

## The Vision of Parent Leaders

by James B. Stenson

Any time people engage in an important, responsible undertaking for others' welfare—whether a business, a job, government affairs, or a family—there's a need for clear, competent leadership. The more serious the challenge, the greater the need for someone to direct everyone's efforts in an inspiring, encouraging way toward the ultimate goal.

The real mission for parents is to raise their children toward responsible adulthood. All the dynamics of family life lead to this: what kind of men and women the children will grow to be. No challenge is more important than this, and so great parents emerge in family life as real leaders.

How do they do this? How do fathers and mothers lead their children effectively? To form a picture of parental leadership, let's look at the characteristics of leaders and see how parents fit the profile of leadership in family life.

Here's a broad statement that you'll probably agree with: In business and professional life and in affairs of state, our most respected leaders are those who look farthest toward the future and foresee oncoming perils and opportunities. Respected leadership and strategic foresight go hand in hand.

It seems that this dynamic works in successful families, too. Parents—all kinds of men and women with different temperaments—succeed in family life through their confident leadership. Successful parents base their confidence in knowing they have this sacred mission to carry out with their children. They see themselves raising adults, not children. They have been called by God to carry out a job, and that holy task is this: to lead their children—with daily sacrificial effort—to grow into confident, responsible, considerate, generous men and women who are committed to live by Christian principles all their lives, no matter what the cost. Being conscious of this mysterious and sacred mission, holding it always before their eyes, is what turns these parents into great men and women themselves, real heroes to their children, and makes their family life together a great, rollicking, beautiful adventure.

Effective parent leaders look at their children and picture them 20 years from now, as grown men and women with job and family responsibilities of their own. They seem to understand a truth of life: Children will tend to grow up to our expectations or down to them. So, these parent leaders set high ideals for their children's later lives. They think of their children's future along these lines--

- The children will have excellent judgment, especially in the choice of a spouse and the upbringing of their own children.
- They will center their lives in a stable, permanent, happy marriage—raising a great family like the one they grew up in.
- They will succeed in their careers, whatever these may be—doing work they enjoy, putting their powers up against problems for the welfare of others.
- They'll be able to support their families comfortably but not luxuriously, for a life of excess, they know, may destroy their children (the parents' grandchildren).
- They will be generous to friends and those in need.
- They will never live as quitters, slackers, whiners, or cowards—nor will they let their own children live this way.
- They will be nobody's fool or pushover. They will not be swayed by charlatans. They will know malarkey when they see it.

- When they've done wrong, they'll face the truth and apologize.
- They will not let their pride stand in the way of truth and justice, especially in family life.
- They will be esteemed by all who know them for their honesty, integrity, hard work, generosity, religious commitment, and good humor.
- They will remain close to their brothers and sisters for life, giving and receiving encouragement and support.
- They will live by their parents' principles. They'll have a conscience for life—the voice of their parents' lessons of right and wrong—and they'll pass these lessons on to their own children.
- Their whole lives will be moved by love—the willingness to endure and overcome anything for the welfare and happiness of others, starting with their family.

All leaders understand, and shun, the lamentable consequences of neglect. Consider this: Public monuments are never set up to honor someone who intended to do something. Leaders act. Though they spend time in study and planning, they mostly act. For leaders, study and planning are a ramp-up for action, not a substitute for it. Moreover, real leaders never let indecision lead to inaction. When confronted with several tough choices of action, they do not shrink back. They brace themselves, choose what they judge as the best way forward, and then set to work as best they can. Sometimes great leadership means just this: doing the best you can with what you have. If you're climbing a mountain, you sometimes have to backtrack or surmount obstacles or thrash your way through tangled shortcuts—but as long as you keep moving upward, you'll reach the summit. The one thing you don't do is quit. Neglect—to do nothing—is the worst mistake of all.

Parent leaders, too, understand the consequences of neglect. They know they have a job to do—a change to effect—in the minds and hearts of their growing children. And they draw courage to act from foreseeing what awful things could happen to their kids if that job remains undone, if their children retain the flaws and selfishness of childhood into adult life. For instance...

- If our children remain self-centered—"Me first!"—they will neglect or mistreat others, and their marriages and careers will fly apart. If their marriages break up, we would lose our grandchildren, or our grandchildren would grow up in a fatherless home.
- If they have no conscience, they will have no inner force to resist temptation. They could cave in to peer-pressures and meet with disasters: drugs, alcohol abuse, recreational sex, trouble with the law.
- If they never learn to say "please" and "thank you" on their own, without prompting, they will remain as self-centered ingrates. They will neglect or mistreat their spouses and think the world owes them a living.
- If they do not respect their parents' authority, they will have trouble with all other rightful authority: teachers, employers, the law, God Himself.
- If they receive no life-directing guidance from their parents in childhood, they may desperately need guidance later from parent-substitutes: marriage counselors, physicians, mental-health professionals, even cult gurus.
- If they see life as mostly play, they will treat the automobile as a toy. If they cannot control their tempers, they will fly headlong into "road rage" and treat the car as a weapon. Either way, they could kill or cripple themselves and others.
- If they form no principled framework for assessing people's character, they may marry jerks.

- If they cannot manage their own affairs, they cannot take care of others.
- If they do not keep their promises, they cannot keep commitments—not to spouse, nor children, nor employers.
- If they never learn to set and meet goals, they cannot set and meet ideals.
- If they form a habit of lying, they will someday get fired.
- If they never learn to balance healthy work and play, their lives could shuttle between drudgery and debauchery. If they never learn to be confident producers, they will live as lifelong adolescent consumers.
- If they remain lazy and sloppy in work, they’ll get shoved aside by their competition.
- If they see work as “hassle” to be shunned, they will have wobbly, precarious careers—or will see work as adolescents see it: just a source of “spending money.”
- If they always expect to have their way, their adult lives will be ravaged by rage and frustration—and their marriages will implode.
- If they sulk and bear grudges, they will muddle through life as smoldering, self-pitying “victims”—and never amount to anything.
- If they remain as egocentric children, they may shun having children of their own.
- If they do not stand for something, they will fall for anything.

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