

Decision Making and the Gift of Perspective

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“The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. The most you can do is live inside that hope, running down its hallways, touching the walls on both sides.” – from *Animal Dreams*, Barbara Kingsolver

Decision Making

Decision making for our children can be stressful. Some of the decisions we face during the spring of the school year are:



How can I keep my children safe when they are home in the summer and I cannot be with them?

What school should my children attend next year?

What summer programs are best for my children?

How can my children get into the best colleges?

When we try to make decisions such as these with our focus only on the future, we can forget to enjoy the gifts our children bring us in the present. Today's commentary is a reminder to focus on another gift: the gift of perspective.

The Gift of Perspective

The gift of perspective is broader: one of looking beyond the urgency and pressure of everyday parenting especially in Silicon Valley. Some habits that promote this wider perspective include:

Focus on being positive with your children and grandchildren. Whenever I spend time with my grandchildren, I tell them how good they have been and how much I have enjoyed their company. (My 4 year old granddaughter told me recently: "You always say that.")

Have fun, be spontaneous, follow their lead. (I am generally either the older sister or sometimes the baby in our imaginary play.)

If possible have a weekly one on one date with each of your children to talk about how things are going (e.g. a walk to the store commenting on what you see on the way).

Personal Examples

Children:

Our granddaughter is about to enter kindergarten. Because of this, as we sat around the table, with two of our grown children, both with fall birthdays, I remembered when my son was going to enter kindergarten. At the time I faced the seemingly impossible decision of whether or not to hold him out a year. I wanted my son to be successful academically, socially and emotionally. I did end up pulling him out of kindergarten and putting him back in preschool to buy an extra year before starting school. No one else was on board with this decision, least of all my son. Over time he straddled grades by going one year ahead for math and remaining with his new class for the rest of the day.

When we talked about it recently, I realized that he had become very successful but not necessarily in the ways I might have predicted. Math was no longer his focus. Writing and English were. He had stopped going to math his senior year of high school and never took it in college, but he was editor of his school newspaper. Although shy as a young child, he became a leader amongst his peers. Because these were his new classmates, he made his best friends from elementary and high school from this group of children. His wife who was sitting at the table with us, reminded us that he had also met her as a freshmen in college. What was at the time, a very difficult educational decision had many unforeseen consequences. He both met and married his

wife and befriended people he would never have met had he not been retained.

Special Education Students:

As is often the case, one of my dyslexic high school students, struggled to satisfy the foreign language prerequisite for college. He tried and dropped German, French and finally managed to pass Spanish. A number of years later, when he returned to visit our new batch of high school resource students, he shared what had happened in the ensuing years. He had graduated from college, joined the Peace Corps and had worked with at-risk students. The most amazing part of the story for me was that he communicated with them in their native tongue of Russian. Who would have guessed that he would one day become fluent in another language, let alone Russian.

Think about other seemingly “urgent” decisions that you have made in the past and their relative importance now. As my beloved Aunt Reva used to say to me: “The things you worry about are not the things that happen.”

With the elusive gift of perspective,

Karen Salzer

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