

## **Leadership lessons from my daughter - John Halamka**

May 19, 2008 (Computerworld) Being a parent has taught me more about leadership than anything written by Spencer Johnson or Peter Drucker. Here are my top 10 management lessons learned from being the father of 15-year-old Lara:

- 1. Yelling never has a positive outcome.** My daughter remembers the two times I've raised my voice, even though they occurred long ago. My outbursts diminished me and had no positive effect on her behavior. In business, if I ever feel that raising my voice will win the battle, my life as a parent tells me that confrontation only makes a situation worse.
- 2. Formal authority rarely works.** I wouldn't get very far if I told Lara, "Do this because I'm your father." That wouldn't get me very far as a CIO, either. Leadership comes from thoughtful discussion that leads to consensus.
- 3. Give permission to make mistakes.** Making mistakes is the way children learn, and it works for our staffs, too. Setting limits and offering staffers the flexibility to excel on their own is far more effective than micromanagement.
- 4. Communication is key.** Teenagers don't perceive parents as cool, smart or fun to be with. But you still have to keep the lines of communication open. It's less important to win an argument than it is to ensure you're still speaking when the discussion is over. The same is true with customers and employees -- I'd rather hear bad news and fix the problem than not hear anything at all.
- 5. Get the basics right.** I've tried to be a living example that the nice guy can finish first, theft and aggressive behavior are wrong, and kindness and consensus win the day. I believe that such a basic moral framework will lead Lara to make the right choices on tough decisions. In business, setting a tone of ethical, fair and collaborative behavior spreads to staff and customers.
- 6. You can criticize ideas, but not people.** If my daughter makes a decision I do not agree with, we can debate her ideas but not her abilities. The same is true with employees and customers. I treat everyone with respect, even if I do not agree with their ideas.
- 7. Foster the joy of success rather than the fear of failure.** When I took

the SATs, I had no real knowledge of their importance. I got a scholarship, not because I was smarter than my peers, but because the fear of failure didn't hang over the exam. With Lara, we've tried to celebrate success. This approach seems much more sustainable than instilling the fear of failure. Organizations that emphasize growth and achievement will perform better than those that manage through intimidation.

**8. Delegate responsibility, but emphasize accountability.** We let our daughter set her schedule, but when the alarm sounds in the morning, she is accountable for her decision to go to bed late. By not enforcing a bedtime, we have enhanced her decision- making. Similarly, the more responsibility you give your staff, the greater their accountability.

**9. Respect innovation.** Last year, when we picked a bucket of carrots from our garden, I recommended that we follow the standard practice of using a sieve to wash them. Lara had a different idea: laying them out in the driveway and washing them with a sprayer. Her method was fast, effective and efficient. Even though business as usual has always worked, there may be better ways.

**10. Accept independence.** If I make decisions for Lara, she'll be less prepared for life. I give her the best guidance that I can, hope that she develops a strong internal compass, and then let her change as she experiences the world. Developing the next generation of leaders requires the same approach.

Parenting can be more valuable than an MBA. It teaches humility, selflessness and self-control. And no matter what I do in IT, my daughter will be my greatest legacy.

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