

relationship
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Parent - Leader

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Leaders take one of the most explored topics in business articles and MBA programs and we forget, sometimes, that we're leading, well or not so well, all the way in everything we do in life, as Chris Lowney expresses in his book "Heroic Leadership". Parenting is one of the roles that can give us some connections into the no so mysterious role of leadership. It's time to demystify leadership.

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Parent – Leader

On the last Father's day in Australia. I was writing some SMS's to fathers I know from family or friends. While I was writing "happy father's day" to a leader I've been coaching for a long time, knowing how dearly he had his children at heart, it came to me that he's also a great leader and aspires to be an even greater leader. While writing, I connected in my mind the key roles between fathers (mothers too of course) and leadership.

Sometimes we make a big deal about leadership, studying it through MBA's and other training courses, but we may forget that many roles of leaders are intrinsic to what we learn from birth, home, school and work. Role theory encourages people to play roles that belong to the person as part of their identity and discourage pseudo-roles—roles that do not belong to us, roles we copy, forcefully and that become fake, not authentic—not us. Those roles do not grow and cannot be maintained. Many leaders play pseudo-roles copying "successful" leader's examples, trying to do "what they did" but not understanding that those roles played on different environments and different people. We can learn from others and from other roles, especially family roles such as fathers or mothers, brothers or sisters, uncles or aunts and great-grandparents. We learn from social roles such as teachers, people in sales or horse-whisperers, but the most core qualities of those roles are in parenting.

Caring and protecting, having the wellbeing of the child at heart, caring for their physical, emotional and spiritual growth and safety while having the wellbeing of the whole family in mind. Living in the "in-between", child and family, especially when they conflict with each other. This ambiguity and tension makes parenting an art. There are no real directions to follow and what worked for one child could be disastrous for the other. Parents and children learn together and from each other. What a great help it is when the partnership between parents works in a synergic way. There can also be the tension when over protecting or "caring" of the child results in a lack of motivating growth, independence and mature development.

Caring comes from the German root karo, meaning to lament grief. Others believe that caring comes from the Hebrew word יקר YaQaR, dear, precious. Care in one instance is related to "having grief, to lament, ache, have grief for the child's suffering, or I ache for you". The other is "you are very dear and precious to me". This feeling sits in the limbic system, the area of emotions and memory, so what is dear for us is easier to remember. It is where "we feel" the other, where we feel love and hate. But we're not just feelings, we have a cortex, a choice area that can be trained, educated to respond when we don't feel like doing it. This is especially important when we are in the "in-between" managing conflicting forces. It's not about me anymore, it's about them, so the Ego must be put to the side. This is not easy to do. It's also caring for the siblings and other members of the family where there could be tensions and personal preferences and affections attached. This tension is also present in business regarding the obtaining of business objectives, bottom line performance and creating profit with the need to take care for the people in the business. We often tilt our actions towards one or the other, always failing on the other side. Some would lean to the company, others toward the employee. Result, both suffer. Productivity cannot be sustained and the workforce cannot develop. Leadership is an art too, and can be learnt.

Wise guide, as parents, we are entrusted with the visioning and creation of the path to follow as a family. It may be one of the most serious strategy pulling we may ever do, but as the saying says, "We spend more time planning the wedding than the marriage and family." The 'wise guide' is not only strategy planning, something that could follow some generic templates, it is the art in the strategy execution. This is where the "guide" and a wise one is needed. Strategy plans can be written as statements, dot points, as a Gantt Chart project or as a recipe. The "proof is in the pudding is in the eating". It is here where the challenge is, and a 'wise guide' will be able to contain and steer the family to successful experiences often not because everything is right, but when

many things may be falling apart. A 'wise guide' is a parent that is humble as he/she learns from mistakes and is open to reflection and insight.

Firm educator, Pichon Riviere, a Swiss-Argentinean psychiatrist, said that every learning experience is therapeutic healing. When I heard this in my first years as a psychiatrist, I thought if that is true, we can say we can be healed by learning from life experiences—that life is a school of how to live life better, therefore work could be better too. The term 'firm' connected to an educator came to me as a memory from the way my grandparents, parents and some teachers were present with me through my learning. Their firmness did not allow my weakness, fears or stubbornness to set the pace of learning but their firmness was a solid anchor for learning.

Discipline provider, as a father this was one of the most challenging roles I had to play and I don't think I've done very well. I often see myself as being too tolerant, too rigid or too hard. One day, my mother saw me chastising my son. She called me and said, "Carlitos, your son will be a man who will need to fly. Don't break his wings." What a lesson! I wonder if I really learnt it, or did I learn it too late? A middle-eastern teaching says, "The father corrects the children he loves." Discipline is not punishing. It is training and education. It comes together with the 'firm educator'. The middle-eastern teaching continues. "At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature." And adds a lesson to the father-teacher: "So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out and run for it!" In corporate or business, it takes the name of performance management. This is very difficult to do and we find that it's often done when is too late and is happening in tense environment, it's awkward and not as productive as we hoped. This is because it's challenging to confront, topic for another chat, and difficult to build a culture of accountability. Repetition of mistakes without consequences creates a culture of entitlement without responsibility. In many occasions, when the employee is faced with performance management conversation, he/she responds with outrage, claiming that he/she had been bullied, with despondency, hurt and threatened to leave or sue the company. We avoid "going there" but the role of the 'discipline provider' (and hopefully), 'loving-caring discipline provider' can, at home, save the life of a child as well as the growth of the family, we can be creative and apply that at work too? My father used to say to me, "I prefer that we cry now than to cry later."

Ethical role model, this is also a biggy! As parents, we live in the window with children, partners, and family watching us, observing how we deal with issues in life (especially those that look unfair or wrong). How do we deal with them ethically? But it's not only our mistakes and faults they observe, they also look at how we celebrate success and enjoy life. They observe how we display some of our virtues including authenticity, assertiveness, compassion, forgiveness among many others.

Encourager, being a father also has gratifications. On father's day, I read this from my daughter Melanie. "Thank you for all your patience, love and respect. You always believed in my capabilities and held me when I succeed and when I failed." It's good to know that sometimes we've done something right too. To be an encourager is often a challenge too. What we can say to a child that fails in his/her exams, and we know that he/she hasn't studied as they should. "Are you stupid? Can't you learn? Can't you do anything right?" How about. "You're grounded for two weeks!" (Angry punisher-put-downer). Or "You'll do well continuing like that, well done!" (Sarcastic Patroniser) or "Well, you've done what you thought was right, what a wonderful opportunity you have ahead to show how great you can do. You have what it takes", "can I be of help?" (Loving Encourager).

In an ancient story, one person says to another who was in great desolation "My mouth would encourage you. Comfort from my lips would bring you relief." In moments of difficulty, we can recall encouraging words and empowering words we have heard before. If you feel you don't have enough encouraging messages in your heart and mind, you may like to do the Pillars of Life Technique that will help you to build the encouraging memories.

Visionary, the proverb, “Where there is no vision the people perish,” is often used in leadership training. Vision and mission statement creation was a must, and still is in some organisations. It’s not accident we call it vision and the visual system is the most developed and complex brain system and is interconnected with every other sense. We can even visualise sounds, colours, ideas and dreams. Being visionary includes the above but surpasses it. It is to see beyond what we see now. Another word we can use for that is faith, as faith is, “The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It’s our handle on what we can’t see. It is a comfort to a child to see his/her parents looking beyond what they see.

We can play off those roles in a creative-constructive way or we may under or overdo it in a fragmenting, reactive way. We can learn to have insight on the way we play the roles and learn the art of parenting-leadership.

You may have other qualities or attributes you may like to share, but I think these are enough points to start playing with.

We don’t need not be a father or parent to use as a metaphor for other relationships including Leadership. We can look at the father role from the role of son or daughter. Each one of us has a father. One that has been present with some of these qualities, or, sadly, one who has been absent or displaying the opposite qualities of the one we needed and desire. Life built within as a DNA code that helps us to identify what a good father is and what it is to become one, we can be good fathers in spite of not having a good role model. We may need to do that with the support of others. You may like to read this article: “Don Samuel”, a man that was a role model to a man without a father.

Some people may say, “It’s difficult for me to do that, naming one of these qualities.” We must recognise that sometimes it is not difficult. “It is at the edge of the impossible.” This is due to lack of role models, being hurt in the past or just being exhausted. Solutions are near when we really want and desire to learn how to live life better.

The family metaphor from a father perspective can be extended to siblings. For example, when I get hurt at work by a colleague, I could hold resentment and anger and forever suffer that, or could choose to treat the situation as it may have happened with my brother or sister. In those situations, we get over it quickly, have a few words about it, and continue playing, sharing and having fun together. Children know that enjoying life, the present, is more important than resentment, and anger. Sometimes we need to just “get over it” like children. Keep playing!



Dr Carlos A. Raimundo is a medical doctor, psychiatrist, MBA and PhD with studies in neuro-science, theology and philosophy. His main desire is to help individuals and teams to learn how to live life better. In doing so, those individuals will transform themselves, allowing the best of the self to emerge and positively affect every relationship, organisation, and family. Carlos’ task involves putting himself forward as a case study by learning and applying what he teaches to his own life. He finds that very challenging, often at the edge of impossible, making many mistakes along the way, but it gives him the immense thrill of trusting, and having faith that transformation is possible.

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