

Missing Pants and Real Men

Contributed by Joshua

With a no small effort, I steeled myself to what would come next.

Looking at the black bag next to me, I knew that my sons would soon discover that our agreement was a serious one. Though I did not see them, my ears followed them past my office, down the hall, and into the bedroom.

Silence. Then rustling through drawers and laundry baskets. Silence… thoughtful silence.

“Dad… mom… where are my pants? Where is my shirt? I can’t find my shoes! Where is everything?”

I dropped my head and a small, sad smile crept over my face. This was not going to be easy – that accounted for the sadness, but I felt deep inside that it would solve the problem – hence the smile.

“Son, come on in here,” I called.

I didn’t say a thing as he walked into the office, only pointed to the black bag. Looking down, there was a flash of confusion, followed by a dawning of remembrance that spread into understanding.

A few days before, we had talked about the chaos of the dressing room. In our house we have the washing and drier in a large room that also has all of the boy’s dressers. It makes life infinitely easier on Margie when doing laundry because all dirty clothes, dressers, and cleaning equipment are in one handy location.

But it also means that five boys are constantly coming and going, changing clothes… and leaving enormous messes, compounded by the one location thing.

We gathered the family together and discussed how to handle this pigpen free-for-all. Mutually, we had agreed that if clothes were left uncared for on the floor, then they would be confiscated… become victim to the magic parenting act of dropping it into a large black plastic bag. The only way to redeem a piece of clothing was to do an extra bit of work around the house or yard.

For the first few days, the fear of losing clothes had kept the room reasonably clean. But then came that fateful moment when, consciously or subconsciously, they each decided to test the resolve of their parents and validity of the agreement.

“No dad! I have to have those clothes right now! I promise, I won’t leave them out again, just let me have them… please!” (this with a deadly charming look of pleading, mixed with pity, mixed with a cry for mercy)

“Does it really matter? Just give the boy his clothes. Who cares if the room is a disaster zone? That’s just the way children are. You’re being too tough here.” These were the thoughts running through my head as he bore down on me with those big brown, sad puppy dog eyes. It was almost more than I could bear.

But then reason snuck back in. “If you give in now, your promises, agreements, and authority will be lost for now and maybe irreparably damaged for the future. There are too many lessons at stake here… far more than a clean room. Integrity, honesty, the power of an agreement and keeping your word, respect for authority, etc… the list goes

one. No matter how tough it is, you've got to hold firm on your word.

"You bet son! I'd love to give all this back to you! (Pause for effect; his eyes glowing in triumph!) That is, just as soon as you clean out the car and mop the floor for the extra jobs you agreed to."

Arrrgggg! Victory was turned to sulking, frustration, and grumbling.

"Sorry, son. You agreed and you broke your word. You'll have to be a man and keep your end of the bargain by submitting to the punishment."

And he did.

Since that day, we have had to bring out the black bag on a few more occasions, but it is infrequent and the redemption work is done quickly and willingly. The room has been upgraded to "moderately clean, most of the time", and downgraded from a nuclear warfare zone.

But, more importantly, we see our boys turning into men of integrity, commitment and honesty.

And having real men for sons is WAY better than a clean room; and having both is the best of all.