



Special Report
RAISING CHILDREN AND LEADING EMPLOYEES

by Robert Urbanowski

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After 20 years of parenting and leading people, as well as many years of research, I found there are some simple truths, or common denominators, in getting the results we want as a parent and a leader. I can tell you that neither job is easy, but after some hard work, both can be rewarding. Every parent wants his or her child to grow up to be a happy, successful, contributing member of society. Every business leader needs their employees to be productive contributing members in the workplace.

In both these relationships, it is critical that we “get it right”, because our actions have the power to impact the very fabric of the other person’s life. My two oldest children are now 21 and 19, and I am very proud of the kind of people they have turned out to be. However, I have to admit that I wished I knew then what I know now about what my kids needed most when growing up. If there are any regrets I have in life, it is that I did not understand what would have enabled me to offer my children more of what they needed.

This short article will provide you with an understanding of what people’s most innate needs are. It’s when you understand and meet those needs - whether that’s your children or your employees- they develop into people that are healthy and able to make their greatest contribution in life.

Raising happy and healthy children

All parents want their children to grow up to achieve and be successful. Like everything else in life, there is a right way and a wrong way to do this. Unfortunately, since television has infiltrated our homes in the late 1940s, we have parented differently. The messaging promoted by the media via the television has influenced our beliefs and the way the raise our children.

After World War II, baby boomers were the first generation to own a television and the first generation to receive repeated and intense exposure from the media. The media’s primary message? “You can have, be, and do anything YOU want”. The media introduced and perpetuated a new focus on “self”. The need to feel good about oneself became paramount, and in the 1970s and 1980s, the self-esteem movement emerged.

As baby boomers began having babies themselves, this new focus on self-esteem and self confidence became an integral part of the belief system in which these children were raised. Parents wanted children to always feel good about themselves. That desire lead, in many cases, to a faulty parenting strategy which an entire generation of children has been raised. Today they are called Generation Y – or as some call them, Generation Me.

What was that faulty strategy? Parents, with the noble desire of wanting their children to feel good about themselves, began focusing on their children’s “self-esteem”. A mistake that author Jean Twenge, Ph.D., describes in greater detail in her book, *Generation Me*. Twenge says that children were taught to feel good about themselves for no reason. It did not matter how they acted or whether they learned anything, they were taught to feel good about themselves first and foremost.

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Schools stopped grading children and praised them for their effort rather than their results. Feeling good about one's self was more important than what the child was able to learn. Children were made to feel special without any valid achievement or reason. While on the surface, raising children to "feel good about themselves first and foremost" does not appear to have a downside, false praise and high self esteem on it's own does nothing positive for the child.

Kids with high self esteem (feeling good about yourself without basis) do NOT get better grades or achieve more. Self esteem is not linked to academic achievement, good behavior, or anything else. The critical error is this: Self esteem is an OUTCOME of having achieved something. Self esteem is not a CAUSE for anything. It doesn't achieve anything positive to teach children to feel good about themselves just for the sake of feeling good. True self esteem comes from behaving well and accomplishing and learning. It's better for children to develop real skills and feel good about accomplishing something real.

This strategy for raising children has now produced a culture obsessed with feeling good about ourselves. According to a new study, today's college students are more narcissistic and self-centered than their predecessors.

From 1982 to 2006, 16,475 college students completed an evaluation called the *Narcissistic Personality Inventory* (NPI). The standard inventory asks for rated responses to such statements as, "If I ruled the world it would be a better place," "I think I am a special person," and "I can live my life the way I want to." The nationwide results were quite telling. NPI scores have risen steadily since the current test was introduced in 1982. By 2006, they said, two-thirds of the students had above-average scores, 30 percent more than in 1982.

The study asserts narcissists "are more likely to have romantic relationships that are short-lived, at risk for infidelity, lack emotional warmth, and to exhibit game-playing, dishonesty, and over-controlling and violent behaviors." This is NOT what their parents had in mind when they raised them.

This error in raising children is rooted in a faulty belief system, influenced highly by the media. The TRUTH is, the needs of children are not met by making them feel good about themselves. Raising healthy children requires an understanding of their most basic human needs.

Every person needs to achieve and needs to feel loved and accepted. As a parent, you need to meet those needs for your children. What children need is to develop real skills and to feel good about themselves from having accomplished something. They need to know what it is like to make an effort and either fail or succeed (this is real life). If they fail, kids need to learn that it's all right if they are not good at something. They can keep trying until they discover what they are good at. This develops self control and the ability to persevere and keep going. These qualities are a much better predictor of life outcomes than self esteem.

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The critical part of parents' role in this process is to provide the child with unconditional love. Children are healthiest when their need for love is met. If you love your children unconditionally, they will not be afraid to try things and fail, because when they fail, they will not be at risk of feeling unloved or rejected. This provides them with the freedom to try new things and eventually succeed. In this way, their sense of true worth is developed and sustained and their needs for achievement and love can be met. Real achievement, combined with real love, wins over "feeling good about yourself" every time.

Motivation at Work

A business leader, like a parent, has the best chance of success when he or she understands that all humans have two primary needs they need met – the need for achievement and the need for acceptance. Adults in the workplace need to feel a sense of real achievement; which means, they need to feel good about themselves because of having accomplished something. Studies show that praising an employee without cause can have a negative effective on performance.

If a business is focused on the short-term performance of its people rather than on meeting needs it asks, "What can I get from my employees?" not "What can I contribute?" Naturally, employees feel like they are simply being used for the company's own benefit. They are paid just enough, but not generously. They are rarely recognized for the value they bring. They are treated simply as workers, who work. The company focuses on what it wants from the employee. Employee performance reviews are one-sided, evaluating employees on how well they have performed. Rarely does the business ask, "What do you need to do your job better?" As a result, most employees leave their job because of lack of appreciation. That's a fact!

A successful business focuses on what the employees' most fundamental needs are. The primary task of its leaders is to contribute toward helping their employees meet these needs.

Employees need to feel valued for what they do. Real leaders coach their employees so they have the opportunity to perform their best, to achieve and to grow.

Employers who focus on meeting their employees' needs take four specific actions to foster the personal development of employees and make them feel valued:

1. They recognize and reward employees' contributions. This sounds simplistic, but few actually do this.
2. They provide employees with the opportunity to achieve and accomplish.

They do this by identifying the employees' greatest skills and assigning tasks and responsibilities that enable the exercise of those skills. The benefit is two-fold. First, by using their greatest skills, employees are able to offer the employer their greatest contributions. Second, employees develop

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and grow their most valuable talents and feel their best. Employees, like athletes, learn to perform at their best and the company ultimately wins.

3. They set targets employees can achieve so their sense of achievement is met. When employees achieve, they feel empowered to perform at even higher levels.
4. They turn employee performance reviews into mutual goal-setting sessions where employees see their opportunity for growth and personal development.

In his book *Winning*, Jack Welch says, “Self-confidence energizes, and it gives your people the courage to stretch, take risks, and achieve beyond their dreams. It’s the fuel of a winning team.” Welch says that from his experience he understands that “...people inherently and instinctively want to be respected for their work and effort and individuality.” The importance of treating people this way is nothing new to great business leaders such as Doug McGregor, Peter Drucker and Ken Blanchard. They have all extolled the importance of valuing the human person in the workplace.

So, whether you are raising children or motivating employees, your best chance for getting what you want is to focus on the development of the other person, paying special attention to the value and worth of the individual. When you do this, you are more like to produce a healthy child or a motivated employee.

Robert Urbanowski is a parent and business strategist who embarked on a research project to identify the common denominators that make businesses successful. He soon discovered that the same factors contributing to professional and business success also translate into our personal lives.

This discovery resulted in the *Law of Contribution* – a principle that affects every part of our lives. The implications for our lives are profound. He shares the results of his research and discovery in the book, *Kickback*. For more information, visit www.lawofcontribution.com.