**Analysis on “Pilot Seminar: Communication”**

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**Communication** creates mutual understanding between family members; thus, it is the key to a healthy family relationship.

***Establishing a Reasonable Value System***

Value systems within the family have to be clearly established and reasonable, but cannot be set too high. Having a good set of morals and values is important in developing a child mentally. However, an unreasonably high set of values can cause a lot of butting heads between family members, especially between the children and parents.

Although parents may feel strongly about their values, such as language and culture, parents must also consider the values of the society which the child is raised. Parents may deem it vital for their children to learn their native or foreign language; however, the parent must consider the likelihood that the child will need to use that language in its entirety. It is beneficial to be bilingual; however, the child will most likely grow up and find work within the United States.

On a different note, parents must agree on their set of values to prevent miscommunication and confusion. If you and your spouse do not feel the same way about something, you should discuss it among yourselves before presenting it to your children. If you send mixed messages and opinions to your children, then he/she most likely won’t accept what you and your spouse are trying to present.

**Consider:** Will enforcing my child to learn more languages put more stress and pressure on my child? How necessary is it for my child to be able to speak, read and write in this language? Is putting my child in language school worth all the time and money? Do my spouse and I both feel the need for such schooling?

***Definition of Success***

*Success (noun) – the achievement of something planned or attempted*

The definition of success may become a hard-fought battle in many families. While parents want their children to succeed in life, many of the parents’ dreams and goals are outlandish. Often, the ideal goals of an Asian American family are for their children to get into Ivy League schools and to get a good job in the future. In order to do this, parents pressure their children to do well in school, obtain leadership positions, play instruments, and even take an inundation of enrichment classes. **Consider:** Does my child really enjoy what he or she is doing?

Only 6.2 percent of applicants worldwide are accepted into Ivy League Schools. Although getting into Ivy League schools is a very ambitious goal, parent should not hold their children to this seemingly impossible standard. Depending on college performance, going to an Ivy League school does not guarantee acceptance to a top graduate school. College may prepare you for graduate school, but graduate school prepares you for life.

Most importantly, everyone is different and can only physically achieve to a certain level. Parents should not value the extent to which their children are achieving, but value how hard their children are trying. If your children are trying their best, there is no use in beating or yelling at them, because no matter how much you yell at them, they have already achieved their highest.

What do you value more, your child’s happiness or the prestigious college acceptance? Cornell, an Ivy League school, has the highest suicide rate (21 suicides from 1996-2006), due to students who are overwhelmed by familial and academic pressures. Education and family are perhaps the two largest pressure factors on a child’s life and can greatly affect their mood and mentality for the rest of their lives.

Think about the amount of stress your child goes through a day. Lighten up; think about what your child has already achieved. Be proud of you child’s accomplishments, for constantly worrying about your child’s failure puts strain on you, your child, and the whole family. Think about life as a glass half full, not half empty. Furthermore, children must remember that their parents only want what’s best for them! If your parents did not care, they would not care what happened to you in the future.

***Trust and Honesty***

The key to promoting conversation and having a healthy family dynamic is respect and trust. To build trust, both sides must be honest with each other. Being completely honest with people, especially with your kids, is hard. However, being honest with each other will create understanding.

For example, telling your child of your past experiences will help illuminate some of your present and future motives. Maybe if your children knew about your struggle to do well in school, they will better understand why education is so important to you. Furthermore, hiding something, no matter how embarrassing the subject matter may be, will only create unnecessary misconceptions within the family unit.

Building trust within the family will prevent potential arguments by eliminating constant suspicion. The best thing to do for children is to be honest with your parents and to trust them. Parents are experienced, although not always right, but usually know what they are talking about. If kids feel like their parents are constantly hanging over their shoulders, they shouldn’t give them any reason to distrust them. Trust that your parents are doing what is right and is the best for you.

Parents should also trust their children and not assume things when there is nothing there to assume. For example, it is unreasonable to assume something is going to happen while your child is hanging out with friends if nothing ever happened before. Although watching out for your child and being careful are good things, being paranoid is completely different. Constantly being suspicious about your child’s actions will just put burden on your back and cause your child to feel uncomfortable or annoyed.

***Respect***

Respect is mutual and should be exercised by everyone within the family unit. Just as children should respect their parents, parents should respect their kids. As trust is built, respect can be gained and lost. There is no such thing as the ultimate respect that exists no matter what, for the amount of respect one displays unto another varies from person to person. That being said, children and parents, as should the rest of the world, treat each other with utmost respect.

Sometimes, that which can cause someone to to lose respect for another person can be highly superficial. Do you really lose respect for a person just because they won’t buy you something you want? Losing respect for someone out these superficial reasons is silly. However, loss of respect due to the stubbornness of a person can be due to lack of communication. If you ever feel like you are losing respect for the other person, it is best to just communicate calmly.

To promote communication, one must hold others to the same standards she or he holds him or herself to. If you want your child to act maturely to you, you must act sensibly to your child. If you want your child to stay calm during a discussion, then you must stay calm as well. Furthermore, treating everyone with respect includes apologizing and showing gratitude. A simple “thank you” or “sorry” can solve a load of issues.

Even though you are the parent, don’t always present yourself to be smarter than or better than your child; don’t be tyrannical. You are just as valuable of a person as your child is and should be treated with the same respect. If you have done something wrong, apologize. Although it may seem embarrassing or demoting, especially as it is untraditional in Chinese culture, it is the correct thing to do. Nobody has to be right all the time. Thanking your child when they finish chores or relaying complements will make them feel appreciated.

By establishing mutual respect and trust, conversation and negotiation will flow like water.

***Tone***

Do not start of a conversation with an angry or oppressive tone. Your tone sets the mood for the rest of the conversation. This applies to both parents and children. Do not begin a conversation by yelling at your child because they will begin to tune you out. No matter how angry you may or may not be, start calmly.

Starting a conversation with blunt statements and yelling will cause a wall to be built between you and your child. However, do not give off the impression that they have not done anything wrong. Stay calm but firm. Pretend you are trying to ask your boss for a raise, not demand one.

Ease into the conversation and explain yourself. Persuade, don’t demand. When a child presents a request to his or her parents, he or she should start with an explanation of their motives to ease into the conversation. Suddenly asking your parents for something is like dropping a bomb. If you try to tie the conversation in through a more neutral subject, you will make your parents feel more comfortable throughout the conversation.

For example, as you are talking about your schoolwork, emphasize that you have been doing well in school. Then, ask for something as a reward for consistently doing well. Consider your recent behavior; if you have been utterly profane, then you may have a hard time convincing your parents of anything.

***Silence***

    *“Silence is golden when you can't think of a good answer.”~Muhammad Ali.*

Silence is a discreet and humble way of communicating, for no one likes to listen to someone talk on and on about something. Talking repetitively will just frustrate or annoy your child. The same applies to children, after discussing something for a while let it sit for a while before further discussion. Sometimes, when a conversation gets too heated, it is best to let it go for a while. Silence can help clear one’s thoughts and resolve many issues. In fact silence may do more good than yelling. If your child knows he or she has done something wrong, silence will eventually make him or her so uncomfortable, that they will come to you to talk about it.

Both parents should be equally invested in their child’s life. However, silence is a means of mutual understanding and can be the essence of love. Just because a family member does not verbally express their appreciation or love, their silence may be their way of showing it to you. Being verbal and being silent regarding the same issue can achieve the same goal.

***Parent Growth***

Children, although your parents are adults who have experienced a lot, they have not experienced the entire world; allow them to grow up too. Your parents come from a different culture and grew up in a completely different world. Try to allow them to understand through persuasion and negotiation. Do not explain something to them once and give up. Besides, they probably explain things to you repetitively every day. Be patient and flexible.

Do not get too easily agitated when your parents do not understand something you are saying. They are trying really hard to build a family in a completely different place. Try to understand their struggle in coming to a foreign world and building a family from scratch. Not only do they have to try to fit in to this new society, they have to make money and raise children. This puts a lot of pressure on your parents. Go easy on them, they are not superheroes; just as you don’t understand everything in the world, they don’t either.

***Nature***

Sometimes employing all the communication skills in the world will not bring about successful communication. Mental disorders and conditions may affect one or more of your loved ones. It is important to get help (psychologist, pediatrician, psychiatrist, etc.) if you discover that one of your family members has a mental condition. Although having such a condition is nothing to be ashamed of, having the burden of a mental condition is very hard and stressful on that person. Thus, if a family member does indeed suffer from a mental condition, get help. Do not try to overcome this on your own.

It is important not to constantly remind that person of their condition, for it is a very sensitive and private subject. It is also important not hold that condition against that person or treat him or her any differently than the other members of the family. Overcoming a condition is a family affair and takes effort from every family member. Just because a family member suffers from depression or ADHD, it does not mean that they cannot function normally. In fact, they have probably been suffering from that condition for a while now without detection.

Stated below are only a few discussed during the seminar; however, there are many others that you can discuss with your pediatrician:

**Depression –** Depression is a mental condition that can be described by a prolonged period of chronic sorrow. 121 million people worldwide suffer from depression each year. It is fairly common and can be caused by a variety of stress factors within and outside of the family. The best thing to do is to first call your family pediatrician for help. He or she will direct you from there. If someone is severely depressed *and* suicidal or thinking of suicide, take them to the emergency room immediately.
**ADHD** – ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. It is a mental disorder that causes the patient to have hyperactive and sporadic tendencies. The patient may have trouble concentrating, which can cause communication issues. It is best to go to your pediatrician for further information.

***Questions and Answers***

**Question #1:** Why do children like to compare their “wealth” with other children? Why are they constantly comparing who has more?

**Answer:**Empathy allows us to feel sorry for someone else and appreciate what we have. If we feel empathy towards the less fortunate, then we will be able to feel thankful for what we have. Lack of empathy towards other people not only can cause us to be greedy, but will cause many other issues down the line. Children must learn to emphasize and appreciate what they have. They must truly see the other side of the world in order to appreciate their current life. Encourage your children to volunteer, or better yet, volunteer with them. As they realize that many people have much less than they do, they will appreciate what they currently have.

**Question #2:** Why don’t my kids say “I Love You” anymore? It seems like they don’t care anymore.

**Answer:** Although children may not verbally express their appreciation for you, they truly do appreciate what you do for them. Their appreciation for you can come in other forms, like sitting down with you once in awhile to watch television or asking you to go on walks with them. Even little things like helping you with chores or making you something once in a while can be forms of appreciation.

Just because they do not say “I love you” as much as they used to, does not mean they love you less than they used to. It could just mean that they are becoming independent individuals, as children tend to do as they grow up. By not saying “I love you” as much, they may feel less like a child dependent on his or her “mommy” and “daddy”.

**Question #3:** Why don’t my children want to communicate with me if communication is so important?

**Answer:** Children may be reluctant to communicate with you if past communication has failed. It takes time for a child to become accepting of the idea, but as long as they feel your love and support they will eventually open up. Don’t force them to talk. As said before, silence can remedy hostility. As long as they feel there is room for successful communication, they will open up. Remember that your children will always love you. If they seem distant or unwilling at first, they will come around when the time is right. Just give them time and space to blossom.

**Question #4:** Why do my children always assume I am wrong when it is obvious that I am right?

**Answer:** You've taught your children at a very young age to try their best at everything they do. In order to be the best, they have to be better than you, too. When they disagree with you and it is obvious that they are wrong, don’t keep yelling at them. Just give them time to come around.

Apologizing is hard, but eventually, they will feel so silly that they will apologize. Making mistakes is part of growing up and becoming independent. Allow your children to make mistakes. This way, what they learn from their mistakes is their own personal experience. Making mistakes will only harm the person who makes them, so as long as they don’t make permanent mistakes, then let them make as many mistakes as they want. Although parents want their children to walk the straightest path in life, sometimes a few curves makes the journey all the more enlightening.

**Question #5:** My children ask me for so many things. How should I respond without seeming too negative and uptight?

**Answer:** Communication involves a lot of negotiation. As long as you give in once in a while, then your child will give in once in a while too. If you say no all the time, the child will feel oppressed and eventually give up communicating with you. Give a little, take a little. Say yes to something reasonable and then ask for something reasonable in return.

For example, even though ear piercing is out of your comfort zone, it is a reasonable request because it has no permanent damage. If you do not like the piercing, you can take it out within a few days and it will heal up completely. Once you say yes to this reasonable proposal, ask for something in return. For example, tell them that if you let them get their ears pierced, then they have to keep up their good grades and help out more often with chores. It’s a win-win situation.

**Question #6:** My child just told me that he/she wants a girlfriend/boyfriend. How should I address the issue if I do not approve?

**Answer:** In America, it is completely normal for children to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. It is part of American culture. In fact, it is an area of pride. Even if you do not approve, you should let them experiment with it as long as it is within safe parameters.

Dating is a great learning experience. It can allow children to discover the essence of true friendship and teach them to be better people. They will learn etiquette and morals that will allow for them to sustain such a relationship. For if they are not polite and respectful of the other person, they can face a break-up. They can then use these lessons on everyday life.

If the relationship becomes out of hand and obstructs learning, then the parent should step in and bring these deficiencies to the attention of the child. It is then the parents’ right to intervene in order to keep the child on track in life. However, if having an intimate relationship seems to merely be a minor detail, then the parent should let the child experience in order to build necessary life skills.