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A Presentation Legacy

By Jim Endicott, Owner/Manager of Distinction

I'm convinced that in the end analysis our legacy as business/ educational professionals won't be written in the journals. Even today's most successful and high-visibility executives often fade into relative obscurity in a few short years either because of business or, more frequently today, moral failures. So, what do we really leave behind? How do we make a real mark on our world? I suspect that when all of us are finally laid to rest they won't be eulogizing our knack with PowerPoint or our ability to be profitable in a down year. If we're honest, we know it will have much more to do with the quality of our relationships but more importantly, the legacy our kids will carry on because of our how we've prepared them for life.



Amy, my daughter, was recently back from her first year of college and we had a few nice moments as we scooted the couch up close to the fireplace and we watched the fire together and talked. For at least that hour or so, time stood still and she became my "little girl" again. I knew it wouldn't last long but I had tried to prepare myself for this time of life.

As we talked that evening I thought about how we prepare our kids for the future. Of course we want them all to be wildly successful but what do we build into their young lives to make that a stronger possibility? What experiences do we try to put in their paths as they grow up that will underscore important character traits and the knowledge/wisdom they will need in the years to come? I've always been of the mind that there are few life skills that will serve her as well as being able to get up in front of a church group, a school class or a future executive management team and articulately communicate her important thoughts and ideas. In some form or fashion, she will be presenting the rest of her life.

There are as many opinions as books on the topic of what our kids really need to be successful. In the last decade, many seem to focus on their presumably shaky self-esteems. I'm not sure I buy into all of that. Many well-adjusted adults today seem to have survived under less than ideal upbringings and there are even some indications that adversity is an element that can foster certain success factors. But I believe we play an important part in their development by the choices we make that provide valuable life experiences. As caring parents, we want to leave little up to chance when it comes to our kid's futures. In retrospect, there's a lot I would probably do differently as a parent now but here are a couple things I've observed.

Stage Presence

Most of the good presenters I've worked with over the years seem to be those who have had more experiences in music and drama growing up. Those in the arts refer to it as 'stage presence.' Whether they are delivering lines in a holiday pageant, singing a solo or hamming it up in a lead role in the high school drama, the experience of getting up in front of a seemingly large group and delivering on something they've practiced hard for seems to be important. It doesn't guarantee a future star presenter but it provides a stronger sense of their place on a stage and the ability to overcome the desire to run from probing eyes. As Amy was growing up she had a number of opportunities to be a part of some dramas that I had written for holiday dessert theater settings. She found a place on stage that became comfortable. Her confidence developed. Encourage your kids in these important choices now. It's not just about giving the relatives another photo op, but it also has some longer-term impact on their young lives.

Teamwork

During Amy's middle school years she participated in some team sports. During that time she had to learn how to take direction. She learned that although she thought she might be able to do a better job than someone else, it was in the team's best interest to encourage and build-up the weaker members of the team. These skills often seem to go lacking in adulthood. We find little time to encourage. We find even less time to build-up others as we become preoccupied with our own short-term objectives and goals. I especially observe this when it comes to collaborative business environments where teams of employees or managers need to work collectively on a presentation. It becomes painfully clear who are team players and who are the "free agents." I believe the kids who have learned the value of team sports (as opposed to solo effort sports) have integrated some important future skills. Rarely has the concept of 'team' been as important to the business world as it is today. As much as some disdain the concept of inter-dependency, it doesn't change the reality in business today.

Just Being Honest

It's clear that our parenting styles can encourage or stifle behavior and to a large part, that becomes the molding and shaping process for our kids. We have the scary ability to build up and to tear down. It's unfortunate, but some styles can make an impressionable kid believe they are more acceptable to others when they act like someone else. Healthy modeling is a good thing. Feeling like the 'real you' will never be acceptable to others can have longer-term implications. In the world of presenting, audiences seem to have an instinctive way of knowing when they are only seeing a veneer - a reasonable facsimile of the real presenter. Critical audience trust is lost because they have a deep desire for what's genuine. What are you teaching your kids these days? You'd be surprised what an environment of unconditional love (not an acceptance of questionable deeds) will do in underscoring future confidence. They begin to understand that no matter what happens to them (on or off the field or stage), they are loved and accepted for who they are. After observing adult presenters for a few decades, I would be willing to guess many of them did not learn some important lessons of self-acceptance at an early age. Who they are and their performance in front of a group are uncontrollably linked. A destructive spiral of negative self-talk begins to rewrite their mental "tapes" and if unchecked, seems to set in motion behaviors and attitudes that they spend the rest of their lives trying to undo in therapy.

This is not an exhaustive list of ideas but hopefully just enough to get you thinking. I'm guessing this column caught a few of you off guard. You may have been looking for a few PowerPoint tips but ended up with more than you bargained for but **if a big part of our**

legacy is to prepare our children for real life, then these things are not just nice for a little balance, but very important to them when they enter adulthood. There are few life skills that will impact them as greatly as being able to clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas to others.

The reality of this became no more apparent to me than during some events in our lives that happened a few years back. Four years ago, as a freshman in high school, Amy and another young man hosted a 30-minute professionally produced video that was used as a promotional tool for an international youth conference. The reason she was asked to be a part of it was because a large portion of the video was about the life of her brother, Jeremy, who had been deeply impacted by the 1997 conference. Our family lost him in a tragic accident in August of 1998 and the producers wanted to feature his life, how it had been impacted by the conference and the powerful legacy he left behind in his 18 short years. I watched with great pride (and a few tears) as my 15-year old daughter walked and delivered her lines into the camera like a pro. Her poise, confidence and personal honesty was well beyond her young years and her courage took my breath away. The confident and articulate young lady in the monitor during the shooting of the video wasn't some network news anchor - it was my "little" girl.

By the time you read this Amy will have returned to George Fox University where she is a communications major. (It was her choice - really) Putting together a clear PowerPoint presentation devoid of the typical sea of text that plagues many adults has become second nature to her. Standing in front of a group of people is something that doesn't seem to rattle her at all. I'd like to tell you it was all a by-product of my diligent coaching, but it wasn't. Just like most kids, she's a keen observer of life and sometimes learned things despite my well-intentioned advice. Although the ultimate development of presenters is a lifelong pursuit to be sure, the early years are when we start building those things into our kid's lives.

I can't wait to watch Amy enter adulthood. When everything is said and done, that's where our legacy truly begins. (I think I just might sneak into an audience or two.)

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