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Breakthrough Parenting

By Michael Wayland

Parenting is Never Easy.

There is not one instruction book that will make you a perfect parent. There is however some wisdom that can be passed on to help you succeed. We call these points of wisdom, breakthroughs. They help you breakthrough the routine of parenting and excel at the important task of raising your children. Dr. John Maxwell identifies 10 strategic breakthroughs you can use to improve your family life and parenting skills. This month we will explore the first five. Next month, we will explore the remaining breakthroughs in part 2 of this article.

A Child's God-given Potential

Maxwell says that the day a child is born, "they start a long trip and their intended destination is the realization of their God given potential". The problem is that they immediately encounter obstacles that get in their way and take them in the wrong direction or they just stop developing their potential. It is your job as a parent to help them breakthrough these obstacles so they can be all they can potentially be.

The Self-fulfilling Prophecy

The first breakthrough is to see your child as they could be not as they are. You have heard of self fulfilling prophecy. The idea is that what you "think" can affect your outcomes. The same is true of how you work with your child. As a youngster, I had significant undiagnosed learning disabilities. My parents always encouraged me to be the best I could be and to go to college. Ultimately, I did.

What I did not know until years later was that my parents did not think I was "smart enough" to go to college. This would have surprised my professors in my doctoral program. My parents kept this belief to themselves. Had they told me, it would have limited my expectations of myself. I probably would have chosen a votech curriculum in high school rather than struggling through college prep classes. What limits your child? Was he born with only one arm? He wants to be a major league pitcher? See him for his potential to be that pitcher. In the 1990's the Detroit Tigers drafted a pitcher with only one arm. I watched him play one day at Tiger stadium and was astounded. He would never have been a major leaguer if his parents said, be realistic, you can't play MLB with only one arm. Try computer programming.

What Does Your Child Truly Love? Listen.

Breakthrough number two is to find your child's bent before you get bent out of shape. You may want your daughter to be a ballerina just like you were, but she may only do it because you are directing her to do so. Her undeveloped talent may be something you don't see because you are blind to it. The key is finding what your child truly loves and excels at, then helping to develop it. Help your child create a strong sense of self identity.

Don't fall prey to the conventional wisdom of treating all your children the same. Rather each is different and has particular talents. Treat them fairly and equitably but that is not necessarily the "same" for each. You can find your child's bent by intently observing them without intervening over a period of time, listening to what they say and what they mean and desire. Pray for discernment in understanding your child. Expose them to new experience even if it is not something they may pick on their own. If they cling to it, pursue more, if not, discard it and pursue other things. Even if it turns out to be something they ultimately don't like, the experience helps to develop them.

What are you Willing to Sacrifice?

Consider what are you willing to sacrifice to help develop your child. Are you willing to get up every morning to take them to hockey practice? Anytime you experience progress, you or someone else before you has sacrificed. Focus on your child's interests, not your own desires for your child. They may become an Eagle Scout because you will it to be so, but that may not be their true interest.

Be a Priority Parent, not a Perfect One.

Breakthrough three is to strive to be a priority parent, not a perfect one. There is no such thing as a perfect parent. Think of your parents. Were they perfect or did they just do the best they could under the circumstances? Since you can't be perfect, what should you aim for? Identify your priorities for your child. An example may be to a) love and obey God b) have a good self image c) accept responsibility for their choices d) have a positive mental attitude and to e) have a thankful spirit. Decide what your priorities are for your child and focus on developing those priorities. The specifics will follow naturally.

Empower Your Child To Explore

Breakthrough four is to understand that your child's most important teacher is not in the classroom. Children learn by doing rather than lectures. The breakthrough for parents is to learn to empower their child and let them explore while maintaining proper boundaries. The breakthrough for the child is mentoring from their parents while they explore. What boy doesn't want to help his father hammer nails into wood? Give him some scrap lumber and teach him to nail while you are working on your home maintenance project. Does it take you more time? Absolutely! But that is what mentoring is about. This does not mean you allow your child to explore anything they want when ever they want. Remember that learning comes through discipline and boundaries too. It is your job to set those limits and follow through.

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child, Gather Yours.

Breakthrough five is not to parent alone. Whether you are a never married mom, a single dad or a traditional family unit, there are many others who can add value to your child's life. If you want people to help in your children's lives, you most likely will have to find and enlist them. Doing so allows you to extend your influence beyond your home, allows your children to be mentored by experts, it develops your children's areas of interests where you may not be able to help, it exposes them to other positive points of view, and it gives them positive role models outside of the immediate family.

Coaches, Family Friends, Relatives...Do Not Parent Alone

So who could these mentors be? Teacher's coaches, neighbors, church members, friends, extended family and more. Make sure you are comfortable with the person as well as their values and beliefs. No matter how good a parent you are, you should not parent alone. You may have to go outside your

comfort zone by asking someone to be involved, but your child will benefit. While you are at it, try to find others you can help too.

Part two of Breakthrough Parenting will appear in the February 2007 issue of International Family Magazine.

For more information on breakthrough parenting, see the book Breakthrough Parenting by Dr. John C. Maxwell Focus on the Family Publishing, 1996 Colorado Springs CO 80995. ISBN 1-56179-469-4.