

10 Lessons Learned: The "Balanced Dad" Concept

By Jeff Prouty | Tuesday, June 16, 2009

I have spent the past 14 years on the national board of directors for Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity. With 150,000 members around the world and 250 chapters on university campuses, Sig Ep is the largest fraternity in the world.

Our mission: Build balanced leaders for the world's communities.

I had to miss the May board meeting in Los Angeles, and told one of the board members that I was trying to be a "balanced dad." That, he said, was an interesting concept, and the impetus for sharing my thoughts with others.

As I reflect on my dad, my kids, clients and other people's kid-raising efforts, here are 10 things I've learned about trying to be a "balanced dad:"

1. **The Human Performance Institute** in Orlando, Fla., speaks in terms of balancing the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional pieces of life. That's how I try to "stretch" clients in the strategic planning of their businesses and boards. How are you doing at emphasizing each of these components of your kids' lives?
2. **Grandpa's Book of Rules.** Rules and guidelines for raising your kids, your grandkids and maybe your neighbor's kids were given to me by my own dad, who wrote such a book about 10 years ago. One of his mantras: Teach your kids how to plant and grow tomatoes. There will be tremendous learning about "nurturing."
3. **Thank God it's Monday.** In Roxanne Emmerich's recently released book, she talks about the importance of "being unstressed." Thirty-four percent of kids wish their parents were less stressed out. How are you doing on the stress index?
4. **The Cheryl Tiegs Approach.** I read that Cheryl Tiegs gave her kids a monthly allowance equal to four times their age. A 10-year old would get a \$40 monthly allowance. I always give the kids their allowance on the first of each month in an envelope with a note that asks: "How do you intend to save, spend, share" this month's allowance?
5. **Half and Half.** In a world where half of us are dieting and half are starving, according to a quote in Forbes magazine, are you inspiring your kids to think about their role in the world? How can they make the world a better place? What are you doing to show them the way?
6. **Dreams.** Are you inspiring your kids to chase their dreams, or inspiring them to chase your dreams? Are you inspiring them to think about big goals, and inspiring them to fully utilize all their potential? Do you know what their goals are -- for today, this week, this year, this decade, this lifetime?

7. **Ask.** Do you ask your kids for feedback? I often use a "keep, stop, start" exercise with clients. Try this with your kids sometime. "Dad, you could be an even better dad if you keep doing, stop doing, start doing?" I think you'll get some fun, and fascinating, feedback. (You'll probably hear you're the "meanest dad in the world" and "the best dad in the world.")
8. **The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth.** I'm intrigued by football coaches who say: "It's not a penalty unless you get caught." How can you dispel that notion -- and anything like it -- for your kids? Teaching, modeling and integrity have never been more important.
9. **The Surprise.** As I reflect on what my parents did so well, part of it was "the surprise." They would show up at my kids' League Baseball game at 1 p.m. (taking time away from their jobs) to my amazement. At the time, I appreciated it. Forty years later, I really appreciate it.
10. **If You Ever Want to Talk...** I recently read about the executive who said to his kids, "If you ever want to talk, I will stop what I'm doing to talk with you." Stop reading the newspaper, stop talking to clients while watching a soccer game, stop working on your pet project at home to talk with your kids. Tough to do, but the right thing to do.

Our kids are 11 and 8, so I'm still learning about being a "balanced dad." If you have any "dadhood" wisdom for me -- whether it's around your own kids and grandkids, or nieces, nephews, foreign exchange students -- please share it with me. If all the dads in the world were focused on being better dads -- building balanced kids -- I do think the world would be an even better place.

We'd be better dads. We'd be better business leaders.

Jeff Prouty lives and works in Eden Prairie. He is founder and chairman of the Prouty Project, a strategic planning and organizational performance firm. Share your "balanced dad" wisdom with Jeff at jeff.prouty@proutyproject.com.