

Leading Your Family, to the Third and Fourth Generations

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2020, published in the Apr, May, Jun, 2020 issue of the "In CASE" Newsletter

My sister and I recently discovered that we share a characteristic behavior. Neither of us says "yes" to a commitment unless we are certain we can do the task and do it well. With that deep agreement, we tend to follow-through. As a result, our friends and colleagues consider us very "count-on-able."

People say the same thing about my daughter. Is it genetic? Is it coincidence? I doubt it.

I think my daughter learned this trait from me, and my sister and I learned it from our parents. Our parents were also very reliable, and they probably learned that value from their parents.

How many of your "natural" strengths and limitations were picked up unconsciously from your parents? Consider your strengths to be blessings your parents passed on to you. Maybe it was genetics; maybe it was the influence of your home environment as you were growing up. Whatever the source of your strongest attributes, your parents probably had some influence on their existence.

Ah, but those weaknesses--are they a punishment to you for the limitations of your ancestors?

Punishment? That's a strong word! Yes, it is. Might it be possible, however, that you are paying for what your parents and grandparents did or failed to do?

It's not only possible, it's Biblical. Look at Exodus 34:7. God told Moses, "I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love.... Even so, I do not leave sin unpunished, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations."

Does this mean you can blame Mom and Dad and their parents for your weaknesses? Maybe, but I wouldn't be too hard on them. All they did was pass along to you what they probably unconsciously learned from their parents. And assuming they loved you and performed as parents the best they could, they undoubtedly made some intentional improvements over how their parents raised them.

Further, I assume you love your children and care about their futures. Perhaps you've done some studying about how to properly parent in this digital age. Are you doing all you can to teach them properly and guide them in developing good values?

Despite honorable motives, you are probably passing along some unintentional bad habits.

Self-deception is a major difficulty faced by leaders, including parents. Satan is the author of deception, and one of his great satisfactions is having fooled us humans about our flaws.

We like to look good, so we pretend--to others and to ourselves--that we're "okay" as we are. Yet many of us do little once we become adults to improve ourselves. And we don't realize that we are inadvertently passing along to our children the limitations that we've learned from our parents.

The first step in confronting self-deception is to simply become aware that you are being duped! Then you can use your God-given freedom to choose something that could lead to a better result.

You can decide to be a transition person in your family's lineage. By inviting the people around you to give you feedback on your actions, you'll raise your awareness of your irritating and detrimental habits. Then you can search for options, considering how you might modify future behaviors.

By making a conscious choice, you perform differently next time, stretching yourself beyond your comfort zone. The likely effect of your new behavior will be a different short-term outcome. If you achieve improved results, you can continue in that direction, replacing your habitual behaviors with something you and others believe will provide improved long-term outcomes.

My clients often can trace their behaviors with their teams back to something unwittingly learned as they were growing up. The parents developed with their child a collaborative, interdependent relationship as he or she assumed increasing responsibility. The young adult entered the world of work capable of building healthy relationships with others—colleagues and team members.

I invite you to do some self-evaluation. Seek feedback from family members and those who work with you. Consider how your past has influenced your present behaviors. Your colleagues will probably enjoy immediate benefit. Perhaps more importantly, you'll likely pass on fewer limiting beliefs and disruptive perspectives to your children and grandchildren, even to the third and fourth generations!

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