

I Am the Boss of You

BY DONNA WICK

A recent conversation with a New York Independent School Upper School Head reminded me of an encounter I had with a six-year old named Lily. Standing with her hands on her hips, wearing her yellow rain boots, Lily furiously shouted, “You are not the boss of me.” Well, actually, I am. The Upper School head, describing the tension between the freedom adolescents crave and the limits they need, echoed Lilly’s words. She too was the boss, in this case of her Upper School students.

Inherent in the job of an Upper School administrator are tensions similar to those we face as parents. In my practice, I see a lot of parents who have trouble with the concept of who’s boss. When I was growing up, there was no question that parents were in charge. But these days, there are a dismaying number of adolescents who are in charge, because their parents don’t want their children’s anger directed at them. I work very hard at convincing parents that it’s okay for their teenagers to be angry with them. In fact, adolescents occasionally *need* to be mad at their parents. It’s a key adolescent developmental task and an essential part of the normal separation process.

Still not convinced? The following research illustrates the point. One of the best-known studies about parenting was developed by clinical and developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind, who distinguishes four different styles of parenting: **authoritarian**, **authoritative**, **permissive**, and **uninvolved**. Baumrind determined that best outcomes for children were associated with parents who adopted an authoritative style of parenting characterized by a high degree of parental responsiveness and parental control. Authoritarian parents err on the side of too much control and too little responsiveness, and permissive parents are high in responsiveness and low in control. Uninvolved parents are low in both. Not surprisingly, this style of parenting is associated with the worst outcomes for children.

Michael Davidovits, who teaches and supervises clinicians at the Ackerman Institute for the Family describes a healthy family system as a hierarchy in which parents have a high degree of both nurture and authority. This creates healthy boundaries in the family, and boundaries are essential to the system’s smooth functioning. Finally, Suniya Luther, a professor of psychology and education at Columbia University who conducts research about risk and resiliency in affluent children, identifies something called “parental monitoring.” She reported affluent adolescents said they were prevented from engaging in risk-taking behavior (in this study, substance use), when they knew their parents were monitoring their whereabouts, even when they were not being truthful as to where they really were. In other words parental long-distance control and involvement kept these adolescents safe.

As parents we should insist upon knowing where our adolescents are, even if we suspect they aren’t telling us the truth. On some level it doesn’t matter if they say they are at Janie’s when they are hanging out in Chinatown. Don’t give up the quest for information, monitor their activities, and demand regular check-ins. When parents establish and then maintain a high degree of authority early in their relationship with their children, it’s easier to give them more freedom as they mature. And once you’ve established who’s the boss, it’s easier to say “no,” even to uncomfortable requests like Spring Break in the Bahamas. But that’s a topic for another discussion. So, go ahead, seize the day, and remember we ARE the boss of them. ●

Dr. Donna Wick is the Executive Director of Freedom Institute. A clinical and developmental psychologist, Dr. Wick works with parents and children and specializes in Mentalization Based Treatment (MBT) for substance abuse. She has appeared on Oprah and Good Morning America, has produced a documentary film and has written about parenting issues for numerous publications.

PRESIDENTS' **Letter****The Parent Child Dynamic:
You Can Count On Change**

In parenting, just as in music, the dynamics keep things interesting. But with the parent-child dynamic, changes may occur at dizzying—even alarming—speed. The key to building a rewarding parent-child dynamic is communication. Be prepared, and be in touch.

Even if whatever phase you're stuck in seems eternal, don't fret. Wait six months—a year at most—and it will have become something else. On the other hand, it won't do to get left behind. It takes effort to keep your footing on parenthood's shifting sands. You'll want to cultivate a nimble approach.

It starts early. Your pre-schooler goes off to kindergarten and along with that shift comes an opportunity for expanding conversation. Now your child brings you news of the outside world, from his perspective, instead of the other way around. Be ready for active listening and interactive dialog. Ask questions and offer encouragement. Think before you speak and tailor your reactions appropriately. Subtly communicate your values and encourage your child to begin forming her own. Even better, attend one of PIA's ParentTalk meetings and hear what other parents in your child's class are learning and doing.

Conversely, when your chatty 10–12 year old clam up and becomes a terse pre-adolescent, be ready. Learn the landscape. Talk to other parents. Know what's out there and what might be food for conversation. Attend a PIA Teen Scene panel, and hear kids just a few years older than yours describe what may sound like foreign territory. It isn't. It's your child's new world and he will be living in it for a while. Be prepared to dwell on the border for a few years, but keep the dialog alive. Embrace the shifting dynamics and fit conversation in where and when you can.



In fact, trying something a little offbeat can keep things interactive. Send your child a text so he won't be overheard talking to mom or dad on his cell. G-chat once in a while. Once when my daughter and I were in different rooms of our apartment I sent her a g-chat saying "I'm g-chatting you from the next room, just because I can." She was charmed. We had a nice long conversation. Maybe the computer was the intermediary, but the content was pretty meaty and our parent-child dynamic got a boost.

Parents in Action has embraced its own shifting dynamics with a new style of leadership.

Parents in Action has embraced its own shifting dynamics with a new style of leadership. This year we have two co-presidents, Ruth Cox and Melanie Wells, and we promise to work at keeping dialog thriving—not just between PIA and its constituents, but also between co-presidents, working together on your behalf, and hoping to prove the old adage that two heads are better than one. If we succeed, effective communication will surely be at the root of accomplishment. Underlying successful civilized life is successful communication—not just parent to child, but among adults too. So enter the parent-child dynamic with this in mind, and show your child how it's done. If it feels clumsy at first, persevere. You and your child will perfect it together. And you will give your child a skill he can use for a lifetime.

—RUTH COX AND MELANIE WELLS

Raising Children Who Love Their Lives

BY PAMELA AWAD

In the end, “the love you take is equal to the love you make.” So says Susie Case, channeling Paul McCartney while speaking about “Raising Children Who Love their Lives,” at the PIA Mother’s Day Benefit luncheon on May 8th. According to Ms. Case, the 200 or so attendees at the Cosmopolitan Club were all designing women, who, by designing a life for their kids, were sculptors of a most innovative sort.

Raising children is a kind of design project and good design “is all about the new next thing.” Children are constantly in transition, and with each one comes the challenge of facing that new next thing. The parallels between good design and effective parenting follow the three principles of good design—identifying a goal, removing the unnecessary, and understanding it’s a process—and are as applicable to raising children as they are to more traditional projects. In this way, says Ms. Case, we are like Michelangelo designing David.

Clear goals, the first principle, are important to define if hard to track and measure. The goal of raising happy kids can be as measurable as, say, the goal of getting into college, if we take into account the traits happy people have in common. Four of the most measurable are:

1. **Self-knowledge:** Happy people “know what they do well and know what they naturally don’t do well”. They are aware of their likes, dislikes and what works for them.
2. **Resilience:** When happy people fail, “their expectation is they will recover” because they have failed and recovered from difficulty before.
3. **Positive habits:** These include perseverance, a willingness to work hard and not procrastinating (e.g., dragging your feet, dawdling, or postponing until tomorrow what you can do today).

4. **Groups:** That is, the ability to work in groups.

Case says, “effective people study in groups, practice in groups and travel in teams.”

“Good design removes the unnecessary so our kids can enjoy the important things.” Case applies this second principle to activities, technology and expectations, meaning, “less is more when it comes to designing lives for happy kids.” She advises paring down scheduled activities to give a child “breathing room”; “portion controlling” technology by scheduling specific times for texting and tech interaction; and depressurizing expectations. Case suggests finding innovative ways to make technology a “creative activity.” For example, alternating museum based drawing classes with tech art classes can further a child’s artistic interests. And citing the Dutch proverb, “women blame themselves when it rains,” Case urges mothers to ease up on their expectations of themselves. By sharing stories with their children about their own imperfections, mothers can depressurize their children’s expectations of themselves.

Finally, good design is a process that takes time and is due in no small part to trial and error. Children should be encouraged to try new experiences and parents should “remember that the things that don’t work teach them as much as the things that do.” Ask questions in an open-ended way to encourage feedback—kids’ impressions are rich in information. Be intentional in your efforts and ask for help when you need it (it takes a village), said Ms. Case, and know that designing a life for your children will help you love your life too. ●

Susie Case is a career coach who works with high school and college students. She lectures frequently and can be reached through Aristotle Circle at www.aristotlecircle.com or at susie@susiecase.com.

NYC-PARENTS IN ACTION 2012-2013 CALENDAR

Please note: All Trainings will be held at Saint Bart's Church, 325 Park Avenue at 51st Street.

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 13th

**School Rep Training
Orientation Coffee**

9:00 am–11:00 am

OCTOBER

Monday 1st

Facilitator Training 1 • 12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Wednesday 3rd

Facilitator Training 2 • 12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Friday 5th

Facilitator Training 3 • 12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Thursday 11th

School Rep Luncheon

Speaker:

- **Donna Wick**

12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

971 Madison Avenue at 73rd Street

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 6th

Benefit Luncheon

Speaker:

- **Dr. Nancy Snyderman**

12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Cosmopolitan Club • 122 East 66th St.

Monday 12th

Seminar with NYU Presbyterian Medical Panel

Moderator:

- **Lucy Martin-Gianino**

6:30 pm–8:00 pm

Nightingale-Bamford School • 20 East 92nd St.

JANUARY

Wednesday 16th

Seminar: Fathers Only

Speaker from Common Sense Media

7:00 pm–8:30 pm

Hewitt School • 45 East 75th Street

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 6th

Facilitator Training • 8:30 am–12:00 pm

Friday 8th

Facilitator Training • 8:30 am–12:00 pm

Wednesday 13th

Facilitator Training • 8:30 am–12:00 pm

Monday 11th

**Teen Scene
with NYC Independent School Teen Panel**

6:00 pm–8:00 pm

Trinity School, 101 West 91st Street

APRIL

Date TBA

School Relations Luncheon

Speaker:

- **Chauncey Parker (DA's Office)**

12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

971 Madison Avenue at 73rd Street

MAY

Wednesday 8th

Spring "Mother's Day" Benefit

12:00 pm–2:00 pm

Cosmopolitan Club • 122 East 66th St.

Be Involved, Be Informed, Be Connected!

If you'd like to be in touch with NYC-Parents in Action, you can reach us at:

MAILING ADDRESS: NYC-Parents in Action, Inc.
P.O. Box 287451 –Yorkville Station
New York, NY 10128-0025

TELEPHONE: 212-426-0240

NYC-PIA WEB SITE: www.parentsinaction.org

WEB SITE CHAIR: Debra Forstenzer

Our Web site is a great source of information on our programs, upcoming events and other parenting resources.

NYC-Parents in Action Newsletter Staff

Pamela Awad and Lisa Huffines, Editors

Writers: Pamela Awad, Veronica Bennett, David Browne, Susan Fisher, Lisa Huffines, Don King, Maureen Sherry Klinsky, Meg Sheridan, Sally Sherwood, Melanie Wells

Train to Be a Discussion Group Facilitator

Are you looking to give back the support and shared experience other parents have given you during the child-rearing years? If you are, here's a way:

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

NYC-Parents in Action provides facilitated discussion groups free of charge to member schools. To serve an increasing number of requests for discussion groups, we need to train parent volunteers from as many schools as possible. We are looking for parents who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups, and have an interest in parenting issues. Our goal is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concerns among parents and to create a comfortable communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. Facilitators receive professional training, and become an integral and valued part of the NYC-PIA community. If you would like more information about becoming a discussion group facilitator or about our upcoming training, please call NYC-PIA at 212-426-0240 or e-mail facilitation@parentsinaction.org.

Facilitation Group Coordinator: Josseline Charas

NYC-Parents in Action, Inc. invites speakers to present their own opinions and expertise on specific topics. Their opinions and comments are not necessarily those of NYC-PIA.