

Parenting Power Article - Kites, Electricity, Franklin, and You

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In June of 1752, Benjamin Franklin walked outside of his Philadelphia, PA with a large, self-made kite in his hand.

It was a perfect day for flying a kite.

Or so thought the great inventor and statesman, Benjamin Franklin. The sky was thick with dark clouds. The wind was stiff and steady. Rain fell, though not in great torrents- a mild drizzle.

But, most importantly, thunder rang out across the land and lightening danced through the sky. It was the lightning that Franklin was after, not merely a kite-flying excursion for thrills and fun.

That fateful day - and the countless experiments that would follow - have been converted into a world full of electrical devices that we have come to totally depend on for our livelihood, entertainment, safety, and comfort.

But there are two fundamental aspects of Franklin's kite flying business that I want to focus on today. Both of these fundamental principles heavily relate to safely socializing our children.

What is more, they have direct application to how we reverse the effects of negative social peer pressure in the lives of our children. If you are dealing with discipline problems, rebellious teenagers, wandering adult children, or frightfully out of control children, I think you will find the lessons of Franklin's kite extremely helpful.

Communication

If you look up the word communication in the Oxford dictionary, you will find this general definition:

"Means of connection between people or places"

When Franklin sent his kite soaring on the wind, he was effectively opening a channel of communication between himself and the sky. Lighting, that had previously been unfocused, scattered and erratic, suddenly had a specific location to focus in on. The wandering bolts now had a home.

Returning to the Oxford dictionary, we find this first definition on the word communication:

“The successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings”

Make Sure You're Planting the Right Seeds

Growing up in a home that was shattered by abuse and divorce, I experienced first-hand the catastrophic disasters that can come from a lack of communication. I saw also that sometimes communication is successful, but the wrong ideas, thoughts, and feeling are sent and received.

It is like going out to the garden and planting carrot seeds when you thought you were planting spinach. The effort produced a harvest, but not the one you wanted.

So it is with parenting. There is either a serious lack of communication, or there is effective communication going on, just not the right kind that produces the results of respect, love, obedience, and joy.

No Communication

First, let’s look at a lack of communication and how to solve it…

16 years ago, I moved to the Netherlands. Before I went, I took about two months of language lessons to learn Dutch. By the end of those two months I felt that I could reasonably communicate with my instructor. With an excited, confident, rather smug attitude, I walked off the plane at Schiphol in Amsterdam.

Hey, I knew the language and was going to fit right in with the natives.

Then the first announcement came over the PA system. Then I heard two dutchmen talking to each. Then I glanced at a newspaper lying on a seat in the terminal.

Whatever delusions of grandeur I had in believing I had learned Dutch in two months, evaporated and I went into a panic. How in the world was I going to ever communicate with these people??

It took a while, but after about a year I was thinking and dreaming and talking in Dutch with substantial ease. By the end of 18 months, I was regularly mistaken for a natural born dutchman, “You’re from Nijmegen, right?” The southern dutch accent was much easier to mimic, so most people thought I was from the southern city of Nijmegen.

Learning Dutch to that level was not easy. I spent many hours in the early morning studying, listening, practicing. But, like I said, I eventually got it.

In the mean time, life was frustrating. I was irritable, agitated, and down right grumpy on many days because I did not understand what was going on around me. Not only that, but it was incredibly embarrassing to try my hardest and still make huge blunders.

I remember one day when a group of boys about 8 years old gathered around me and started laughing hysterically because of my bad accent and sloppy speech. That sure boosted my self-image.

Then there was the day that I complimented a gentleman on his nice dress. He gave me a queer look, grunted and walked away. I had meant to say "jacket" - he had on a really cool leather jacket, that looked like it was custom hand-made with some amazing designs and patterns in it. But the word for jacket is "jas" and the word for a woman's dress is "jurk". Hey, they start with the same letter!

A lack of successful communication can be extremely frustrating for both parties.

Please... Learn My Personal, Private Language

"But," you say, "I speak English and so do my children. What are you talking about?"

As individual children of God, each of us has a unique and personal "language" that we speak. The core of this language is found in the personality styles and was first recorded by the Greek philosopher and physician Galen more than 1800 years ago. (See our Parenting With Style model for more details on that topic).

It is my experience that most of the angry, frustrated, embarrassed, and emotionally charged situations that happen in a home, come from the lack of successful communication. I also find that most children, finding that they cannot communicate in the home, reach outside of the home to find people that they can communicate with.

When this happens, parents and parental authority take a back seat to friends and peers.

And that is when the trouble starts.

So, what is the solution?

Some parents have decided that what they need to do is become closer friends with their children and relate more to them. They do this by coming down to their level and engaging in negative behavior with them. This is a serious mistake. Taking this route only validates the negative behavior and makes you a peer and not a parent.

The principle is right - you do need to relate better to them, but you should do this by learning their private "language" and engage them with you on your terms of positive and beneficial behavior. Again, one of the best ways to do this is to learn the Parenting With Style™ model so that you can see more clearly into their hearts and who they are.

Only then will true communication and understanding be possible. This will serve as the foundation and the beginning of solving conflict and behavior challenges with you child.

Communication With Your Father

There is another aspect of communication that is essential - and it is based on the same principle.

As children of God, we each have a loving Heavenly Father that is eager and anxious to communicate with us. Remember, these were His children long before we got them. He loves them and wants to see them happy and successful in this life, far more than we do.

As parents, God has given us charge of some of His precious children. Don't you think He is willing to help in that responsibility? I can tell you without reservation that He is and that He will.

But we have to ask.

Franklin revolutionized the world by opening up a communication channel with the sky, and you can revolutionize your family by opening up communications with the Lord. Prayer and revelation is the second of the 7 Secrets of Successful Parenting. Use it. I can promise you He will give you marvelous answers and insights uniquely fashioned for your family and children.

The Law of Limits

The second aspect of Franklin's kite flying experiment that has application to your family, is the Law of Limits.

You see, electricity had been around for thousands of years - since the beginning of the world. But it was not until someone put specific and measurable limits around it, that it actually became useful to man.

On that stormy day, Benjamin Franklin proved that electricity could be useful, once it was forced to run through a very specific channel and given specific limitations. In this case and in later experiments, he ran it through a copper wire - a practice still in use today.

Stated bluntly, our children are the same way… they are only useful when they are given a correct path to follow with specific, measurable limits to live by. Outside of those limits, children become disrespectful, lazy, selfish, insubordinate, un-mannered, and generally rotten. It is not pretty at all.

As the old saying goes, "Choose your battles wisely". So, the question is, what limits do you implement and how hard to you enforce them.

Small Things Make a Big Difference

I am a firm believer in the concept that little things make a big difference. It is another application of the 80/20 law. We can put all of our efforts into 20% of the most effective "battles"; and get 80% of the results in our children that we are looking for.

I also am a big believer in multiplying our efforts. I'd like to recommend five key areas where we can set limits with our children that will have the biggest impact in their lives:

- TV and Movies
- Music and Computer Games
- Books
- Internet
- Friends

Margie and I are EXTREMELY cautious and protective of our children in these areas. Why? Because at a young age their minds are more like sponges than computers. They absorb everything, accepting most things as facts and reality, unless they are taught otherwise. Teaching "otherwise" is one of the purposes of parenthood.

Many parents are tuned into actual scenes, words and other content. Too many parents are not aware enough of "themes". What is the underlying message or lesson being taught in the film? "This should be the first question to be asked, instead of "Does it have swearing or violence or nudity in it?"

Themes have a stronger, more powerful impact on children because they define macro thinking and decision making processes in the mind. In other words, theme, move our thinking in a very definitive and specific direction as we make daily decisions.

So, what are the themes of the music, the games, the books, the movies and the TV shows your children are consuming? By enforcing limits in these areas, you not only restrict them from being influenced by the themes, images, and perspectives, but you also eliminate the programming that is causing so much of the social problems in our children today.

Let me give you an example that will likely get us tarred and feathered.

Begin Harry Potter Rant...

I am NOT a fan of Harry Potter… for many, many reasons that I don't have time to go into now.

So, let's just talk about one aspect.

Flying home from Chicago a while back, the in-flight movie was one of the latest Harry Potter flicks. Margie and I had no interest in watching it so did not get headphones. But, like it or not, there are 100 screens on the plane and from time to time your eye catches the movie.

Even without words, I noticed a very strong theme running through Harry Potter. Young children are much smarter, stronger, and more powerful than stupid school masters and fat old ladies.

That is not the plot. It is not specifically spoken (at least without earphones I didn't hear it!). It's not

the action sequence. But, it is a major theme and I'm afraid that our youth have swallowed it hook, line, and sinker.

Themes have a powerful way of influencing our children and every precaution should be taken to educate them on good and bad themes. Every effort should be extended to eliminate destructive themes from their lives and feed them positive, powerful, uplifting themes.

What if our children were never taught to believe in the themes that adults and authority were stupid, ignorant, and useless? What if they were taught to believe that we, as their parents, love, honor, care for, and seek the very best for them? There are plenty of books, movies, music and websites that teach this exact thing… but they are not usually mainstream. For example, have you read the book “Eight Cousins” by Louisa May Alcott? Or what about “Laddie” by Gene Stratton-Porter? There are two books that should be required reading for every one of our children… but both are hard to find and unpopular.

One final note on limits: Choose your children's friends wisely. Human association is the fastest and most powerful way to transmit themes in our lives. The sheer act of associating with another human makes you susceptible to their thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and precepts. They don't need to come out and say it, you just absorb it.

Play an active role in the friends and associates that your children have. It is not easy, but it will pay off in great dividends.

One final note on friends and associates…

In certain circumstances, you may need to consider the option of moving away from a certain peer group. The move will disrupt their patterns and associations and give you, as the parent, the opportunity to replace those patterns with more positive influences.

Many people feel they are locked into a particular home or a certain job. I simply do not believe this. If a move is the right thing for your family, and are willing to make the effort to look for a new home and new employment, God will bless you with success. Remember, these are His children and He will help you in raising them.

The trick in this option is finding and implementing replacement patterns. Learn their personal language, work on your relationship with them, plan out alternate activities and get them to buy into it. Yes, it is a lot of work, but your children are worth it.

Different Ages Require Different Approaches

Now let me address two different age groups and how you can apply these principles to each:

Zero to 11 Years Old

When children are young, you play the role of computer programmer. As the parent, you essentially dictate (or should) the information, themes, images, and concepts that enter their lives. They are literally dependent on you for food, clothing, shelter, and information. You have the power - and should use it unilaterally - to define every aspect of their young lives and especially in the areas that I've outlined above.

Remember, make a plan about how you want your children to turn out, and then implement that plan with all your heart.

If you will do this... if you will plant the seeds of goodness early... if you will feed them "butter and honey" in their earliest years... you can be sure that they will learn to love the good and despise the evil. It is just how we are built.

By doing this, you will effectively eliminate the vast majority of challenges that most parents face in dealing with their children. You will give them a powerful shield against negative peer pressure and embed in them incredible social skills that will serve them well their whole lives.

Now, what if you have made mistakes in those first 11 years and now your child has suddenly become a wild and wooly teenager?

11 to 18 Years Old

When a tree is young, it is easy to bend and keep straight. When it is older the wood sets solid, becoming hard and rigid. Still, it is not unworkable, it just takes extra time, more work, and more drastic measures.

Here is where the concept of "tough love" or "real love" as I call it, comes into play.

This is accomplished by setting very specific limits and then attaching clear and measurable rewards and punishments for obedience and disobedience. Again, some of the best results you will have, are in eliminating the negative programming. You should be aware that negative programming sources are addictive and very popular. There will be stiff resistance, but it needs to be done.

How you approach this is largely dependent on your personality style and the style of your child. But, in all respects, you should sit down with the child, one-on-one and clearly explain to them the limits and consequences.

But, don't just stop there, take time to explain to them why you are putting this limit in place. Reason with them and get them to reason with you as much as possible. It is likely that if you just drop down a new rule and set up consequences, they are going to rebel and fight against you all the way.

Instead, give them the respect they deserve as a young-adult and let them be part of the solution.

This whole process will be much more effective if you have learned their personal language and speak to them on their terms.

24 Hours In A Day

As you know, the earth has been rotating around the sun at the same speed since it was created. This rotation gives all of us - including our children - 24 hours in any given day.

One of the most effective crisis management approaches I have seen parents implement is time consumption. Find activities that they like (the personality style will give you a clue) and then schedule those activities as a family and do it far in advance.

By doing this, you are literally and physically increasing positive, quality family time and limiting time for negative social interactions. What is more, you can have them bring their peers along and be a positive influence in their lives as well.

There is a lot of work in all of this, but, as I said, and as you know in your heart, your children are worth whatever price you need to pay.

When you have successful communication and enforce appropriate limits in your home, you will find that safely socializing your children is possible. You can protect your children from negative peer pressure and you can give them the critical social skills they need to become successful, happy and productive parents and adults.