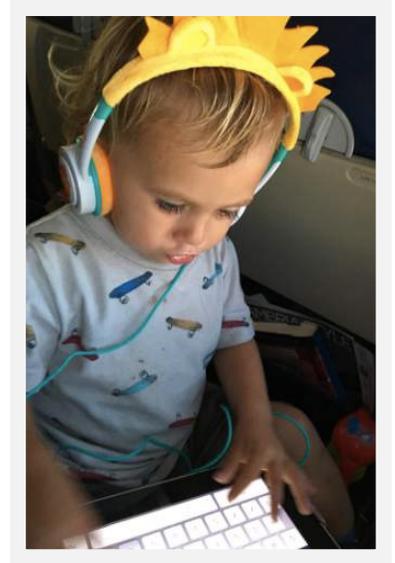
This past weekend, we were on a mini-vacation when we walked by the spa.

"What's a spa?" My 8-year-old asked.

"It's a place where they put stuff on your face and cucumbers on your eyes and they put your feet in warm water and paint your nails and massage your back," my 4-year-old informed her to all of our astonishment.

"How do you know that?" my 8-year-old asked (for all of us).

"I have an app about it on my iPad."



In that moment, I vaguely recalled her asking if she could get that app – and since it was free, I must have said, *“Sure, whatever.”* I’m not sure how helpful that spa knowledge will serve her in life unless she decides to become aesthetician, but more than anything, it was an embodiment of what all the research we do at 7 Generation Games has shown us, which is that when kids are engaged in a game, they are absorbing more than you might even imagine – and that yes, games can and do teach. Which is why my job involves creating apps to teaching incredibly important things like math, language and social studies, so that when someone one day asks my daughter, *“What’s the difference between a sum and a product?”* she can answer with spa-like confidence.

Which leads me to my educational example. I recognize that being the CEO of an educational games company puts me a unique position when it comes to helping my 8-year-old with her math homework. It means things like when she is studying for her chapter test, like she was last night, and she asks me, “Which one is the divisor and which one is the dividend again?” I can do things like take her iPad, open up our game “Making Camp” and pull up a video covering that exact concept that I created and voiced (you wear a lot of hats as a startup founder!).

Just like the example with my younger daughter, this experience reinforced to me the need and importance of what we’re doing and the real-world, practical value. That we are making things that matter. Things that really do help teach kids the information they need to know. When people ask, “How do you know that kids need the products that you’re making?” I don’t have to look beyond my own home.

Living in the digital age we do, my kids are going to going to spend time on their iPads. And they’re going to learn from the various apps they’ve loaded on them – whether it’s useful or not so useful information. (And the reality is they spend far more time playing the game apps that I’ve downloaded for them than the flashcard apps, I’ve got on there.) I often find myself referring back to this viral reddit thread from a few years ago.



Which is why every day, we set out to try to help convey a small amount of that information to people in a way that can maybe rival the level of entertainment that comes from looking at pictures of cats. Or even better, maybe we can make it so fun, that it’s even better than cat gifs!

ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT: LIFE LESSON FOR MY CHILDREN

The past week, I've attended a few different events centered around women entrepreneurs. The events were great and excellent opportunities to network and learn. But as usually happens when you attend events centered around a specific topic, you start to see recurring themes. Time and time again, I heard the point raised that women need to be better at speaking up and asking for what they want.



It's not a new point – from Sheryl Sandberg talking about it in her book "Lean In" to it being a common issue raised at conferences or panels. To be fair, it probably is something many women might need to work on. But to be clear, women not being vocal enough isn't the real problem or the reason why women get a negligible share of VC funding and so few board seats (although that's a different topic altogether).

I can't say that I can completely relate – as I'm not the kind of person who feels that I have to wait for permission to speak or that I can't ask for what I want. As one of my former editors can likely attest, in every weekly performance meeting, I used to ask for a raise. (While, I did not get one every week, I did get a few.) As an entrepreneur, you sometimes encounter really great folks who say, *"Is there any way I can help you?"* And recently I having been saying, *"Yes, I need money."* They do not just cut you checks on the spot, but several have helped by making introductions that can get me closer to folks who cut checks.

As I've been hearing people both say that women need to get better at asking for what they want and other women saying they have a hard time asking, I started reflecting on why I didn't seem to feel that way. (If you know my mother, you can probably guess why.)

I remember being in second grade when an adult said to me, *"Didn't anyone ever tell you children should be seen and not heard?"*

I had been asking questions about something or other. I have always asked a lot of questions.

"Yes," I replied. *"But my mom says that's stupid and that I have as much right to talk as anyone else."* (If you know my mother, that probably does not surprise you at all.)

The look on the person's face is probably what has embedded that moment in my memory.

Needless to say, my entire life, I have always felt that I had the right to speak my opinion and/or ask questions. As I've grown older, I have come to see that not everyone feels that way. So often, I hear people lamenting, *"I really wanted to say something, but..."* or *"What I wanted to ask was..."* I know people who have gone years at a job not asking for a raise or promotion because they didn't feel comfortable asking for what they wanted.

My belief that I always had the right to speak is probably why I was able to be a journalist for so many years as it's a job that literally centers around asking random strangers questions. I'm not saying it's always easy. I don't really enjoy the fundraising and sales processes of a running a startup – there are few things less fun than having to ask people for money, knowing most of them are going to say no.

But I'm also a believer in you don't get things unless you ask – whether it's money or sales or information. It's an important skill, one that I'm working to make sure my children possess.

"I can't speak my voice," my 3-year-old told me recently. He wanted his dad to give him an apple, but wanted me to ask for him.

"I'll come with you to ask him, but you have to ask," I said.

If he can't ask his dad for something, how on earth will he ever ask anyone else?

One of my many proud parenting moments came when my oldest daughter was not quite 5-years old. We were at the American Girl Doll Store in New York City, and she had some specific overpriced doll outfit that she wanted for her birthday. Like most preschoolers, her preference was to have me ask for things for her. But that day, we walked into the store, and she walked right up to the clerk on her own with a level of

confidence I did not know she possessed and asked for what she was looking for. I was so surprised/impressed that I ended up somehow agreeing to pay \$10 to get her dolls' ears pierced on top of the rollerskating outfit we bought. But that moment stuck with me, because it showed me that if there was something she really wanted, she wasn't going to be hesitant to ask – even if it meant pushing herself outside her comfort zone.

Of course, I have gotten many dirty looks from my daughters – and have suffered through several meltdowns over – making them ask for things. But it's worth it for them to learn if you want something you have to ask for it and that no else is going to ask for you. (That doesn't always mean you'll get what you want, but again, that is a whole other topic as well.) And while they might think that I'm mean and unreasonable, I know firsthand that being able to "speak your voice," will get you a lot further in life than you might think.

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MY LIFE AS "SOCCER MOM"

I am a soccer mom, but let's get one thing clear: I don't drive a minivan with a stick family on the back. (At least, not yet.)

Both my daughters play soccer, so I guess that makes me a "soccer mom." Now, I suppose this has been the case for the last couple years as my older daughter played soccer since she was 6, but it really shifted when she moved up to the U-10 age group.

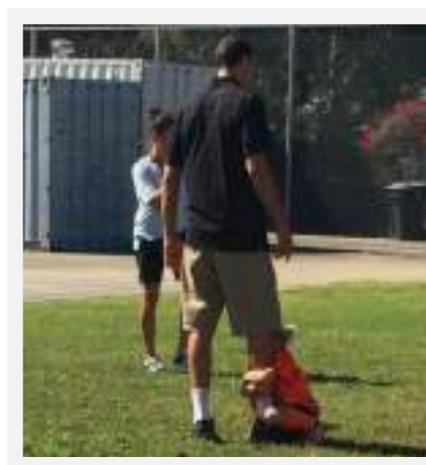
You see that's where soccer starts to get a bit more competitive. There's longer practices, additional optional practices and more focus on strategy and positions. (Now, it's AYSO, so fortunately there are not the kinds of crazy I encountered as a reporter who covered youth soccer both at a local and national level.)

But as I've been both on the sidelines this season and watching my kids develop over the years, I couldn't help but be struck by how much youth soccer parallels to other areas of learning – specifically, math, based on my day-to-day job of running 7 Generation Games.

Here's what I mean:

At the youngest levels (my 4-year-old daughter is in U5), it's just about getting them used to the idea. You introduce them to the most basic concepts: The ball goes in the net. Don't use your hands. Kick the ball. Or in math: Counting, numbers, more than, less than.

Forget about keeping score. How about just keeping them off of your leg in the middle of a game?



Then you build on that. In fact, in AYSO, the first few years they don't even keep score – because they're still learning. Learning, not winning, is the point, because, well, they're 6 – and what they care most about is what the snack is after the game, as it should be, because they are 6. Each year, the kids develop further and build upon what they learn. And there are certainly some kids that have a more natural aptitude for the game. There are kids whose parents have played with them a bit or who have brothers or sisters who play and so they have a bit more of an idea of what's going on than the kids whose parents show up on the first day not knowing they need shin guards. Math is like that too! (Only you don't need shin guards to divide.)

But here's what U-10 has shown me – well, I already knew it, so I guess what U-10 has illustrated – there is an age where the scale between “natural ability and/or a head start” and “practice” starts to shift. It's that whole adage about “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard.” I think that saying is a bit heavy when we're talking about 8 and 9-year-olds, but there reaches a point where it's necessary to work to improve – and for some kids, that means they need to work even harder. It's not a coincidence that our math games start at that 3rd Grade level.

My daughter was not one of those sport standouts who dominated the first time she stepped on the field. She is fast and athletic, but she also needs to work at it. And so she is, especially this season. She goes to her regular practice and she goes to the optional extra practice. She listens to her coaches, and she comes home and we talk about what she could do better after a game. She went to a week of soccer camp before the season started. And it's paying off. She went from never having scored a goal in two years to having scored like four already and we're only five weeks into the season. (I have to qualify it with “like four” because I'm not actually keeping soccer stats on an 8-year-old.) The biggest thing for me is that she's seeing that her effort is yielding results.

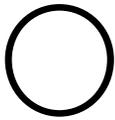
Math, or I would argue any subject or any endeavor, is similar. There are the kids that will seem to “just get it right away” or whose parents have been drilling them with flashcards since birth, but eventually all students will hit concepts where they have to work at them. There's a reason textbooks have pages of “practice problems.”

The academic parallel is fitting for my daughter as well because this year marks the first year that she's really had to study. In class, she typically has been the all-star to whom it just comes naturally. But in 4th Grade, she's



actually having to review her study guides and ask me to check her work and practice her spelling words. As somewhat of a flip side to realizing practice pays off, she's realizing that even if you're talented, you can't cruise on that alone forever.

EIGHT THINGS MY MOM DID RIGHT



One thing we learn to do as we get older is forgive our parents for not being perfect.

I didn't have a perfect childhood – no one does.



Several times this year I have run across people who I knew 20, 30, even 40 years ago. We were living in the same town, attending the same school, working at the same place. Somehow, my life diverged from theirs, for the very much better.

Part of the credit goes to good old mom. Listen up, parents, as almost all of these things are free, because God knows we didn't have much money.

- 1.** She taught me to read. When I started kindergarten, I had just turned five years old and was reading books when I was supposed to be coloring. Yes, I got into trouble for not following the rules my first day of kindergarten, a precursor to my academic career. I know you can read because you are reading this book. If you can read, you can teach your child.
- 2.** She got me a library card. I still remember the excitement when I got my very own card. I was in kindergarten. Did you ever see that scene in the movie, *Matilda*, where she is coming home from the library pulling a wagon piled with books? That was honest-to-God me by the time I was in fifth- or sixth-grade.
- 3.** She took me swimming a lot. When we had a YMCA membership, we went there almost every day. She also took us to the lakes near our house, and in the winters, to the ocean by my grandparents' house in Florida. I swim pretty regularly to this day. I travel a lot and almost every hotel has a pool. Thanks to mom, I weigh the same as I did when I won the world championships 31 years ago.

4. She got me into a better elementary school. My mom got us an inter-district transfer before there was such a thing. Actually, we went to Catholic elementary schools, which were free back then, and Mom talked the priest into allowing us to attend the best school in town instead of the school in our parish.

5. She taught me to ice skate. I think it was actually more taking me to the rink, putting some used skates on me and telling me to have fun. In much of the Midwest, there are outdoor rinks that are free all year. I went skating tonight with two of my lovely daughters and two granddaughters (it was far from free in Santa Monica!), and it was something fun that we still share.

6. She got me into a private high school on scholarship. She found out about the school, filled out all of the paper work and then she drove 10 miles out of her way to work every day so I could attend.

7. She got a job at a top private university that offered free tuition for the children of employees. There were not many opportunities for women back then. I'm sure her job as a secretary bored her out of her mind many days, and it didn't pay much. It was up to me to get the SAT score to get accepted, but knowing that it would be free was a big incentive. Thanks to the free tuition, my scholarship and full-time minimum wage jobs paid my living expenses, I was able to graduate owing \$900.

8. She taught me to cook. Even though my children have seldom witnessed it, the fact is that I can cook. Learning to cook is one of the best ways I know to understand equivalent fractions and conversion from different systems of measurement (like cups to pints). It also enabled me to save money when I was a broke graduate student by working at the co-op, getting fresh food cheap and making it myself. I just this minute ate some turkey soup I made from actual turkey and vegetables. It was delicious.

I get so tired of hearing people whine about things their parents didn't do. There are certainly parts of my childhood I wish were different.

Maybe we should all take a moment and reflect now and then on the things that went right.

Thanks, Mom.

P.S. Why didn't I talk about my mom signing me up for judo class? Because that, and some other things she did, are pretty specific to me, but I think these 8 or something similar could probably be done by millions of parents around the country.

PARENTING ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It's not easy being the parent of an adolescent under any circumstances. Parents want to protect and care for their children. Youth want to experience life, to become young adults.

This conflict is even greater when the child has a disability. Parents often see their child as vulnerable because of the disability and feel an even greater responsibility to take care of him or her. At the same time, their teen wants to be like everyone else. That's one of the reasons our games are played in Grades 9-12 by students with learning disabilities. Just because the teenager has a disability doesn't mean she isn't like other teenagers, wanting to play video games, date, go to parties, get away from parental supervision, earn her own money, drive a car and all of the other things that matter to a teenager.



That seems to be even more the case with students who have invisible" disabilities like learning disabilities, chronic diseases or mental health issues.

If a student is visually impaired or uses a wheelchair, that is going to be pretty obvious to his or her peers and the student may have no option but to ask for special assistance.

What NOT to do

If you find the transition to adulthood easy, your family is the lucky exception. Here, I'll offer several efforts to help you on your journey. These include knowledge of adolescent development, services for youth making the transition from home and school to work and independent living and resources for continuing education on issues in adolescence.

One sure way to have conflict in your home (or classroom) is to insist that adolescents act younger than their age – do worksheets, be home before dark, only watch G-rated movies.

Get a job, kid!

Part of becoming an adult is being able to support yourself. Adolescents often have an attitude and act as if they know everything. Adolescence is also a time when people are feeling very insecure. They are making a lot of decisions for the very first time and are afraid of failure. It's that old vicious circle. People don't want to hire youth with no experience but how do you get experience if no one will hire you? The fact is that getting that first job IS harder for youth with disabilities.

Some very good advice from the 2005 Rehabilitation Service Administration Project Director's conference came from Geri Jewell, who you may remember as the actress with cerebral palsy on the comedy Facts of Life (that part wasn't an act, she really does have cerebral palsy).

"I used my disability to get out of everything I ever thought I would fail in – foreign language, science, sex education."

Haight, de Bremond & Richardson-Crooks advise, *"You can have a terrific website, you can send out all the email in the world but what we have found really works is that you need a concerned adult to look the youth in the eye and say, 'You can do this. You should check this job opportunity out.'"*

Even more than for youth without disabilities, that experience is important. According to Jennifer Sheehy Keller, in a Rutgers University survey, 32% of employers said that they did not have even one job that could be done by a person with a disability. Further, only 2% of youth with disabilities participate in work-based programs such as mentoring or internship programs.

What TO do

Getting internships or volunteer experience can help. Once a youth with a disability has successfully performed in a job, whether it is in an office, a factory or a store, it is very convincing to respond to an employer who wonders whether a person with a disability can perform a task with, "I know I can because I have done it before."

In summary, youth with disabilities may be afraid to fail, employers generally are not very knowledgeable about disabilities or making accommodations for people to hold jobs, and it is critically important for the adults in their lives to provide support and encouragement.

In just about any job, basic academic skills – math and English – are expected.

FAMILIES AND DISABILITY: BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

It's obvious, but not always acknowledged, that teachers aren't the only educators. This is always true, but particularly if you have a child with a disability, parents and siblings can be crucial in the education of their family member.

Where do we start? There are so many sides to having a family member with a disability. These may include just helping with daily living activities, such as bathing, brushing teeth or walking. Care for a person with health problems or a disability can be more difficult than for other family members. You need to give medicine, be involved in school, healthcare decisions and making sure your family member has a healthy lifestyle. In all of that, you need to be sure you find time to care for yourself as well. Much of the time all your family members bring the same to the family – friends in the house, jokes and just someone to sit with on the couch. They also bring problems with learning to take care of themselves, discipline and getting along with one another.

Let's begin our discussion of families with young children and move on through the ages, starting with

Behavior Problems

All children are a behavior problem sometimes, but children with disabilities have more behavior problems than others. In preschool settings, the most common reason that children with disabilities are unable to attend the regular program is due to unacceptable behavior. As adults, the most common reason that people with disabilities lose jobs is an inability to get along at work, not because of lack of job skills.



Think of all of the things a child can do to make you worried, upset or just plain crazy. Here are a few, many of which you can probably relate to: running away from home, hitting other children, screaming at the top of their lungs, whining, breaking objects you would prefer not to have broken, spitting their medication into the rug instead of swallowing it, taking things that don't belong to them eating things they shouldn't eat (such as laundry soap), sticking their toy army men in the DVD player and breaking it.

We are very sure you could come up with an equally long list of your own, and we are just getting started, right? Despite the large number of possible behavior problems, really, children do things for one of a few reasons.

They want to get something.

They want to get away from something.

They want to tell you something.

They didn't know of anything better to do.

Sometimes behavior problems in young children are very logical, in that the child is getting what he or she wants.



Ryan wants to have a turn playing on a trampoline, going down the slide or using other equipment. When he hits the other children or swears at them, they go away from him, so he is left alone to play on whatever he wants. Most of the children who live near him are smaller than he is, so they can't really fight back. When he is sent home from other children's homes, his parents have usually been drinking and don't take much notice, simply sitting him in front of the TV with a comment like, *"Why can't you ever be good?"*

When his mother quit drinking, she decided to do something about her son's behavior. She asked the other parents to send him home immediately any time he hit another child. Each time he was sent home from someone else's house she sat her son on the couch with no TV, no video games for fifteen minutes. When he would whine or try to get off the couch, she would tell him, *"No, there is no hitting. You have no TV and no videos because you hit someone."*

He started school about the same time, and the school followed the exact same

procedure. When he would hit another child, a teacher would take him over to a bench and make him sit down by himself, so he did not get to use the swings, in fact, he didn't get to do anything. He isn't perfect now, but he hits other children far less often.

The lesson: Observe the child's behavior and see if it brings something he wants. Try to stop him from getting what he wants from this behavior. Often, you will hear that you need to replace this with another behavior that will get him what he wants. That is a good idea but not always possible. The other children want to keep their toys. Ryan can't have them.

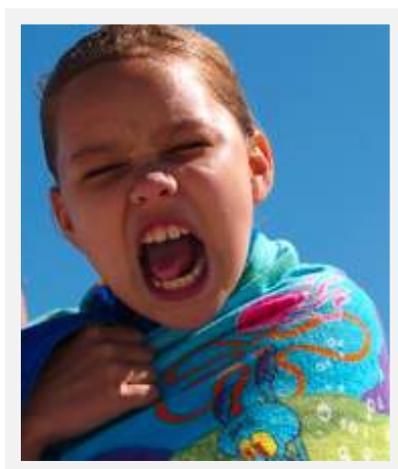
There are, of course, multiple reasons young children may have behavior problems, and one of these is it gets them away from things they don't want.

When I taught junior high school, I had one student who was generally pretty good. (I taught in a special school for children who were severely emotionally disturbed, so "good" is a relative term here.) However, once a day, he would get into an argument with another student over something stupid like, *"He keeps chewing on his pencil and he knows it bothers me."*

He would get taken out of the class or put in the time out room. Within the hour, he would calm down, come back to the class and be fine for the rest of the day. I tried talking to him about not letting little things bother him. I tried moving him to a different seat, next to different students. Finally, it dawned on me that these incidents always happened right before math. It turned out that he was very bad in math and very far advanced in his other subjects. He would rather be suspended from school than let the other students know how far behind he was. My solution was to have him do his math in the resource room with the aide, *"Since you need to concentrate and the noise the other students makes clearly is distracting to you."* This is a common situation children of all ages may be trying to escape from: a task he or she dislikes.

Other common situations children try to avoid or escape from:

- Tasks that are so difficult that they are frustrated,
- Noisy environments – some children find too much noise distracting and uncomfortable,
- Too many children,
- Other children too close to the child,
- Too much stimulation in the classroom – people talking, papers hanging from every possible inch of space.



Remember, children with disabilities may be more sensitive to certain types of situations. They may be more sensitive to touch, to too much noise and activity because they do not have the emotional or intellectual ability to just ignore what might be bothering them. This is even more true for younger children who do not have very many coping strategies. Where adults may be able to talk out their feelings, walk away into another room or just count to ten, young children can generally only think of a very few things to do – cry, hit the other person, run away.

What can you do when children are frustrated by tasks that are too difficult?

Slow down. If you believe the child is acting out, for example, crying, hitting, hiding under a table, because he or she is frustrated by a task that is too difficult, try making the task easier by slowing down. After you ask a question or make a request of a child, try counting to five or ten before saying or doing anything else. Sometimes adults ask again or move in to help before giving the child enough time to respond.

Break tasks into smaller steps. When you ask a child to do something that is a series of steps, such as clean up an area or complete an activity that involves several actions, such as an art project, try breaking it into steps. “*First, we color all these squares.*” Only after the child has completed that activity do you move on to the next step, “*Now, we cut up the squares.*”

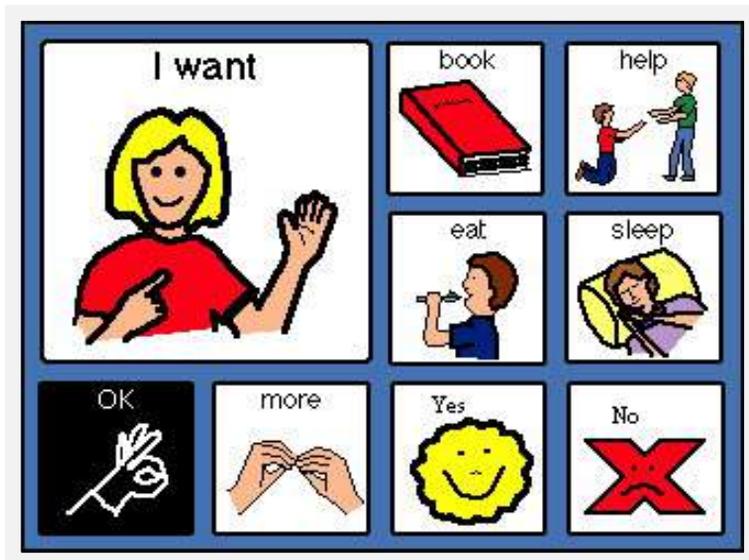
Similarly, when doing chores, like cleaning up a huge mess your children just made, have them put the cereal box away first, then the package of cookies, then the pieces they didn’t eat. Finally, get around to sweeping up the crumbs.

What can you do when children are seeking to communicate?

Sometimes behavior problems are a way for children to communicate. Most commonly, they are trying to get attention. Here are some recommendations as to different approaches.

Provide other means of communication.

For children who do not speak, you may use a picture board (see example below) so the child can point to what he wants.



You can teach sign language.

Children who do not speak and have limited intelligence can still learn some basic signs. There are many, many books, videos and DVDs available to teach you or your child basic sign language.

Try to provide attention before behavior problems happen.

Praise children’s accomplishments, or simply talk to them, “That’s a very nice picture” or “I saw Aunt Gladys today. She says she couldn’t believe how big you are getting.” Read to them, walk with them, cuddle them – let them know by your actions that they don’t have to misbehave to get attention.

While parents often don’t think of computer or mobile games as a social activity, but more getting a much-needed five-minute break while their children are occupied. Games can also be a way of providing attention. I’ve often seen parents and children playing our games together, with the parent providing hints and instruction for the math or language challenges in the game, while the children do the canoeing or fishing activities without assistance – or help their parent.

I will leave you with three more tips for reducing behavior problems will apply to just about all children.

Have a small number of rules.

The more rules you have, the more likely the child will get into trouble. Instead of having rules about not touching glasses, because they can break, and punishing a child who disobeys, simply put glassware up above where the child can reach. Having too many rules may not be an issue in the home, but it sometimes is in classrooms, from preschool through high school. When a child has a major difference between the

number of rules at home and school, this may make problems even more likely. This may also explain why your child, who is not a behavior problem at home, is constantly getting into trouble at school.

Give advance warning when changing activities.

Many young children are frustrated when they have to stop one activity and start on another. They are enjoying watching TV and now you want them to come in and eat dinner. They are taking a bath and you want them to go to bed. They are in bed and you want them to get up and go to school. Even if they like school, or bathing or dinner, it may be hard for children to “switch gears.” It can help to give them advance warning – “When that show is over, it is time for dinner.” Or “In ten minutes, you need to get out of bed and get ready to go to Head Start.”

Keep a regular schedule.

This is difficult for many families who may need to make frequent doctor’s appointments, work different shifts, often change jobs, lose jobs, look for different jobs, need to find a new place to live. As much as possible, though, have a regular routine when your child gets up, has breakfast, goes to school, comes home, has supper, goes to bed and so on. Try to have family rituals. In our family, we were not very good about having regular meals, however, we read every one of the children a story before bed every night. Yes, my children were raised pre-iPad.



THE END (AT LEAST OF THIS BOOK)

If you came to this book looking for all the secrets to parenting, you might feel slightly disappointed in having gotten to this page only to learn that we do **not know it all**. But let's be honest, if we really had all of the answers and solutions when it came to parenting, we wouldn't be giving it away as a free ebook.

When it comes to parenting, no one knows what they're doing. Hence, the ironic title. Sure, I definitely feel like I have a better idea of what I'm doing now than I did 35 years ago, but if three and a half decades and four children (and six grandchildren) have taught me anything, it's that no one has it all figured out. No one has all of the answers, no matter how many books they've read or classes they've taken or children they've encountered in their lives. Those people who act like they do are clueless at best, liars at worst.

Whether it's raising your kids or training for a world title or launching a startup, you have to set out every day to do the best you possibly can. If you put in the effort, you'll see the results. If you don't, well, in the case of children, you'll probably end up stuck spending the rest of your life surrounded by assholes who will eventually determine what senior living facility you end up in. And in case it doesn't go without saying, of all those areas, your children should come first.

Ultimately parenting at its core is about being there and doing the best you can for your kids. When all else fails, just love them. That will go a long way.

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