

Keys To The Foundation of Character

Lecture Notes

The first item of business in developing respect and responsibility in our students is to change our language. Teachers can't ask children to do something. They must tell them. We have to move from the interrogative to the imperative. If the directive is not followed by the student, a consequence must be imposed on the child.

I am not an army man, but my dad was, and he shared a lot of his military experiences with me. The first thing he had to do was get his head shaved, then they replaced his clothes with his army uniform. In order to get a furlough he had to be sure that he was responsible, respectful, and compliant with the wishes of his commanding officer. I asked him one day which one of the three behaviors was the most important. He told me that in order to gain more freedom and get what you want, you have to be *compliant* and *respectful* first. You have to do what you are told to do, no ifs, ands, or buts. In this case, he explained that if he followed the rules, then he got his furlough.

This translates to classrooms by establishing an environment where our students are compliant/obedient first. Once a teacher has created a classroom in which students know the rules and the consequences, and the climate of the entire classroom is one of respect, then the teacher can gradually start to dole out freedoms, a little bit at a time. Instead, teachers today give students all kinds of freedom, then take it away when the children are non-compliant. This is exactly the opposite of what is supposed to happen, **AND IT BREEDS DISRESPECT IN THE STUDENTS.**

If a child is told to do something and he doesn't do it, he needs to be held accountable. A child can't be given unearned freedom. I say, no compliance, no respect, no freedom. If a child doesn't have a compliant attitude and he is not held accountable for his non-compliance, he will do and say just about anything that he wants to.

I like to use the illustration of a triangle to really make this concept of compliance/respect before choice/freedom understandable to teachers by using the visuals that can be found in the illustration section at the back of the book titled "The Keys to the Foundations of Character." The tip of the triangle represents the amount of freedom that a child should have at a young age. The tip of the triangle is narrow; when a child is very young, the child should have very little choice. As you go down the triangle, it becomes wider; as the child grows older and has learned to naturally display a compliant attitude, more freedom will naturally be given, and the child will learn to make choices when he is mature enough to make the right choices. As this process occurs, the relationship that develops between the child and the teacher is not strained, so arguments and disagreements are at a minimum. The relationship becomes one that is genuine, and there is a mutual and natural respect that develops between the teacher and the student. The teacher isn't held hostage by controlling students and will not have to be concerned about telling students what to do for fear of an episode of disrespect. As the child grows older and is respectful and responsible, a trust develops that is conducive to the teachers being able to allow choice. Not only does the child now have choice, but because of the compliant attitude, the child now has the ability to make correct choices. This is what I call the inside-out approach to change. The child realizes the benefits of his compliant attitude and develops the ability to do what he is told when he is told to do it without the teacher having to impose some type of extrinsic discipline. The child intrinsically realizes the benefits of compliance, and the positive behavior is now a part of his character.

When Choice Is Given Without Being Earned

In the previous pages I just explained the ideal situation; unfortunately, this is not what is happening in our schools these days, or in society as a whole. In Illustration two you will see a triangle where the tip is at the bottom and the wide part is at the top. This upside down triangle represents the way that has evolved in which we first give our youngest children choice without demanding any obedience. As time goes on, our children gradually get out of control, and then we are faced with trying to regain some control or manage uncontrollable children. Because children were allowed to make any choices they wished, but never were taught to make

correct choices, they will go through life believing that they can say and do anything they want. They will become confused when a teacher asks them to do something they don't want to do. Later on in life, they will always have trouble dealing with any boss or authority figure correctly.

Abnormal relationships develop where children tell their parents exactly what they intend to do, and their parents' authority becomes non-existent. In school, children try to tell their teachers exactly what they intend to do, then the power struggles begin. Any relationships between the child and the teacher become strained. Natural respect cannot develop between the teacher and the student when the student believes that the ground is level and that no one is in charge. The teacher is then held hostage by power-hungry students and constantly fears an episode of disrespect that he/she will not know how to manage. The trust that should exist was never allowed to develop, and the only response teachers can have is to become dictatorial in order to have any control in the classroom. The only other alternative the teacher has in this situation is to constantly provide extrinsic rewards for positive behavior because students never developed any intrinsic motivation to do the right thing. Positive behavior will never become part of the child's true character.

The Long Term Negative

Effect of Choice

I used to play baseball in high school and college. When my child, Sarah, was born in 1991, baseball wasn't something I thought she would ever be interested in. But when she was six, I took her over to the park to hit some baseballs. She picked up the balls after I hit them, then she got up to bat. She hit a few balls, even ran the bases. Sarah had and still has athletic ability: good hand eye coordination, flexibility, strength, and agility. Well, when Sarah was seven, she came to me one day and said, "Hey, Dad, can I play soccer?" I said, "Sure." So I went out and bought her a soccer ball, shin guards, and cleats. I signed her up for the recreational league in town. I must admit I was enthused. We practiced kicking the ball in the backyard, and we were both getting excited about her first game.

Well, the Saturday of the first game came, so Sarah and I headed up to the soccer field. After some warm-up activities and a pep talk from the coach, the game started. To my surprise, Sarah was in the starting line-up. She ran up and down the

field for the first ten minutes or so, and she finally had an opportunity to kick the ball. She took her first kick, missed the ball, and landed flat on her back. She got up and came crying over to the sideline and begged, "Don't make me play anymore, Dad, I can't do it." She refused to go back into the game. The game ended, and on the way to the car she continued to cry, "Don't make me play, Dad, please, I don't want to."

I mustered up all my courage and said to her sternly, "You're playing. Now get in the car." She got in the car and we drove home. On the way home all I heard was a bunch of sniffing and whining in the back seat. I didn't have a very long ride home, but I can tell you this. She wore me out. I was emotionally exhausted by the time I got home. We pulled up into the driveway, and I sat miserably in the car as I watched Sarah get out and walk into the house, sniffing and shaking as she walked through the front door. I sat stewing in the car and said to myself, "Who wants to play soccer anyway, dumb game." I then attempted to further rationalize my thoughts by saying to myself, "Soccer's for boys anyway." I walked into the house, stood at the bottom of the stairs, and yelled, "SARAH." She sniffled her way through a "Yeah, Dad." "Come down here." She came down the stairs, and I said to her, "Look, honey, you don't have to play soccer if you don't want to play. It's ok with me." "Oh thank you, Daddy." She gave me a big hug and kiss, then ran back upstairs.

Honestly, I felt like her hero. I was her knight in shining armor. I had just come through for her and given her exactly what she wanted. I was sure I had made the prudent decision; I didn't even have to ask her mother's opinion. I figured what's the big deal, no harm done. I was content in the knowledge that I had allowed my six-year-old daughter to make her own decision.

Well, I have another daughter named Grace (Grace is six years younger than Sarah) who came to me when she was six and said, "Hey, Dad, can I play soccer?" I said, "Sure, honey." The same routine started again, the shin guards, the cleats, the soccer ball, the practice, and finally the game. But this time, the outcome was much different.

Grace ran enthusiastically up and down the field from one end to the other. She never got near enough to even touch the ball, but she had a great time. Grace came off the field with a look of absolute joy in her eyes and said to me, "Boy that was fun, Dad." She played the first season and had a ball. She played the next season and really improved a lot. She wanted to score badly, but didn't have the opportunity. She still loved the game. To her, every game was an event, an outing that ended with a snack and Gatorade, lunch, and a fun time spent with me.

While this was going on, Sarah was into cheerleading, gymnastics, track, palates, and even a little weight lifting. She loved designer clothes, having her nails done, tanning, make-up, and just looking good. She watched her weight and understood that in order to look good, she had to spend a good deal of time exercising. She commented to me one time that some of her friends on her track team had less body fat than she did and that they could run faster than she could. It was just a passing comment, but I remember her saying it, and I most definitely noticed that she was bothered by this.

One day, Sarah and I drove over to the soccer field to pick Grace up from practice. We got to the field, and Grace got into the car sweating; her face was as red as a tomato. Sarah handed a Gatorade and a snack over to her in the back seat, and Grace just sat there, contentedly guzzling her drink. Sarah looked back at Grace, then looked forward, looked back again at Grace again, then stared straight at me. She said, "Hey, Dad, why didn't you make me play soccer?"

I said defensively, "I wanted you to play. Don't you remember? You kicked the ball once, missed it, and fell on your head. Then you begged me not to make you play again." She answered me with, "*So?* Why didn't you make me?" Now I was the one who was starting to sweat. I said, "You didn't want to play. You wouldn't let up until I agreed not to make you play."

Sarah then made a statement to me that I will never forget as long as I live. She said, "But, Dad, you're supposed to be in charge."

Where had I gone wrong seven years earlier? At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do was to give in to what Sarah wanted. But it turned out that I hadn't done what she *needed* me to do. I had allowed a six-year-old to decide whether she wanted to play soccer. What had she really needed at the time? She needed me to tell her that she was going to play soccer because I as the parent knew what was best for her, and I wasn't going to give her a way out. She wanted me to be in charge, not allow her to be in charge. I had unknowingly let her down.

When I teach graduate courses, I ask my adult students the following question all the time. "How many things did your parents let you get away with as a kid that you wish you had never gotten away with?" I usually get lots of stunned looks.

Too often we allow our children to make choices and decisions that they have no business making. I see it all the time in supermarkets, stores, and malls, parents giving in when their children demand they buy something, or parents trying to

coax their kids to stop crying or to stop running away from them. The children ignore their parents' pleadings. Usually, the parents say something to their children like, "What do you want to do?" Well, honestly, who cares what they want; they're three years old!

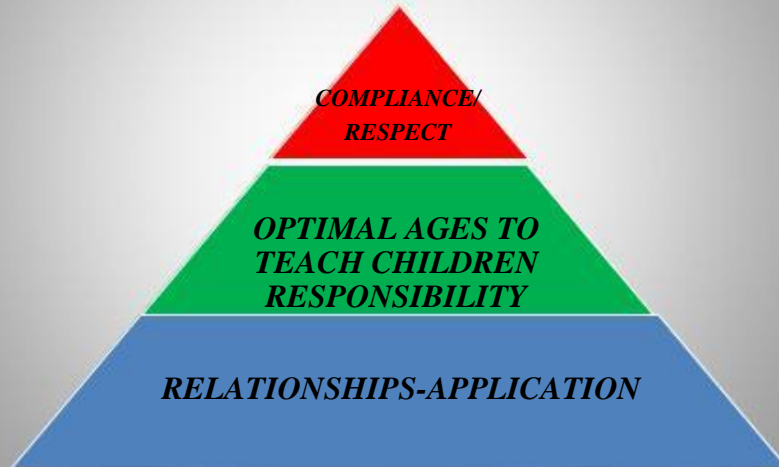
I'm not sure where this whole attitude has come from, but I have my own theory that Dr. Benjamin Spock had a lot to do with it. Spock's first book, *Baby and Child Care* was first published in 1946 just in time for the baby boomer generation. In his book he spoke about feeding on demand, respecting your children, the need for flexibility, and the lack of the necessity to worry about spoiling. The paperback sold more than 50 million copies and was translated into thirty languages. Critics of Spock claimed that he was "the father of permissiveness." In later years, Spock claimed that he never changed his basic philosophy on child care, that it was imperative to respect children because they were human beings and they deserved respect. But he seemed to retreat somewhat from his teachings when he made statements such as "I've always said ask for respect from your children, ask for cooperation, ask for politeness. Give your children firm leadership." Years later, he became more moralistic and said that parents should give their children strong values and encourage them to help others. This is only supposition, but I think Spock may have decided that he didn't like what he saw in society and realized that he may have played a part in the screwing up of generations. In later editions of the book originally titled *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, he stressed that children needed standards and that parents also had a right to respect. He stated in his book that parents were starting to become afraid of imposing on the child in any way.

I'm not claiming to be an expert on child rearing, but I do know that if children are fed on demand, they will be demanding. If they are allowed to say anything they want, they will be disrespectful. If they are not held accountable, they will be irresponsible. And if there are no consequences for inappropriate behavior, they will be non-compliant. Parents today always ask, "What can we do with our kids today?" My question is, "What are we going to do with these parents?"

Once I relinquished my natural right as a parent to make decisions for my children, I was never truly able to reestablish my parental authority. From the moment my daughter convinced me to allow her to make the choice not to play soccer; she learned she had the power to make every decision that came along in her life whether large or small. And the saddest part of all is that she blames me because I wasn't strong enough *not* to let her assume a role she was never designed to play in her young life.

Dr. Spock has since passed away, and I think many of us are looking for a new voice to offer us some solid advice to help us sort out the mess we are in today.

*Keys to
The Foundation of Character*



What We Do Now!!!

The Exact Opposite

**FREEDOM AND CHOICES TO YOUNG CHILDREN – 2-9
TEMPER TANTRUMS, CRYING AND WHINNING. IT IS VERY
EASY TO GIVE IN TO A CRYING CHILD!**

NO BOUNDRIES BETWEEN 10-13 YEARS OLD

**START SAYING AND DOING WHAT THEY WANT VERY
ARGUMENTATIVE-CONCERN DEVELOPS ON THE PART OF
TEACHERS AND PARENTS REGARDING THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOR**

**REBELLION, GRADES 9-12, NO SELF DISCIPLINE,
OR SELF MOTIVATION**

**POWER STRUGGLES, NO CHARACTER. IT IS VERY
DIFFICULT TO RESTRAIN THE BEHAVIORS OF A
REBELLIOUS TEENAGER**

