



# Happier Parenting

SMILING AND THRIVING WHILE IN THE  
TRENCHES OF PARENTHOOD

*Ben Yau*  
AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Foreword by Raymond Aaron | New York Times Bestselling Author

# HAPPIER PARENTS, HAPPIER CHILDREN, HAPPIER WORLD!

In *Happier Parenting*, author Ben Yau shares with you his simple steps to develop more parenting confidence and ultimately more joy in everything that entails being a parent in today's world. Along the way, you'll laugh, you'll cry, and you'll have AHA moments. Join Ben, and journey together to *Happier Parenting*. Don't forget to laugh and have fun along the way!

"*Happier Parenting* is so refreshing. Ben simplifies his parenting approach into easy steps through humorous and heartwarming stories. *Happier Parenting* will guide you in a way no other parenting book will."

-Foreword of *Happier Parenting* by **Raymond Aaron**,  
*New York Times Bestselling Author*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ben Yau currently lives in Los Angeles, CA. By day he is a career computer engineer, and by night (and weekends) he loves swing dancing, trading and investing, being active, socializing with other neighborhood families, and really good/bad jokes! (But of course!!) Most of all, Ben loves and treasures the time he gets to spend with his family.

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# **HAPPIER PARENTING**

Smiling and Thriving  
While in the Trenches of Parenthood

Ben Yau



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*I dedicate this book to every parent—past, present, and future—  
who is opening it with curiosity, enthusiasm, energy,  
and open-mindedness.*

*I could not have done this without the support and love of my wife  
and kids. I cannot remember what my life was before you,  
and I cannot imagine my future without you. Thank you  
for making my life the most beautiful, entertaining,  
and heartwarming story I could ever ask for.*



## Testimonials

*“Although you might think a parenting book would be more about ‘how’ to treat your children, that’s not at all the case with this book. Ben Yau’s perspective is actually much deeper, suggesting that happier parenting starts with a happier Self. Ben has taken to heart the importance of giving energy to one’s own successes, thoughtfully incorporating this truth as an important factor in creating a happier and more rewarding parenting life. If you want to live more confidently and joyfully, I highly recommend that you give yourself the gift of reading this book as soon as you possibly can, as I promise it will support you in becoming not only a happier parent but a happier person!”*

– Michael Nitti, acclaimed life coach, spiritual teacher, and author of *The Trophy Effect*

*“I love the central premise of Ben Yau’s ‘Happier Parenting’ book. In order to be a happier parent, one needs to be a happier person. The book is filled with heartfelt, humorous, and relatable stories from a real parent. With easy-to-follow mindset shifts and ‘How to Do’ exercises, this book will be a practical companion for any busy parent. In our fast-paced, accelerated, go-go-go, do-do-do culture, Ben’s book is a great reminder to love oneself, embrace playfulness, laugh more, and ultimately be happy.”*

– Anna Seewald, M. Ed, keynote speaker, author, parent educator, and host of the *Authentic Parenting* podcast.

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*“What a joy to read! Ben’s practical strategies, such as the ‘coffee break’ concept, are easy to apply and duplicate, and it is Ben’s fun style that made this a true pleasure. The conversational tone is so friendly, and the heart-warming stories are shared with poignancy. It seems as if you are sitting in a room having coffee with a dear friend, and he is sharing from his heart. Being a coach and author on the subject of love and mindfulness, I greatly value Ben’s focus on self-love: Self-love first, then everything else flows from there. Perfection! I must mention that I also truly enjoyed seeing the pictures of his kids, and some of their sweet creations. To be honest, as I am now a parent to adult children, these quite often moved me to tears. To all of you parents out there doing your best, this is the book for you! Enjoy every moment you possibly can; I promise it will be over in a blink. I wish you all the best in your parenting journey.”*

– Emilie Rawlings, author of *Foundation: Love. Mindfulness. Meditation*

*“I was captivated by Ben’s endearing storytelling, reading page after page, as if I was right there with him in his parenting journey. As a coach who inspires workaholics experiencing burnout to integrate more happiness and fulfillment in their lives, I thoroughly enjoyed witnessing Ben’s wholehearted passion doing the same for parents. He uses his wit, insight, and humbleness to help burned-out parents transform their parenting into one that is more joyful and balanced. Definitely check out this invaluable, fun read!”*

– Kat Nieh, mindset coach, podcaster, and award-winning author of *Dear Workaholics*

## Testimonials

*“Parents finally have a practical guide to parenting that leaves out the cliché, old-world theories, and welcomes in real-life, current situations from the author. Through my own coaching of clients on their business endeavors, I have found we, as people, all desire the same thing: success. While Ben’s book is about parenting, his central concept applies universally: It is vitally important to include joy and happiness along our journeys to success. Ben has brilliantly found a way to make the bittersweet subject of parenting challenges an absolute joy to read, with transparent experiences and clever humor from his real life. So don’t wait! Get this book, get extra copies for your parent friends, get his book bonuses, get connected with Ben directly, and discover the immense value he provides for you on your parenting journey. You will not be disappointed!”*

– K. Raj Singh, *The Passive Income Artiste*, TEDx speaker, author, and business advisor



## Foreword

Do you feel like you are doing everything you can to be the best parent you can be, and yet at times it feels like you are continuously falling behind and playing catch-up? Catching up on day-to-day responsibilities, catching up on sleep, and catching up on sanity? Perhaps you have that common worry that most parents have: you feel at times you could be or should be doing better as a parent.

One of the worst things about this is when we wake up, look at our kids and realize that they have grown by leaps and bounds in the blink of an eye! What just happened? Have you ever gotten so busy “parenting” that it seems like the best years you have with your children are just flying by?

You are most assuredly picking up this book at the perfect time. Worry no more! The time for you to find more joy, happiness, and fulfillment in your parenting is now.

I am delighted to write this foreword for Ben Yau and his incredible book, *Happier Parenting*. Ben is an exceptional writer and coach, with an undeniably caring soul. I do not think I have ever come across an individual like Ben. He is a senior computer engineer. He is also an internationally known dance choreographer and champion. But what I like most about Ben is he is a caring and passionate teacher and coach. He is an incredibly kind person, a dedicated husband, and a wonderful father. When you add in his light sense of humor and his insatiable enthusiasm for jokes that you love to groan at, it’s no wonder Ben has an extraordinary flair for analyzing, explaining, and entertaining, all at once.

In the book you now hold in your hands, not only has Ben managed to simplify his parenting approach into easy steps, but through his humorous and heartwarming stories of first-hand experience he draws an effective visual of

## *Happier Parenting*

what it feels like to go through all the ups and downs of parenting, as we try to provide the best possible life for our children. It's through surviving these "parenting trenches," as Ben calls it, and living to tell the tale that you will find your way to loving life with your family, and living your life to the fullest each day.

I believe there is not a more important book to read right now. The importance of families, and the relationships parents and children have, can never be understated. I am especially concerned in today's world. Everything moves faster. People are getting more addicted to their technology. Relationships with others are becoming more about "Likes" and "Emoji," and less about actual relations, emotions, and humanity. This is why I find Ben's book so refreshing. In a world of news, media, and the internet, where parenting has become more complex, Ben's insight on developing relationships with your kids, your community, and most importantly yourself, is both refreshing and necessary.

I am sure you will enjoy reading Ben's thoughts, stories, and the many AHA moments he's had on his journey to *Happier Parenting* as much as I did. *Happier Parenting* will guide you in a way no other parenting book will.

A piece of advice: make sure to start today, and enjoy your children before they have children of their own. You will not be disappointed.

**Raymond Aaron**  
**New York Times Bestselling Author**

## Acknowledgements

I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade when I declared to myself, “I want to write books!”

It seems life sometimes wants you to enjoy the scenic route.

Through a windy road lasting many decades, embracing my roles as a computer engineer, stock trader, competitive swing dancer, teacher, and then finally, and most dotingly, a loving husband and dedicated father, it is really a dream come true to realize the role of author. Seriously, third-grade me is happy-dancing like crazy! And this would not have been possible without the support and influence of so many people.

To all these wonderful people, thank you. Some of you are recent influences in my life. Many of you may not be aware of how much you have influenced me. In fact, many of you do not even know me. I can simply say that you have all inspired me and taught me something amazing. You’ve sparked me to laugh, think, and cry. And grow. Which has culminated in this book.

The first “Thank You” absolutely has to go to our miracle workers: **Dr. Robert Boostanfar**, **Dr. Philip Werthman**, and **Dr. Beth Julian**. And all of their respective staff. Without you, it is entirely possible Sheri and I would never have had our three little munchkins. I am eternally grateful to you.

To **Hal Runkel**: Your book, *Screamfree Parenting*, crossed my google search path at exactly the right time when I needed it, and is still my favorite parenting book.

To **Dr. Masaru Emoto**: You have helped me be more mindful and aware of my energy, thoughts, and words I speak to others as well as myself. Thank you so much.

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To **Michael Nitti**: Thank you for making me aware of my “trophy tendencies,” and for encouraging me to keep my *good trophy* room growing with frequent additions.

To **Jack Canfield**: Your *Chicken Soup* books are uplifting, and your talks are life changing.

Thank you to **Raymond Aaron**. Besides helping my dream of being an author come true, your guidance, wisdom, and mentorship have opened my eyes to the possibilities waiting to be written.

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To **Chris and Chris**, I recall a wise man once said that the best way to keep a secret is to write it in a book. Well, I went and did it anyway (HA!), and we will see if this acknowledgement remains a secret! In all sincerity, though, I cannot thank you enough for your coaching and guidance, for *Investing from the Beach*, and for showing us the possibilities to time freedom. A mind, once expanded, cannot contract. I will never be able to thank you enough for doing it first and then showing the rest of us the way.

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To **Frankie Manning**: You are an inspiration—your joy; your jubilation; teaching us, as “leads,” to treat our partners like royalty, and the importance of making connections—thank you for so many great lessons.

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To **Dawn Hampton**: Sheri and I still talk about your musicality demo from years ago in Oakland, and the amount of musicality you showed in just inches of movement. Thank you for the lesson that quality, backed by heart and soul, can beat quantity any day. We miss you.

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Speaking of sports, oh yes! A big part of my "spoil the inner child" regimen (Chapter 4!) is sports stuff. First, to the **Fantasy Footballers** podcast, my favorite podcast: You guys are always making me laugh, and you set such great examples of being dads! Huge thanks to the **Fantasy Football Dad's League**, and to the commish and all the managers past and present: Thank you for the fun, for keeping me on my toes, and for embracing my overly complicated trade proposals all season long. And to my Seattle sports comrades, **Gary, Craig, and Dave**, I'm sure we'll figure out that jinx thing soon enough, and I know we will have a ton of fun doing so.

## Acknowledgements

Speaking of *Happier Parenting* regimens, a big part of my **SMILES** and **SILLIES** regimen (Chapter 6!) is listening to standup comedy. These four comedians in particular, I keep coming back to over and over again, listening to their same bits over and over again, because they still make me laugh over and over again. Thank you to **Brian Regan, Don Friesen, Jim Gaffigan, and Ali Wong**, for always bringing the laughs and smiles out of me.

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To the **Lloyd-Samson Clan**: So many memories and so much love—cutting our parenting teeth at the same time with our party of 10. Here's to a lifetime of memories and love for our families to share.

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To **Gary**: An extra thank you, my lifelong friend. Growing up, I was such a ... I can't even think of a good word. Moron? Oaf? Something like that. Still, for whatever reason, you looked past all that, and here we are today. You are one of a kind.

Thank you to **Auntie Esther and family**, and to **Cousin George and family**, for being great extended family, and for simply staying connected with us all these years! And for those creative newsletters!

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To my brother, **Richey**, I know you're there for me, and I'm there for you. And craps is there for us (but of course!) You're the best big bro I ever had—sure, you're the only big bro I ever had, but you're still the best (ha!)

To **Mom and Dad**: Through the lens of hindsight, through the process of writing this book, through experience of being a parent, I can easily see how much time, effort, sacrifice, and love you gave to your boys. These past few years, each day, I've grown to appreciate you both even more. Thank you for everything.

To **Kayla, Emmitt, and Wyatt**: my amazing three kids, the folks in my life that call me "Dad." Sure, sure, you more often than not call me "Mr. Tutu," "Mrs. Tutu," "Mr. SmackYourButt," and other names like that, but we know it all means "Dad." There is a saying that some things are worth the wait. That could never be truer. You definitely made me and Mom wait, and I don't know if I will ever express enough how much you were all more than worth the wait. You make me laugh, think, and cry. You make my life amazing. And you've taught me so much. I'm crazy about you, and promise to always be there for you. Thank you for choosing me to be your dad.

## *Acknowledgements*

Lastly, saving the best for last, to my amazing wife **Sheri**—my dance partner, my life partner, my partner in crime, the love of my life—I don't know what my life would be without you. I still remember the first time seeing you, it was literally one of those "I saw her from across the room" stories, that room being the back swing dance room at the Derby. I saw your smile. And I did literally cross the room for you, in this case to ask you for a dance. And then just like in *When Harry Met Sally*, we became friends, great friends, confused friends, and then, also just like in *When Harry Met Sally*, on that one New Year's Eve, we realized we were supposed to be together. That's how it began more than 20 years ago, the visuals are never far from my mind. God brought us together for a reason, and we have had such a blessed life so far, and I think the best is yet to come. You keep up with all my insanity, and you balance me out, even when I'm a headache to deal with. You have the same capacity to "push," and together, we do amazing things; and also, separately, we understand each other and support each other in pursuit of our individual projects. From the very beginning, the relentless "push" and "vision" to not give up when fertility challenges were thrown in our face. And today, the continued support we give each other to "push" and find our potential. Heck, even with this book, you took the kids to Grandma's on multiple occasions to give me the gift of time to finish this book. I have so much to thank you for; it's been a whirlwind, seeing how much we have accomplished. I can't wait to see how much more we will achieve together in our lifetimes. I love you. And thank you.



# Chapter 1

## Welcome to Crazy Town: Population Parents

*“I would say that the hardest thing  
about being a parent is these goddamned kids.”*  
– Andy Richter, Actor/Writer/Comedian

Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!

I am so glad you're here.

You possibly found your way here because:

- The book cover and title just snagged your curiosity, and you had to take a look. *Welcome! Glad to see you here!*
- You are an awesome parent, you have some challenging moments here and there, and you are looking for some tips on happier parenting. *This is awesome! Glad you're here!*
- You are an awesome parent, you feel you are already a happier parenting parent, and you are looking for some tips and continued development on even more happier parenting. *WOOT! I'm happy you're here!*
- Of course, I can't overlook that maybe you're a friend or an acquaintance, and you have this book as a show of support! (Thank you so much!) Or maybe you are friends of my parents, because they did mention they would be buying and handing out a lot of copies (YAY! Thanks Mom and Dad!). And it just so happened that today you decided to have a peek inside. *Thank you for that, and I'm glad to see you here too!*

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Whether you fall into one or more of the groups above, or a different category altogether, I am sincerely excited to see you here. Because, by the end of this book, my promise to you is that no matter where you are in your parenting journey, or personal journey for that matter, this book will be my A+ effort to collect useful tips and fun stories to help your journey be even more fun and awesome. And we will definitely enjoy some laughs along the way—sure, likely at my expense, but hey, that’s why I’m here; I’ve got your back. Sounds good? Great! Here we go!

### **Craziest Job Posting in the World**

Before we get started, I came across this bazonkers job posting the other day—totally bazonkers. Have a peek:

#### ***Hiring ASAP: management position to supervise young team.***

*Responsibilities include managing and developing a young team that is very energetic, inquisitive, and persistent. Sure, they can also be argumentative and have selective hearing, but hey, it all adds to the unpredictable fun.*

*Good news: Meals are included. That’s a bonus. Sure, the rest of the team eats first, but leftovers can be pretty yummy.*

*Bathroom breaks are, on average, two times a day and must be kept short. You’ll know when it’s been too long when our young team members start banging on the bathroom door calling for you. They are just checking to see if you’re safe, and not because they don’t want to give you a moment alone. No, not that, of course.*

*You will function as 100% first response support to your team. Pretty much anything is on the table here, including but not limited to: communication, organization, sales, cooking, cleaning, arts and crafts, plumbing, hostage negotiation, and crisis management. Battlefield improvised first aid may come in handy too! As shifts are 24x7 on call, make sure to sleep when you can, such as combining quick naps with your twice-a-day allotted bathroom trips.*

## *Welcome to Crazy Town: Population Parents*

*Please inquire immediately. Your young team members are anxiously waiting!*

Bazonkers. Of course, I did my due diligence just to make sure, and yup, here is the official definition of “bazonkers”:

### **bazonkers (adjective)**

1. delirious with excitement or anger; nuts
2. a never-ending, everlasting parental state

Definition courtesy of Wiktionary. And maybe, possibly, my brain.

In all seriousness, that job description is really just barely the tip of the tip of the parenting iceberg—am I right? **#HollaYallParents!** An actual accurate “job description” would take up this entire book, especially on those days where parenting is just this relentless in-the-trenches onslaught of bazonkersness.

At this point, if you’re asking yourself, “Wait, isn’t this book supposed to help me feel better about parenting?” no worries, we’ll get there. I want to first acknowledge how amazing and resilient you already are. Not only do we survive, but we keep coming back for more. (That’s right; this means you!)

In fact, I think we need to take a moment for recognition right here. Can we take a moment? You parents survive in the most relentless of battle trenches, and then keep working to be better. Before we go any further, take a moment to step back and see how awesome you are.

### **Parents, I Honor You**

Parenting is like extreme on-the-job training, like nothing else I can think of: just throw you in and see if you can swim. Whether a working parent or stay-at-home parent, or some combination thereof, there are books to read and classes to take; but when it comes to actually “doing the job,” it reminds me of when I worked at start-ups. You have to wear every hat imaginable because no one else is there to do it. It’s learning and solving while on the job, and debugging issues “on the fly,” in a live production environment. And those are the normal days. On the harder days, it can feel like you’re truly in the pit of despair (thank you, *The Princess Bride*). It can feel quite frustrating, and even

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quite lonely too, as if the entire battle is on you alone. And you *still* pull yourself out of it and move forward.

(And by the way, please remember, you are not alone. There is always a tribe of parents to help you out.)

First and foremost: Parents, I want to recognize you for embracing the crazy bazonkerness, and coming back for more.

**“YOU GET NO 401K. NO CO-WORKERS. YOU’RE JUST IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ALL DAY LONG WITH THIS HUMAN TAMAGOTCHI THAT DON’T GOT NO RESET BUTTON, SO THE STAKES ARE EXTREMELY HIGH.”**

**– ALI WONG, COMEDIAN**

There is actually proof, happening right this very second, to show you how amazing you are: just the simple fact that you picked up this book and are reading it. Think about that for a minute. Parenting is surviving in the trenches, leaving little time for anything else. And you are picking up a book and reading it. You are using your precious and minimal “spare time” to invest in yourself to become a better parent, and really, a better person! There is no easier proof than that to show how awesome you are.

### **Parents, I honor you.**

I honor your courage.

I honor your capacity to love.

I honor your energy.

I honor your willingness to share of yourself.

I honor you for your open mindedness.

I honor you for your relentlessness.

I honor you for the parent you are, and the parent you continue to strive to be.

### **#HighFive**

And I welcome you to my book!

### **#HighFiveAgain**

## **Who Is This Book For? (This May Surprise You!)**

Now that we know who you are, let's talk about this book and what it can do for you. With a book called *Happier Parenting*, it seems a bit obvious whom this book would be for, right? I mean, it pretty much says it there in the title. However, there is definitely a lot more to this, and you might be surprised.

Let's take a closer look at this concept of "parent." The definition below is from Merriam Webster's online dictionary:

### **parent (noun)**

1. one that begets or brings forth offspring
2. a person who brings up and cares for another

The first definition is what I would call a "traditional" definition for the word "parent," one that seems to indicate the idea of biological offspring. And while this may be a "traditional" definition, a book on parenting and how to be a better "parent," begs a much different, and wider, audience. This is why I absolutely love the second definition: "***a person who brings up and cares for another.***"

Isn't this second definition a fabulous definition? This second definition is what I refer to as the "spiritual" definition of parent, or the "spiritual parent." It is this person that I write this book for.

Unfortunately, reality tells us that some parents fitting the "traditional" definition do not fit the "spiritual" definition. I speak of those that may not have as a priority to "bring up and care for" their child, for whatever reason. It is unfortunate, and they are not the audience for this book.

The audience I am writing this book for are an amazing group: those that fit the "spiritual parent" definition, that have influence on bringing up and caring for a child, and want to better themselves and their "parenting" of this child. This includes so many amazing people! Just off the top of my head, this would include:

- Parent of your own biological offspring
- Parent of your adopted offspring

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- Godparent
- Foster parent
- An auntie or uncle by relation or by close friendship
- One of those many positions of leadership and nurture, such as caregiver, nanny, teacher, coach, youth group leader, and many more
- Just a friend of the family that adores and spends time and effort with the kids

The common thread: the desire to nurture a child and invest in their well-being. To ***bring up and care for*** a child.

In fact, whether it is now, or maybe even in the future, if you envision being in that space and embracing that role, then I am writing this book for you. You have the ability, aptitude, and desire to ***bring up and care for*** a child, as well as the desire to continue to develop yourself into a better person.

Having picked up this book, you've already shown you have a desire to learn how to become a happier parent and a happier person. And so, it is *exactly* you whom I am writing this book for.

### **#FunnyHowThatWorks**

So now that we know who you are—that you're awesome, and that you're the person I'm writing this book for—shall we take a gander at who I am, and what this book will be for you? Yes, let's!

### **My Purpose for This Book**

Why this book? Why a book on parenting? Funny you should ask. Because those are questions my wife asked me too, when I told her I wanted to write this book. After all, I am a career computer engineer, specializing in server virtualization, storage, and clustering. Why me? What's my purpose for writing this book?

Before I get into that, let us each ask ourselves a few questions:

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- 1. Am I a happy parent?** My answer for me: I admit that while sometimes it is yes, it is also sometimes no. There are great days, and there are challenging days.
- 2. Am I the best parent in the world?** My answer for me: No, I am not. I am a work in progress. Will I ever be? Honestly, who knows? However ... This begs the final question!
- 3. Am I a happier parent and better parent than yesterday?** Short answer for me: I certainly hope so! My real answer for me: There are up days and down days; however, I know, in the big picture, I constantly and happily work toward being a *happier* and *better* parent. Even with the missteps that I have (yes, I still have them!), I love where I am. And I love where I want to go.

What do you think of my answers? More importantly, what do you think of your answers?

I admit, I think my answers are pretty dang nifty. But also, I wouldn't be surprised if your answers were similar to mine. I think those answers just go along with being a "spiritual parent": We have it in us to want to do our best, and continually look to improve on that.

Let's do a follow-up exercise. This is a good one (i.e., play in full!).

- 1. First**, raise your hand out there if you are a happy person.
- 2. Second**, raise your hand out there if you have regrets.

Did you raise your hand on one question only? Or both questions?

I raised my hand both times when I first was posed these questions, at a workshop with **Chris** and **Chris**, from the podcast *Investing from the Beach*. My thought was that raising my hand for both was a nice representation of balance in my life: be happy with who I was, but also be aware of mistakes I made in the past so I could learn from them—things like that. Not to mention most of the room seemed to be with me on the "raising hands both times" deal.

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Chris smiled, because he was about to pick us apart—just a little bit. He said that you cannot raise your hand to both questions; you can only raise it for one or the other. You cannot be happy and have regrets at the same time. It's one or the other.

Um ... What?

Meaning, the things in my life that I might consider a regret, well, that is what made me who I am. If I am a happy person, why would these be regrets? Why aren't they just moments, or perhaps even opportunities, that allowed me to grow and adapt and change?

Oh ... Wow. **#MindBlown**. Do you see the power in this?

We can **choose** which one of those questions we raise our hands for. We can choose regrets, and we can choose ... happier! No matter what happens—the struggles we go through, the intense parenting challenges we have, the “bad choices” that might ruin us for days—we can always choose to see all of those experiences as moving us on the journey toward ... happier!!! How awesome is that?

And this brings us back to: Why me and why this book?

My own journey through life and parenting has been, well, one I would have previously said was full of regrets and bad decisions, things that I let weigh me down for years. Now, being a work in progress (**#yup**), I can say that these don't have to be regrets so much as they can be great stories to share and learn from. After all, what's the old adage? Tragedy + Time = Comedy? And what a saving grace that saying is! I can now say my life is full of many “comedic” experiences, and many of them qualify for great shareable lessons and *edutainment*. (Even for me as I recount them!)

And if it is true that there is no better teacher than experience, this is where I think the most value of this book is for you. My hope is that you approach this book as not just something to read, but as a way of exchanging your reading time for my “experience.” If you can do this, I think it will be time and effort well spent. Fred Rogers put it best, that everyone holds the answer to someone else's question.

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**“IF ONLY YOU COULD SENSE HOW IMPORTANT YOU ARE TO THE LIVES OF THOSE YOU MEET; HOW IMPORTANT YOU CAN BE TO PEOPLE YOU MAY NEVER EVEN DREAM OF. THERE IS SOMETHING OF YOURSELF THAT YOU LEAVE AT EVERY MEETING WITH ANOTHER PERSON.”**  
— **FRED ROGERS, CREATOR OF MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD**

You and I both hold in ourselves stories, experiences, and knowledge that are answers to someone else’s question. These “someones” could be people we never meet, people born years after we pass. So why not share? And that goes for me and for you. Do you realize that when we do not share, we withhold from so many people the answers they are looking for? Which brings us to my book, and my story, the one I hope can be the answer to someone else’s question.

### **The Beginning of My Story**

My wife and I went through six years of infertility before being blessed with our first child. I recall vividly during those first six years, living day to day and month to month, questioning myself over and over again: What if we were never meant to have children?

There were feelings of sadness, loss in faith, and much crying. I would watch my wife and see how infertility could bring a strong and confident woman to her knees, crying, with burning questions of faith and lack of confidence. I could see how infertility could result in feelings of being less than a woman: “Why can’t I do something that is supposed to be natural?”

For me personally, I found it can bring a husband to his knees, looking over at his weeping wife, desperately trying to figure out what he can do to help, oftentimes coming up empty, with tears streaming down his face. Today, I still sometimes think about all the hopeful parents out there going through challenges to start or continue their family, and I continue to pray for all of them. It is the hardest thing I have ever had to go through, and not something I would want to wish on anyone.

Our first doctor basically decided to settle on “unexplained” when it came to our infertility. He certainly gave us no hope. We did not end the story there,

## *Happier Parenting*

however, and sought out new doctors. We found out about other recent medical discoveries, treatments, and surgeries heading into our third IVF. Then the day came; we got a positive pregnancy test!



*Sheri and I both having surgery for our third IVF*

We passed milestone after milestone. We saw a little embryo clinging on inside my wife, growing every day! I was torn between guarded optimism and mega-disbelief—the first ultrasound, the first heartbeat—until one day, after a mad rush to the delivery room, we were blessed with the most beautiful baby ever. I wept with happiness.

I recall vividly seeing my daughter for the first time. So cute. So tiny. And so loud. Oh yes, she was bawling like nobody's business. And yet she was so fragile. I was overwhelmed with tears: "Is this real? Is this really happening?" I could not get over my disbelief. After years of tempering my dreams and optimism, I was afraid to believe.

Over the next few days, as I got to know my daughter, I was overwhelmed with love and thankfulness. I was a DAD!! We were parents!! And I started dreaming about the future. I knew I was going to be the best and most perfect parent. And there would be nothing I wouldn't do for my wonderful child. And yes, there is some slight foreshadowing there.

First, to put a little ribbon on this particular infertility adventure: Today, we are a blessed family of five. Our infertility story continued for another four years, with more procedures and more miracle work from our team of doctors

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and staff. Today, with a total of three kids, we can say we are “done.” (And so very grateful to our miracle working doctors and their staff!)

Though my wife and I joke that if we had had our third child first, we might have stopped right there (**#WILDCHILD**). I think God suspected this would be our last, and He definitely put all the “goodness” into our youngest one. You know, the one that makes you realize why child safety mechanisms were ever invented?

**“I HAVE TWO WONDERFUL KIDS ... AND ANOTHER KID.”**

**– BRIAN REGAN, COMEDIAN**

Oh, come on. You know I’m kidding. I love them all! At least on most days. Ermm ... Yes, we should continue.

Getting back to the story, having gone through so much with infertility, having been given this opportunity to be a parent when so many we knew would not get this opportunity, I felt we owed it to so many people not to take this for granted: for us, for the kids, for all the people we met on our journey. Oh yes, indeed, I would NOT take this lightly!! By gall gosh darn it! We would be that “happily ever after.” Yes, happily and ever and after. No matter what. AT ALL COSTS!

Do you hear that buzzing sound? That’s the foreshadowing again. That buzzing: Is it the incredible amount of pressure I’m building up in myself? Is it the presupposition of the inevitable downfall I’m setting myself up for? Yup, pretty much.

“Happily ever after” ... at all costs?! WHAT? How about “happily ever challenging?” MY GOODNESS! WOW, did it hit me pretty quickly that this was the most challenging thing I had ever done in my life to date. And WOW, did it hit me pretty quickly my feelings of inadequacy of being a “successful” parent.

And this is where our hero story begins. Oh, I’m the hero, by the way, just to remind you. And guess what? You are too; you’ll see.

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Let's begin with this: Have you ever went into a parenting situation, thinking you had the perfect strategy and parenting know-how to handle things, and ... it worked? Wow, feelings of accomplishment, right? Some big ego-boosting? You are the A-1 best parent ever, and there ain't nothing you can't handle. Good times.

And then there are those times when you're going in as A-1 best parent ever, only to have everything blow up in your face? And turn out WAY different than you expected? Yeah, those times. Heck, for me, those early epic diaper changing fails should have been sufficient foreshadowing:

### **epic diaper changing fail (noun)**

1. when parent confidently goes into the changing room with baby, only to run out seconds later screaming with panic, clinging in one arm a wet, naked, crying baby, and clinging in the other arm a pile of wet clothes (aren't those supposed to be on the baby?!), a wet, dirty diaper (forgot to throw it out?!), and a wet, clean diaper (how does the CLEAN diaper even get wet?!) **#Yipes**
2. pretty sure a second example isn't needed **#DoubleYipes**

It was at that moment, I realized something very important about becoming a parent: Did you know that when becoming a parent, you don't automatically become a sage, wise, calm, patient, human being? Did you know that?

**"JUST BECAUSE YOU BECAME A PARENT, DOESN'T MEAN YOU GREW UP.  
YEAH. I'M THE SAME PIECE OF SHIT THAT I ALWAYS WAS BEFORE I BECAME A MOM,  
NOW JUST WITH MORE RESPONSIBILITY, AND I'M BARELY RISING TO THE OCCASION."**

**— ALI WONG, COMEDIAN**

So, what you're saying, Universe, and Ali Wong, is that just because I became a parent, that didn't mean gone were all my insecurities, feelings of inadequacy, anger management—basically all those issues I had growing up. Shhnope, it didn't. And not only did they not go away, they became magnified. You've maybe heard that money is a magnifier? Whoever you are underneath, it gets magnified with money issues? The same can be said for crisis: Crisis is a

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magnifier. And well, gosh, gall-darnit, if parenting ain't a magnifier too. All that enormous pressure I was putting on myself led to my eventual parenting "fall from grace," i.e., burnout. Or, as I started calling it, "parental darkness." It was a pretty harsh time for me to go through. Fortunately, having emerged from this "parental darkness" and back into the light, it has been the ultimate growth experience, full of self-discovery, and more importantly, self-love. I can happily say that I am a happy person (and a happier person!). I feel fewer regrets, and I am looking forward to continuing my journey toward ... happier!

That is the real happily ever after! Or more accurately ... ***happier ever after!*** (See what I did? Because "Happier" is in my book title? **#NICE!!**)

**"BE HAPPY WHERE YOU ARE, AND BE HAPPY WHERE YOU ARE GOING,  
SO YOU'LL BE HAPPY WHEN YOU GET THERE."**

**— MARSHALL SYLVER, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER**

And now the answer to "Why this book? Why now?" I figured, hey, if I could get someone like me to a place of happier parenting, then my stories can likely help all the other wonderful spiritual parent moms and dads out there.

Throughout the last handful of years, I've spoken on stage, at seminars, and with other parents about many of my experiences and revelations. While my intent was simply to share my own stories and "Aha" moments, and to simply connect, with time and feedback and other parents seeking to connect with me, I eventually thought, "Hey, I might have a valuable message here." And since then, I have found this to resonate as a mission in my life. The culmination of this is what you now hold in your hands.

***My mission is to help parents become happier parents.  
Because happier parents make for happier kids.  
And happier kids are tomorrow's happier parents.  
If we keep this cycle going, the world will be a happier place.  
I want to help make the world a happier place.  
Let's help make the world a happier place.***

**#WOOHOO**

**#HappyDanceBreak**

## Happier Parenting

And here we are, already at the end of the first chapter. Well, look at us! We made it!

I now have a few activities for you below. I'll have these at the end of each chapter. The purpose is to anchor in a few ideas, and to have a bit of fun and be as interactive as we can in a book. Some of these questions are answer-based, in which case I'll supply answers based on the chapter (like a quiz!). Others are open-ended conversations just to have you ponder some questions as they relate to you, in which case I'll share my personal answer (like interview style) so that you can get to know me better too. And feel free to email me your answers too! Why not?

After you've done your activities, let's race on over to the next chapter because I can't wait to get started!

### Activities & Questions

**Q: When I say “parent,” whom am I referring to?**

A: By “parent” I mean anyone—past, present, and future—that spends time and effort to “bring forth” and care for “offspring” (yours or someone else's!). That is whom I write this book for, and who I hope finds usefulness in it!

**Q: What do I mean when I say “I honor you?”**

A: I say it because you are worthy of this acclaim! ***You are already a great parent.***

**Q: What is a parenting “win” you had recently? There is no win too small. As parents, we have so many wins throughout the day; we do SO MUCH each day that deserves celebration. So, just to really anchor in how awesome you are, what is one parenting “win” you had recently? What can I high five you for?**

A: This win is from a time when my son loved playing handball—around the house, all day, whacking this little rubber ball against any and every wall. It just so happens that the best wall is next to where we eat. Yup, you guessed

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it. He whacked the ball into a cup of milk and knocked it over. While I have gotten better at the calm responses, sometimes there is still a charged reflex: “HEY! LOOK WHAT HAPPENED!” This time, I actually surprised myself at how calm I was. We kind of stared at each other, and I finally said, “So, let’s clean it up? Get the paper towels?” I think he was dumbfounded. Both of us were! And then he got the towels and we cleaned it up. Granted, I was working on four hours of sleep, so it’s possible I had no reflexes to react. But hey, I’ll take the win! **#HighFive #SleepDeprivedWins**

### **What’s Next?**

First things first, I have a Book Bonus section! As a thank you for reading, I want to invite you to get some fabulous and free book bonuses, a collection of fun and useful supplemental material. You can grab them now at my book website:

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

Next things next: WOOHOO! I am ready and excited to start. Are you? Great! Race on over to Chapter 2, because we are about to kick off this adventure into *Happier Parenting!* I’ll see you there!



*Our three miracle babies!*



## Chapter 2

### Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes

*“I don’t know what’s more exhausting about parenting:  
the getting up early, or acting like you know what you’re doing.”*

– Jim Gaffigan, Comedian

Welcome to Chapter 2. So nice to see you here!

Before we get to where we’re going, let’s look at where we are now and what parenting is like in today’s world in order to give ourselves a starting point. We all know parenting can be a challenge these days. But what does that exactly mean?

Here are a few questions to give you some food for thought:

- What thoughts come to mind when you hear the word “parenting?”
- What challenges do you face as a parent?
- How do you think parenting differs from previous generations?
- What makes parenting today easier compared to previous generations?
- What makes parenting today more challenging compared to previous generations?

Let’s pause a bit so we can give these all a bit more thought. Maybe even write a few of these down.

## *Happier Parenting*

*(pausing, giving us some moments to think, maybe write things down, cue the “Jeopardy” theme)*

Nice! Let’s continue, yes?

### **The Parenting Scene Today**

The role of today’s parents is quite complex, and definitely very active. Parenting of previous generations was parenting in simpler times; the focus was on necessities and survival. As society got more complicated, so did the responsibilities of parenting. And here we are today, especially with the world of information being so much more accessible, where much of the challenge for parents is just that there is so much more to think about. One might argue that the world has gotten more convenient, but that actually adds to the complexity. Consider the fact that McDonald’s can now be delivered to your door (WOW?!). But does that make things easier? Is that not another set of choices to be added to your ever-growing list?

Let’s look at some of the challenges in today’s parenting:

#### **1. Schooling is more complex.**

We have the best interest of our kids at heart, and we want them to have the best opportunities available. And wow, there are more opportunities than ever today: public, private, dual immersion language (that’s a big stressor for us personally!), magnet schools, and that’s just to name a few. And each day it seems there are more methods used for teaching, more methods for us to question and research. No joke, one day I was helping my daughter (2<sup>nd</sup> grade at the time) check math homework, and I got confused. I did not realize there were so many ways to solve “What’s 2+3?” (And I’m a computer engineer!)

#### **2. The cost of raising kids is increasing.**

More school, more extracurricular activities, more costs. Not coincidentally, Pew Research Center shows a consistent increase in dual income families—up to 66% in 2016—which then leads to even more worries! Increased concerns for childcare, anyone?

**“WHO’S TAKING CARE OF THE BABY? THE TV IS TAKING CARE OF THE BABY, OKAY?  
THE WINDOWS ARE OPEN, SHE’S GOT GUMMY VITAMINS ON HER LAP, SHE’S FINE!”**

**– ALI WONG, COMEDIAN**

**#HaHaFunny**

**#Wait...CanWeDoThat**

**#Wait...CanYouHashtagEllipsis**

### **3. Parental comparisons in the world of social media**

Many of us enjoy sharing our fun and best moments on social media. What proud parent doesn't enjoy sharing fun family moments? Social media gives parents another avenue to share those moments. I am most definitely guilty as charged. I love social media. On the flip side, this can create stress for parents. Even if not intended, consciously or not, comparisons can and will happen. “That is so cool! Oh, wait ... Maybe I should have my kids learn that instrument too?” or “That’s neat! Oh, wait; maybe we should vacation there too?” or “Oh yeah, those Nintendo Switches are awesome! We should get one too! For the kids, I mean. For the kids.”

**#YupSnuckThatLastOneIn**

**#YupGotANintendoSwitch**

### **4. We are living in the age of information, like ... a lot of it!**

There is so much information at our fingertips, and by so much, that could mean too much. This includes all types of information, like wrong information, conflicting information, confusing information, and TOO MUCH information. (As an aside, seriously, one of my most favorite article titles: “Thank you, WebMD, but it’s not cancer.”)

Sure, the internet is helpful in many ways, like finding all the many ways to solve “What’s 2+3?” (Thank you google!) At the same time, have you ever pulled out the good ol’ Google to do some research on some parenting thing that came up, and found a response and thought, “Oh, hey, that makes sense!” only to scroll through to the next response, which is of course opposing and contradictory to the first response, and yet you find yourself nodding along, “Oh, hey! That makes sense too!” Gah ... What’s a well-meaning parent to do?

## *Happier Parenting*

(Pssst ... One thing a well-meaning parent can do: Take a break from parenting, open those windows, listen to some Ali Wong, and snuggle with some gummy vitamins. Mmmm, delicious and nutritious!)

### **5. With complexity comes bias.**

Going hand in hand with the world becoming a smaller place, there are just so many more opportunities for parent-judging and parent-shaming compared to the days of yore. Not to mention ... the labels! With the increased complexity in parenting, of course we want to try to simplify things for our own sanity; thus, labels and categories are used for convenience. Side effect? The feelings of negative bias and prejudice that can come with using labels.

I send my child to the neighborhood park to play, and some may call me the *“free range parent.”*

I walk with them to school and make sure they are never out of my sight, and some may now call me the *“helicopter parent.”*

I often wear my neon orange tennis shoes when I walk my kids to school, and now many will now call me the *“really cool parent.”*

**#YupSnuckThatLastOneInAgain**  
**#NeonShoesRock**

How real are these parenting challenges? And how might they adversely affect us as parents? Glad you asked! I happen to have a few studies right here for us to check out.

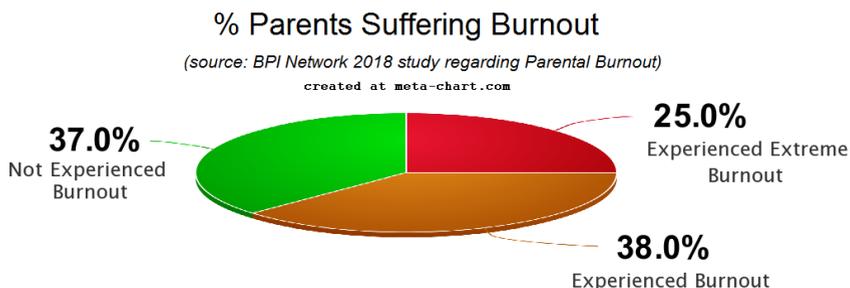
### **Parental Burnout: It's Real**

**“WHAT ASSURANCE DO I HAVE THAT YOUR PARENTING ISN'T SCREWING ME UP?”**  
**– CALVIN TO HIS DAD (FROM THE COMIC STRIP “CALVIN & HOBBS”)**

A recent study by the BPI Network explored burnout in parents. Burnout was defined as a state of *physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion*, sometimes

## Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes

leading to sleep and focus problems. At an extreme level, burnout included feelings of frustration, helplessness, and resentment.



The BPI Network's 2018 results state:

- 63% of parents experienced some form of parental burnout.
- 40% of burnout experienced was at significant levels. These burnouts could include:
  - extreme frustration (33%)
  - constant exhaustion (26%)
  - difficulty handling even normal daily tasks (17%)
- 33% of parents say a contributing factor to burnout is lack of cooperation from children.
- 29% of parents say financial anxiety is a factor of burnout.
- 29% of parents feel exhausted from work and managing the home.

*(source: BPI Network 2018 study regarding parental burnout)*

Wow! From a big picture, what are these numbers saying? This means, in a group of 3 parents, there's a good chance that:

- Parent #1 has no burnouts.
- Parent #2 experiences burnout (possibly extreme frustration and exhaustion).
- Parent #3 experiences extreme burnout (possibly helplessness and resentment).

## Happier Parenting

Imagine standing next to two other parents (any parents will do, whether real, fictional, or just ambiguous blobs to fill the visual). Now, turn to one parent and smile, and then turn to the other parent and smile. And now realize, statistically speaking, in your circle of three, two of you are suffering some form of parental burnout, and one of you likely is suffering to a degree that includes resentment and helplessness. Wow, right?! No Bueno!

As a side-note: Take a look inward, and realize that if you don't think you are experiencing burnout, that means the other two are. Be kind. Maybe consider it a nice time to treat a round of Starbucks. Or Krispy Kreme. Or massage. Oooh, yes, massage is nice.

**#RealLifeTips**

**#SupportFellowParents**

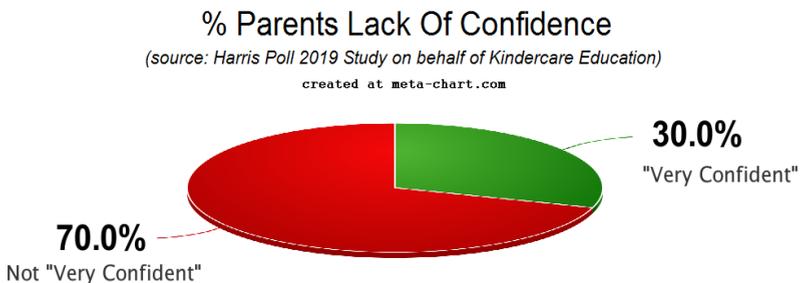
**#AlwaysTimeForAMassage**

### Parental Confidence (or Lack Thereof): It's a Thing

**"I DON'T THINK I'D HAVE BEEN IN SUCH A HURRY TO REACH ADULTHOOD IF I'D KNOWN THE WHOLE THING WAS GOING TO BE AD-LIBBED."**

**– CALVIN'S DAD (FROM THE COMIC STRIP "CALVIN & HOBBS")**

Below is a study about parental confidence, by the Harris Poll: How confident are parents in their parenting ability and parenting decisions?



## *Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes*

Results of the survey include the below:

- On a typical day, only 30% of parents say they are “very confident.”
- 70% agree it’s harder to raise a child today than 10 years ago.
- Some contributing factors to lack of parent confidence include:
  - parent shaming and comparison, especially via social media (39%)
  - parent judgement from society and other parents (38%)
  - fighting kids to monitor screen time (63%)
  - difficulty in knowing if the right decision is being made (55%), and information overload (25%)

*(Source: Harris Poll 2019 Study, on behalf of KinderCare Education, regarding parent’s confidence in their parenting decisions)*

Have you ever wrestled with a parenting decision? Right, that’s like asking if you have ever tucked in your child and said good night, only to see your child up and next to you 30 minutes later (scaring you out of your socks of course!), asking for water or a snack.

There are so many decisions to be made, and the wrestling happens not only before and during the decisions, but oftentimes after the fact. What a weight to carry around! Whether it’s about vaccinations, co-sleeping, screen time, choice of schools, choice of gummy vitamins, whether I keep letting my kids yell out poop and fart jokes at random times (because, sure, okay, possibly inappropriate, but they are so funny and at the age where it’s still adorable!)—and those are just a few of the millions of choices in the ever-growing list of a parenting life.

And how do we parents feel about all these decisions that face us? The Harris Poll survey results say it’s only 1 in 3 of us parents that feel “very confident.” There’s that blasted 1 in 3 again.

Are you still standing next to those two imaginary parents? Is it time for a second round of imaginary Starbucks? Have I mentioned that massages are pretty awesome? Or maybe compliment one of them on their awesome neon shoes?

## *Happier Parenting*

**#SupportFellowParents**  
**#AlwaysTimeForAMassage**  
**#NeonShoesReallyRock**

An important side-note here: Speaking as a parent that has experienced both burnout and lack of parent confidence, while I mention for fun Starbucks, donuts, and massages, sincerely speaking, I can't say how often some of my more challenging days have been literally saved by a kind word or gesture from another person, parent or not. Truly, kindness can really help someone get through the day. Just something to keep in mind from someone who has been a grateful recipient. **#RealLifeTips**

**"EVERYONE YOU MEET IS FIGHTING A BATTLE  
YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT. BE KIND. ALWAYS."  
— ANONYMOUS**

Okay, back to your regularly scheduled book.

### **The Good News Is ....**

A certain question started coming up repeatedly in my head as I went through the "parental darkness":

*"Why am I just absolutely sucking at parenting?"*

Going through burnout was not fun. Losing confidence in my parenting ability was not fun.

*"Why am I just absolutely sucking at parenting?"*

I mean, I was a good person deep down. I had my kids' best interest at heart. And I knew I was capable of being a better parent. I *wanted* to be a better parent. So why was I sucking so bad at this?

Strangely, this somehow evolved in my mind into an engineering problem to solve (thank you, computer engineering mind), and eventually even into a form of affirmation (thank you, self-improvement books).

## *Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes*

*"I am a good person. I shouldn't be sucking at this. So, let's figure out how not to suck at this."*

One day, I magically arrived at a realization. With many consecutive four-hour sleep nights in tow, my brain somehow found its way to the existence of a universal truth: a Universal Truth of Parenting! Sure, my brain was sitting in its room, tallying marks on the wall of consecutive four-hour sleep nights, but maybe it was worth it to discover this universal truth. Because *THIS* Universal Truth of Parenting was a big key in my turnaround. It is my solid rock that keeps me grounded. Want to see it? I am very excited to share it with you all. And here it is!

### **The Universal Truth of Parenting**

**"PARENTS, GIVEN WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES THEY ARE IN, ALWAYS DO THE BEST THEY CAN, TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY."**

**– THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH OF PARENTING**

Please read it a few times; let it marinate, because it's a good one.

Now, after reading that a few times, I am going to guess that some of you "spiritual parent" readers might be resisting this Universal Truth of Parenting.

*"But Ben, yes, I do care for my kids and want to do my best, but I don't know if I'm ALWAYS doing my best."*

I would say, "Have faith; believe me, you are." *Given the circumstances and to the best of your abilities, you are.* It fits hand in hand with what it means to be a "spiritual parent." It just cannot be otherwise.

*"But Ben, I don't think all parents do this. I don't think all parents are always doing their best."*

This is again where we make the distinction between those two definitions of "parent", the first being the "traditional parent," and the second being the "spiritual parent." Because this universal truth is an absolute that comes with someone who fits the definition of the "spiritual parent," the one who wants

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to “bring forth” and “care for” a child.

As an example, let’s consider the two studies mentioned earlier in this chapter, regarding burnout and lack of confidence. In the big picture, it amounts to frustration as a parent. Think about the passion you have for raising your kids, the passion you have for wanting them to turn out to be great humans and successful citizens. However, do you realize that the more passionate you are, and the more you really want to be a great parent, the more of a high-pressure cooker situation you are potentially creating?

Let’s picture us “handling” a parenting situation. Let’s say the outcome is perfect. We’re talking smooth “like BUTTA” baby. How awesome do we feel? Pretty dang awesome, right? Like you could successfully negotiate any United Nations Summit meeting with all the feel-goods.

But now picture the outcome being ... exactly the opposite. Ugh! Not at all what we had planned. Not smooth. No butta baby—just 100% margarine.

**#NoButta**

**#100Margarine**

**#BecauseMargarineIsNoButta**

What would you feel in that situation? Stress? Contention? Frustration? All of the above?

See if this sounds familiar: The more passionately I try something, and the more it feels like it’s not going my way, the more frustration I feel—and the more burnout I might experience. Does that sound like it could be you too?

As an example from my own life, there have been times I’ve had “heated exchanges” (yelling matches) with my kids. I was upset with something they did or didn’t do, or a result that didn’t happen as I expected. Heated exchanges abounded. I have maybe even been told once that I was the worst dad ever. And some of those times, I wouldn’t have disagreed either.

In some of those moments, I was able to ultimately rescue the situation, reaching down for the calm and handling it like a pro, with the flair and panache indicative of an awesome, happier parent, with the composure that

## *Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes*

would make a United Nations peacemaker proud. Good times.

Then there were times that I handled it, well, not in that way. No United Nations peacemaker awards. Instead, there was the lashing out, arguing, screaming, tantrums, and ultimatums. And that's just me. The kids, yup, them too. Those were not good times.

During the calm and meditative times in between, I wondered: Why could I not handle it in the calm way that I had done before? What caused my different reactions? What exactly was different? Was it my child's behavior? No, nothing there of much difference. They were the same energetic, inquisitive, persistent, argumentative, and hearing-selective kids they always have been. Was it me and my core values? No, nothing there of drastic difference. I was still the same guy trying to be the best dad possible, wanting to do my best to "bring forth" and "care for" my kids.

As I analyzed it further (**#computerengineer**), that's when it hit me: I was doing the best I could; that was not changing. Could it really be just my own abilities not being up to snuff, or the circumstances changing to where I was not equipped to handle it? Abilities can be taught, the important part being that the underlying core values were strong. Could it really be that simple?

Looked at another way: Circumstances, realistically, are infinite in nature, and realistically out of my control. My abilities, including the development of, the handling of, the learning of, and the practice of, are always in my control. *Was it really that simple?*

**"IF YOU GET TOO ENGROSSED AND INVOLVED AND CONCERNED IN REGARD  
TO THINGS OVER WHICH YOU HAVE NO CONTROL, IT WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT  
THE THINGS OVER WHICH YOU HAVE CONTROL."**

**— JOHN WOODEN, HALL OF FAME BASKETBALL COACH**

Another fantastic example: driving a car and making a left turn. Shall we break it down?

Learning how to make a left turn: The technical parts to it are not too complicated, and are consistent for any left turn you would need to make. Generally, you pull the car forward, slow or stop the car, turn the wheel left as

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you slowly accelerate, and generally make it more of a 90 degree turn instead of a 45-degree turn.

That said, now think about all the different circumstances in which you could be making a left turn. Realistically, the circumstances are infinite, and could be nerve wracking. Factors could include:

- Size of intersection
- What you are turning into (e.g., driveway, shopping center, another cross street)
- Crosswalks, marked or not
- Stop sign, yield sign, or traffic signal
- Pedestrians: How many? What kind?
- Time of day
- The number of lanes
- Designated left turn lane?
- The weather

Even if, physically, everything is identical, and say you make this turn every morning on the way to work, and every single thing is the same—same people, same pedestrians, same drivers, same cars, same weather—what about:

- Did you have a good day or bad day yesterday?
- Did you have a good morning or bad morning?
- Did you just experience an epic diaper changing fail?
- Did your favorite sports team win or lose?
- Did your open stock trade fly or crater?

And these situations change, and not just for you; there are situation changes for every single person in that intersection. In other words, when it comes to circumstance, there are too many possibilities to consider—infinite possibilities—and realistically, that is what I mean by “out of your control.” The good news? In our driving example, what you can control is your own abilities, your own safety measures, and your experience. The more you learn, practice, and experience, the more you learn not to just handle different situations, but also how to react to the situation. If things go as expected, you can react one way. If things do not go as expected, you can react a different way. Smooth like butta baby. **#NoMargarine #Butta**

## *Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes*

Can you see how the more I learn about driving, the more experience I have, and the more I practice, the better equipped I am to handle and react to whatever left-turn situations come at me?

More importantly, can you relate the above driving example to parenting?

Word for word: can you see how the more I learn about parenting, the more experience I have, and the more I practice, the better equipped I am to handle and react to whatever parenting circumstances come at me?

Hmmm ... VERY interesting, yes?

### **That's the good news!**

Now, before moving on, a few questions for you: What's your reason for coming here? What constitutes "happier" to you? Is it that you want to relate better with your kids? Perhaps you want to manage your time better? Do you want to feel less frustrated? Do you want more patience? Or, the very popular parent's desperate wish: "I just want to stop screaming at my kids."

I hope you see now: This chapter is here to help you realize you have every reason to be confident that you can accomplish these things. You are the parent that always does their best, given the circumstances and your abilities. Realize there are infinite possibilities, and realize this is a part of you learning, experiencing, and growing to handle and react. The rock-hard solid core is in place; now it's just adding to it. That's all there is to it.

How amazingly simple is that? I think that is pretty awesome!

**"PARENTS, GIVEN WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES THEY ARE IN,  
ALWAYS DO THE BEST THEY CAN, TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY."  
— THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH OF PARENTING**

## **I'll Take My Clothes Now, Scotty**

We've spent the last two chapters honoring you. The first was to help you take a step back and appreciate yourself as a parent and as a person, and this chapter was to go even deeper so you won't forget it.

The title of this chapter might seem strange and unrelated, but now I explain (drum roll) the secret sauce: It is the unique, strange, and entertaining visuals that really help lock in a concept. Silly Example: Can you hear the song "YMCA" without acting out the letters? Probably not. It's those silly and strong visuals and physical motions that can anchor ideas and emotions for us. Considering we've spent the last two chapters on some very important concepts, you are darn tootin' right we are going to lock this in.

Most of us are aware of the phrase "Beam me up, Scotty," a catchphrase that has long been a part of popular culture. If you aren't, the short version is that it originated from the show *Star Trek*, where Captain Kirk is often beamed down to planets, from his spaceship hovering above the planet. Now, Captain Kirk is one confident dude! He could be beamed into one of any unknown, random, unexpected circumstances, and yet when he gets beamed down, he still remains the same calm leader (with the same fun-to-impersonate, slightly staccato delivery of his lines).

One day, I came across the quote that is the title of this chapter, and the visual made me laugh: humorous and memorable. Can you imagine the technician, Scotty, playing a prank on Captain Kirk and beaming him down without his clothes? Kirk finds himself facing a huge horde of unfriendly looking aliens. He goes to pull his phaser from his pants pocket, only to see ... he has no pants on?!

But wait ... We then see that Captain Kirk does not panic. Oh no, not him. He's still the same calm and charismatic person inside. With a slow raise of his comm to his mouth, he whispers:

***"Very funny, Scotty; now beam me down my clothes."***

Lock in the above visual; yes, I know we may not want to imagine naked *Star Trek* actors, but imagine instead that you are now "Captain Parent." You are

## *Very Funny Scotty; Now Beam Me Down My Clothes*

beamed into unexpected and strange parenting circumstances (ever have the calm of an afternoon broken up by sudden skin crawling screaming and fighting amongst your kids?). And you are beamed in naked. Oh, I mean figuratively speaking; you know, the surprise of finding yourself unprepared in an unfamiliar situation. Yes, that's what I mean; not the other thing, like with public speaking where you are supposed to imagine your audience naked. (That doesn't work for reading anyway.)

Do you panic? No need to. Why? Because deep down underneath, you are still that same Captain Parent, and that same "spiritual parent" that can rely on the foundation that is the Universal Truth of Parenting. You are Captain Parent; you just got beamed in naked is all.

Now comes the fun part! Lock in this moment, this visual. Take a calm breath, raise your wrist to your mouth (because that's where your pretend comm device is), and whisper calmly and confidently:

***"Very funny, parenting universe. Now beam me down my parenting tips."***

Nice, right?

By the way, here is a fun fact: Did you know the effectiveness of locking in a concept is directly related to how outlandishly you act out the visual? For sure! So maybe, for funsies, do you want to take a moment and repeat the exercise again, but this time even better? It's all relative; whichever way you did it last time, up it a notch this time. Go right ahead. I'll wait.

Nice! In the future, just keep locking it in when you have a moment. And challenge yourself to keep upping the level of commitment in your visuals. If your level is just repeating the lines a few times, that's fantastic, AND it will serve you. You can up the level by physically raising your pretend-wrist-comm to your mouth, by saying the words out loud, by acting out the whole scenario in your head, or by full on physically acting it out. It's all relative to you, and each bit helps lock it in. Try a few things out and make it your own. This concept is the solid foundation for me to turn to when I need it, so it's a good one to lock in.

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And with that, WOW! We are at the end of Chapter 2. Already? Yup! And at this point, you are now locked and loaded and ready for the journey that is the rest of this book. With each page you now read, each tip you grab, each new “AHA!” you ponder, that is the parenting universe beaming you down more and more good stuff. Exciting? You betcha! Let’s now get to our activities and questions, shall we?

### **Activities & Questions:**

**Q: According to the BPI Network Study, statistically, how many parents suffer from burnout?**

A: The dreaded two in three, which also means, in that parent circle of three you’re standing in, to please remember to be kind.

### **#SupportYourFellowParents**

**Q: According to the Harris Poll Study, statistically speaking, how many parents do not feel “very confident” about their parenting?**

A: Two in three. Again, some harsh numbers, and helpful to know when you are standing next to two other parents.

### **#BeKindAlways**

**Q: What is the Universal Truth of Parenting?**

A: Parents, given whatever circumstances they are in, always do the best they can, to the best of their ability. This truth applies to you, and its purpose is for you to continue to KNOW what an awesome parent you are.

**Q: Why is this exciting?**

A: Because you are Captain Parent! Calm, cool, collected, charismatic, and once in a while, depending on the situation, naked. But the parenting universe is at your beck and call to help you out and keep beaming you help. In other words, the hard part is actually done. The rest is straightforward.

**Activity: “Very Funny, Parenting Universe. Now Beam Me Down Some Parenting Tips!”**

Just for fun, if you find the opportunity and inspiration, if a parenting situation ever comes up, such as the kiddoes fighting about something, why not walk over to the situation as “Captain Parent” ... Yes, make a beaming noise with your mouth; any sound effect will do. Then take a look at the aliens in front of you, aka the kids, and then lift your wrist comm to your mouth and say out loud in your best Captain Kirk impersonation: “Very funny, parenting universe. Now beam me down my tips.”

It is quite possible that the entire situation might resolve itself before you even get that far; you’ll know by the quizzical looks your in-house aliens will give you (and then they forget whatever superficial argument they were involved in). Oh, and by the way, this type of parenting tip is covered later when we talk about Pattern Interrupts! Woot, looking forward to that!

For now, the activity is to look for opportunities to use this visual to lock in your Captain Parent persona! Sounds cheesy; in fact, as I’m writing this, I’m like, “Dude, bro, sounds cheesy.” But TRY IT! Even if it’s at the engagement level of a visual in your head, please try it. You might like it! And you might find that it works well for you!

## **What’s Next?**

We’ve spent the first chapter lauding you for being a great parent. We’ve spent this chapter doing a deeper dive and seriously finding out why you are worthy of being commended, and from there seeing that it may not be so complicated after all, once you see that the rock-hard core spiritual parent in you is in place. Which means it’s now the time you’ve been waiting for: The starter pistol is about to go off! The next chapter, we hit the ground running as I unveil the 3 simple steps to happier parenting. You ready? Great, I’ll see you there!

Don’t forget to head over to my book website to get your free book bonuses!  
<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

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*One of my favorite family costume photos! And now that the kids have outgrown these “Incredibles” costumes, I think one day I’m going to print out the letters “C” and “P” and tape them to my costume. That’s right: create my own “Captain Parent” costume. Beam me down those tips Universe! **#CaptainParent***

## Chapter 3

### Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner

*“Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children, and now I have six children and no theories.”*

– John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

Welcome to the 3-Step SOS Method to Happier Parenting



And here we are! Very nice, don't you think? It's even nicer in color. **#HINT** And oh yay! You can get the full color, high resolution, print-ready version at the book bonuses! **#WOOHOO**

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

## *Happier Parenting*

What is the purpose of the 3 simple **SOS** steps to happier parenting? But of course! It is to increase your parenting toolset, to help prepare you to handle and react. To go with our silly visual of Captain Parent, you will have more than just your undies when you get beamed to the variety of unpredictable parental circumstances (now that's a statement I never thought I'd see in a parenting book!). The 3 steps will magically start adding outfits and accessories to your "beam down" closet. Let's have a closer look:

**SOS = SELF, OTHERS, SMILES**

**S** is for *love* and *respect* of **SELF**

**O** is for *love* and *respect* of **OTHERS**

**S** is for *love* and *respect* of **SMILES**

**S** is for **SELF**

**O** is for **OTHERS**

**S** is for **SMILES**

**SELF**

**OTHER**

**SMILES**

(As a side-note: When you read the above, if you detect a bit of "Dora the Explorer" type rhythm, you wouldn't be wrong. That stuff gets stuck in your head, even after all these years. Darn you, Dora, and your fun catchy tunes!) Let's have a look. It's very simple. And that's by design. Simple to remember, simple to do. And you may have caught that the focus is not just on being a happier parent, but also being a happier person. Being a happier parent starts with being a happier you. Here is the brief overview, and then we will dedicate a chapter to each step.

**STEP 1: Love and Respect of SELF:** The absolute necessary foundation for happiness. If you have experience in self-help or personal development, then you likely have come across the concept of *Self-Love* and its importance.

When we go into more detail, I will describe my personal three building blocks for Love of **SELF**:

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

### SELF Building Blocks:

1. Celebrate Yourself
2. Make It Positive
3. Personal Development

Yes, *Self-Love* can be challenging for some (author included). And maybe even counter-intuitive. After all, that was also my first thought when I was first presented with this idea. The big picture tip here is to simply keep practicing loving yourself and see what happens!

**“IF YOUR COMPASSION DOES NOT INCLUDE YOURSELF, IT IS INCOMPLETE.”**

**– JACK KORNFELD, BUDDHA’S LITTLE INSTRUCTION BOOK**

**STEP 2: Love and Respect of *OTHERS*:** Respectful relationships with things external to us is vitally important: people, places, things around us. For this book, a specific “Other” for us would be “Offspring,” the child in our care we are invested in “*bringing forth and caring for.*” Do you have hopes for a happier world? This is a big quantum soup we are a part of, so those hopes can happen when we invest in things beyond ourselves, and not necessarily at the expense of ourselves (*i.e., Step 2 not at the expense of Step 1!*)

My personal building blocks for this section are as follows:

### OTHERS Building Blocks

1. Deposits and Withdrawals
2. Enable Choices
3. Credibility and Humility

This area definitely covers some of the most mind-blowing parental concepts I’ve learned, and I’m looking forward to this section.

**“IN LIFE, IT’S NOT WHERE YOU GO; IT’S WHO YOU TRAVEL WITH.”**

**– CHARLES M. SCHULZ, CREATOR OF THE COMIC STRIP “PEANUTS”**

**STEP 3: Love and Respect of *SMILES*:** This one is as important for your child as it is for you. Keep the smiles in your life. We always hear about our “inner

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child.” Guess what? You are still that child. You just have layers and layers on top of your inner child, called experience, societal norms, and lessons “learned.” These layers are like the box that houses our brain, which happens to be that same box we are often encouraged to think outside of. (Funny that!)

My personal building blocks for this section:

### **SMILES Building Blocks**

1. Go with the Flow
2. Pattern Interrupts
3. PLAY!

This area is especially important as it is easy to forget that your inner child is still around; but it’s with you in all those daily battles in adult life, including those battles in the trenches of parenthood. This section is to help you take a step back, realize what is beautiful and blessed, and to keep smiling.

**“WHEN IN DOUBT, MAKE FUNNY FACES.”**

– **AMY POEHLER, COMEDIAN**

All three **SOS** steps are simple for a reason: easy to remember, and easy to take action. As you get more comfortable and familiar with the idea of **SOS**, and start out with my own building blocks, don’t be surprised if you start coming up with your own “building blocks,” customized to your own style and panache.

The big picture is that if all you take away are these **SOS** concepts themselves, meaning you continue to work on “**S**elf,” “**O**thers,” and “**S**miles,” in a way that resonates with you, I would say that you already have the win. That alone will help you to continue to reach higher levels of calmer and happier parenting for the rest of your life.

### **Mindset Shifts and Exercises, Like Peas and Carrots**

There are two key components to each of the **SOS** steps and their corresponding blocks: the exercises, and the mindset shifts. The exercises, you

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

can think of as a “How to Do” type activity. The mindset shifts, you can think of as a “How to Think” type activity.

Now, you might be asking, which one is more important? Which one do I start out with? That is a fantastic question, and I’m glad you asked! Let’s take a closer look at both the “How to Do” and the “How to Think.”

### ***Why the Exercises? (aka the “How to Do”)***

*“There is no substitute for experience.”*

*“Learning by doing is the best way to go.”*

The above are popular sayings, and I 100% agree. There is the obvious benefit of persistent daily activity, which is the incremental work to get something done: If you lay one brick down a day, in 100 days, you will have a 100-brick wall. That’s not bad at all. And it’s pretty simple, and linear too. The trick is then to just make sure to get these daily activities in. Fortunately, it’s not as hard as you might think.

I’ve refined a fairly easy and systematic way to get these daily activities in. From my own experience, I’ve found that there are a lot of activities that can be chunked down to 5-minute, 10-minute, or 15-minute windows, and so on. For me, some examples are: going for walks, doing pushups, meditating, and reading books.

I have found that even with small pockets of time, if done daily, fantastic results await. The 5-minute timeframe mindset for me is one of the most powerful to be able to fit in daily tasks. My brain has convinced myself that, at any time, someone can always take 5 minutes to do something. It’s just an eensy-weensy tiny five minutes! What can you accomplish in those 5 minutes? Over the long haul, it’s astonishing what you can do. And that’s just in five minutes. The big picture is to get those daily chunks in, whatever time chunk works for you. Let’s use the example of reading books. My current reading list is about 22 books and comes mostly from the aforementioned **Chris** and **Chris**, and their podcast, *Investing from the Beach*. The “Chris and Chris” plan to tackle the reading list is a great example of daily chunks: plan out a daily quota of reading so that I will finish a book every 20 to 30 days. Basically, take the pages in the

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book, divide by 20, and that's my daily reading activity. This comes out to about 10 to 20 minutes per day of reading for me. I was surprised that this not only made things more manageable, but I've found there to be many additional **surprise benefits** with this daily activity model:

- *Maintaining the habit was easier.* I was surprised how easy it was to schedule my daily chunk of reading. Sometimes it's harder to schedule a one-hour meeting once a week, but how about a 15-minute break once a day? Maybe 5-minute breaks three times a day? I call these my "coffee breaks." Who doesn't like quick (and maybe not so quick) coffee breaks? The chunking into small daily timeframes made things easier for me to keep the consistency up, to the point where I've now started calling these my "coffee break readings." I've extended this to "coffee break pushups," "coffee break stretching," and "coffee break fantasy football team management and roster churning."

### #YupSnuckThatLastOneIn

### #WaiverWireDay

- *Does this carry over to our 3-step SOS?* For sure! Some of the exercises and activities can take as little as a few minutes a day. And if you don't remember the specifics, just remember "Self," "Others," and "Smiles." Each day, spend a minute or two, or more, on something you deem worthy of the categories "Self," "Others," and "Smiles." This system is designed to keep things simple and easy (phew!), because that's how it can be sustainable in the long run.
- *Maintaining the joy in the activity was easier.* For people who sometimes struggle to get to the gym to workout (\*raises hand\*), I've found there is a common thread amongst us: "I do enjoy working out at the gym; it's just the getting to the gym that can be tough, but once I am there, I love it." Sound familiar? This transcends to other parts of life too, not just going to the gym.

The "coffee break" time management method wins here. For my daily reading, I found it easier to include it when it was as long as a "coffee break." And once the book was open and I was reading, time would fly by. I would hit my page allotment in no time, and sometimes would just

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keep going. Kind of like how, once I was at the gym, I would sometimes want to stay and work out more, just because I was already there. Very cool!

- *Does this carry over to our 3-step SOS?* You bet it does! Because doing **SOS** daily will not just keep your activity up but will also remind you how much you enjoy doing it. It might be after you are finished for the day with doing some **SOS**, and you might find you'll want to put in a few more while you're there. For me, I love wrestling with my boys. During my work day, I take 5-minute breaks to play and wrestle with them. Guess how often I end up going beyond the 5 minutes once I'm in there in a savage tickle-wrestle-fight laugh fest? Yup.
- *Maintaining a higher vibration and energy was easier.* For me, the most unexpected bonus was the continued vibration at a high level of development, and how easy it was to maintain those higher frequencies. I'll use the reading as an example. Doing my reading daily, I felt like I was getting 10+ minute coaching sessions from these authors, on a daily basis. I was getting "hang out" time with these authors every day, and as the days continued, each session continued to build positivity and energy. That's just an example of how continuing habits daily allows your vibrations and energy to build upon the previous day.
- *Does this carry over to our 3-step SOS?* But of course! As your happier parenting rises, and your happier person rises, the energy and momentum will rise. Whether it's you feeling it or those around you feeling it (especially your family and kids!), that energy can be fed off of and create more energy. In a negative energy example, I've noticed with me and my kids that it's rare that my kids ever scream first. It is usually me. It may not be that specific situation where I screamed first, but maybe I did it the previous day and then they picked up on it. Yes, the "monkey see, monkey do" effect! The good side of that is the more I change and create, the higher positive vibration of energy, and the more those around me will feel it as well, including my kids!

**"HAPPINESS IS THE ONLY THING THAT MULTIPLIES WHEN YOU SHARE IT."**

**— ALBERT SCHWEITZER, NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER, PHILOSOPHY**

## *Happier Parenting*

### ***Why the Mindset Shifts? (aka the “How to Think”)***

My favorite analogy to compare the “How to Do” to the “How to Think”: Think of your home and the furniture in it. Now picture that you decide to replace your old couch with a new couch. The new couch is exciting! And it will change things up a bit in the room. This is like a “How to Do”: neat little fun change. Now imagine that you get a NEW HOUSE! No new furniture, all the same furniture, put into an entirely new house: EVERYTHING looks new and different. That’s a mindset shift. Same furniture, brand new home: Everything can take on a new context, basically a new perspective. That is a “How to Think.”

**“NO PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED FROM  
THE SAME LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS THAT CREATED IT.”  
– ALBERT EINSTEIN, PHYSICIST**

Let’s try a little exercise in perspective and mindset. Have a look at this picture:



One weekend, I had the three kids to myself, as Sheri was out of town for a business convention. I took the kids to a housewarming, and naturally they started running amuck and having fun. Of course, as all parents know, the best way to get your kids gathered into a spot is to just lie down.

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

**“IF YOU LIE DOWN, THEY WILL COME.”**

**– FIELD OF DREAMS (KINDA SORTA)**

And true to form, the kids “somehow” found me and started climbing on top of me. During all the fun, someone took the picture of us on the previous page, which I loved so much; and I, of course, posted it on my social media.

***Here’s the question:*** How would you caption this picture? What do you see? What comment would you leave on my social media for this picture?

Don’t move on until you’ve thought of a caption or comment!

Good to go? Great! The most common comment and reaction, besides the laughter (ha ha!), was something along these lines:

*“Wow, they already got to you, huh?”*

*“No bones broken yet, right?”*

*“3 on 1 pig pile! Wow, you’re going to have your hands full!”*

I enjoyed reading all the comments, of course (I love social media!). I was also a bit surprised that not as many people as I expected caught on to what was going on in the photo. Eventually, someone commented what I was looking for:

*“Wow, you’re a genius! You figured out how to keep them entertained while you snuck in a mini-nap!”*

That’s right, baby! **#StillWasAnExhaustingWeekend**

If you saw it, awesome. If you didn’t, even better, because you now have a *new mindset shift!* Think about it: Any other examples now of getting to play with your kids AND sneaking in a nap? This is the power of “How to Think.” The mindset is, “Hey, I can play a game AND get a moment of rest. COOL!” Now ask yourself, “Hey, is there a “parent getting a moment of rest” possibility

## *Happier Parenting*

in all the other games I play with my kids?”

I'll give you another example: hide and seek. My kids have grown to love fooling Dad, so they are always the hiders and I'm the seeker. And of course, to be fair, it is best for me to count to 30. Slowly.

And another fun little example, this time making it part of the game: I have *somehow* gotten the kids to realize that when they massage my shoulders, no matter how hard I try to stay awake, I fall asleep! Dad tries to resist. Dad tries to resist. And then ... Zzzzzzzz. Dad is OUT. Wow, my kids outsmarted Dad *again*! They then run off laughing. Sure, part of the game is finding something funny to put in Dad's hand and then waking him up, because Dad always wakes up surprised: "AIIIEE! WHO PUT THIS IN MY HAND?!" which of course means they immediately massage my shoulder and "make" me fall asleep again, before running off gleefully to find what else they can put in Dad's hand while he's "asleep."

For Dad, sure it's a nice 10 to 20-second break. Oh wait, did you know that kids, when they find something fun, love to repeat that something fun, over and over again? Cumulatively, you could turn this into a nice five-minute (or longer!) break/nap where *you are supposed to lie down by yourself* until they come back.

**#BuyThatForADollar**  
**#RealPowerNapping**

This is an example of how once the mind is open to a new way of thinking, it is expanded, and once expanded can never contract. All the current tips and tools you already have can take on new meaning. That's the power of a mindset shift!

***Which is better: the exercises or the mindset shifts?***

Big picture answer: Both are better. That's honestly my first response, even if that doesn't make sense. BOTH are better. The more logical response: Both are important. Both have distinct advantages, so definitely spend time on both. Do not favor one over the other.

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

***When it comes to exercises***, absolutely they help. You can easily hit the ground running with the exercises. And just by doing these on a daily basis, just minutes per day, the mindset shift can happen over time while you get all the benefits of daily experience. In fact, for some of you, hitting the ground running might be the best way. It doesn't have to be perfect; it doesn't have to be pretty. It doesn't have to be overanalyzed or overthought. As long as it's being done, you're golden.

My favorite example: our Peloton bike. **#Woohoo!** I love our Peloton; there are amazing instructors and a huge variety of programs. As a newbie, though, I remember feeling overwhelmed: All those different techniques, methods, positions, postures—well, it was sometimes confusing, and once in a while even got me flustered during a workout.

Fortunately, in one of my earlier rides, an instructor (who is now my favorite instructor!!) laid it out pretty simply, and I now think this quote applies to just about anything.

**“JUST TURN THE PEDALS. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED.  
IT CAN BE THAT SIMPLE. JUST KEEP TURNING THOSE PEDALS.”  
— SAM YO, FITNESS COACH, PELOTON INSTRUCTOR**

This immediately allowed me to give myself some grace, and helped me realize that I can just do my best to interpret what's going on, and have faith it will work itself out. This is the perfect mantra for the exercises, the “How to Do.” Sometimes you just want to hit the ground running. It doesn't have to be perfect. It doesn't need overthinking. Just turn the pedals.

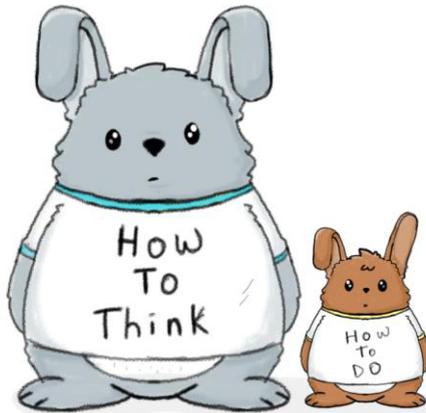
***When it comes to the mindset shifts***, these are essential, especially for the long haul. Just think back to the furniture thought exercise: new furniture each day in the same old house, compared to one brand new house full of the same furniture. The new house is one snap change, and creates a huge number of new contexts for you. This is why mindset shifts are such huge and powerful agents of change.

In short, both are helpful, and I encourage you to work on both in parallel.

## Happier Parenting

From an importance standpoint, I again reference the *Investing from the Beach* podcast, by Chris and Chris. They are the ones that first brought the phrases, “How to Do” and “How to Think,” into my vernacular. From their years of experience of teaching stock trading, the formula for success in pretty much anything is only 5% on “How to Do,” and is mostly in the 95% on “How to Think.” That’s a pretty big ratio, a 95/5. At the same time, it’s a great indication of how powerful mindset shifts are in creating change, and setting you up in the long term for success.

And guess what!? Just to lock it in, I have a most memorable of visuals for you.



(Awww cute!!!)

**#HowToDoPlush**

**#HowToThinkPlush**

**#MerchandisingOpportunity**

By the way, do you realize we have already explored a “How to Think” mindset shift example? Yes, we did! Just a few pages back, I presented a “How to Think” mindset shift on how to get your daily “How to Do” activity in. Do you remember it?

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

My mindset shift was that I convinced myself that at any time, I can always take five minutes away from what I was doing, to do something else. It's only for five minutes. My mind convinced me: It's just an eensy weensy tiny 5 minutes. Anytime, anywhere, 5 minutes. That is an example of a mindset shift. And so far, it has helped me work in so many productive habits: reading, meditation, exercises, playing with my kids, and so on. The "anybody can make 5 minutes at any time," aka the "coffee break" mindset shift, has had an AMAZING influence on my life.

Ready for another mindset shift example? Great! One of my favorite examples is below.

### **My Marie Kondo Story**

For months, my wife, Sheri, had been wanting to tidy up our place. I agreed it was more than a tad bit cluttered. I knew I liked the idea of cleaning our place, but it wasn't something I naturally found to be fun. It was one of those things I just needed to be in the mood for.

Sheri was headed out of town on a business convention, so we agreed that we would both read Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. We also agreed that when she got back, we would work on tidying our house. I thought it was a good plan and, of course, I agreed. Sheri also made me promise I wouldn't start tidying until she got back. Now, honestly, this befuddled me because, well, having been married for 10+ years, she knew I was already not a tidying type of person. My waiting for her to get back? No problemo! Did I mention that tidying wasn't something I naturally found to be fun?

**By the way:** I have to say, though, that good old Albert Einstein famously quipped: "If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?" **#GoAlbert**

So, here I was, reading Marie Kondo's book. I was expecting some sort of tips or tricks on how to more easily tidy things; maybe some "one shot" tidying tips and how to more easily manage and regulate this going forward, and work it within a schedule. In other words, I was in "How to Do" thinking mode.

## *Happier Parenting*

To my surprise, what I was reading was not tips. Marie Kondo was working instead on selling me on her idea of tidying, and her proclamation that with the magic of tidying, you only need to do it once. Once you've done it, you will never have to do it again.

I was like ... huh? How was that even possible? Tidying was like dishes: You clean them, they always get dirty, and you clean them again. Or, you know, like having kids. You clean the playroom, and you clean it again 30 minutes later. Where were my tips? You're saying tidy ... only once?

**#Skeptical**  
**#NotABeliever**

Fast forward about 50 pages. And ...

**#Believer**

Tidy once, and you're done. "How to Think" mindset shift presented and accepted. I could see it and believe it now. Not only did I believe it, I was excited to do it! Not only was I excited to do it, but I didn't even want to wait for Sheri to return home from her convention. I wanted to start tidying right away. I did manage to keep disciplined and hold off ... *UNTIL* ... I got to the part about the socks—OH, MAN, THE SOCKS! At which point I actually put the book down *mid-page* and went to my sock drawer and tidied my socks.

**"I TIDIED MY SOCKS JUST NOW BECAUSE WHEN YOU REALIZE  
YOU WANT TO TIDY YOUR SOCKS FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE,  
YOU WANT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE TO START AS SOON AS POSSIBLE."  
— WHEN HARRY MET SALLY (KINDA SORTA)**

The point of this story is that it was not some magical "How to Do" tip that got me all excited to tidy my socks. Marie Kondo introduced me to a "How to Think." She presented something entirely new to me on how to think about the items in my house, especially the socks, and this mindset shift ended up being an incredible agent of change. I mean, I not only did not wait for Sheri to get back, I actually put the book down mid-page so I could go tidy my sock drawer!

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

I hope this section gets you excited, not just about how you can hit the ground running with the exercises, but also about the potential power of the mindset shifts that lie ahead for you.

In fact, did you notice we spent the first two chapters on the parenting mindset? The structure of these first few chapters is by design. By introducing the concepts of the “spiritual parent” and the “Universal Truth of Parenting,” we are exploring two very special “How to Think” about parenting. It was imperative to me to start you out with the mindset shift that you are already an awesome and amazing parent. This is how I started my journey as well, and this is the groundwork for what the rest of this book will bring you.

Now, before we go on, I have one important ground rule we all must follow to get the most out of this book:

### **Steal My Dance Moves and Make Them Your Own**

That’s right, the most important ground rule: *Steal my dance moves and make them your own!* (Bet you never thought you’d hear that in a parenting book!) Okay, maybe a clarification is in order. Let’s back it up a bit to the real most important ground rule of this book:

#### **I won’t be telling you the truth.**

Again, maybe something you were not expecting to see in a parenting book? Or any kind of personal development book? It is most certainly true. What I promise is this:

#### **I WILL be telling you MY truth.**

I promise you I am not here to change how you do things. I’m not here to change your mind or force anything on you. I am here to share with you my truths: my mindset shifts and exercises that have helped me tremendously, and my stories that I have laughed at and learned from. What I would love more than anything else is simply for you to absorb it, soak it in, try out a few exercises and mindset shifts, ponder them, see what suits you, and use my book to help you create your truth. **This book is your happier parent sidekick.**

## *Happier Parenting*

Just as my truth is mine to create, your truth is yours to create. And the fun part is that you can make it what you want; I am simply acting as your “happier parent wingman” through my book.

Your life.

Your stories.

Your lessons.

### ***YOUR TRUTH***

The best story I have, to nail this concept down: SWING DANCE MOVES. And *STEALING THEM*.

This idea comes courtesy of the most legendary swing dancer and Lindy Hopper of all time: Frankie Manning. When Lindy Hop made its revival in the 1980s, Frankie Manning, one of the best Lindy Hoppers of the original era, back in the 1920s and 1930s, was actually still alive! While he had stopped dancing after World War II, he was eventually coaxed out of “dance” retirement. And we, in the swing dance world, are certainly happy he was! He became a worldwide ambassador of Lindy Hop, and happily taught all around the world at the largest swing dance events. Lindy communities all over the world would fly him out just to take his lessons and hear his stories.

Sheri and I were fortunate to be able to take a number of classes with him, and attend a number of Q&A sessions with him. One thing that always struck me was how he described Lindy Hop in his day: It wasn’t a formal dance that was ever taught; it was just done.

*You just did it.*

Frankie loved telling the story about how he would sit and watch other dancers, and if one of his friends did a fancy move that he liked, he’d “steal” it. He would try it out, and he would tweak things—some things worked, some things didn’t—and eventually he would figure out how it worked for him. A few weeks later, his friend would see Frankie do that move, and he would say, “Hey, that’s a cool move. Where’d you learn it?” He’d laugh and reply, “I stole it from you!”

## *Nobody Puts Happy in a Corner*

If you think about it, parenting can be a whole lot like Lindy Hop and Frankie's new moves. We can see this by reading the below, twice—the first in the context of Frankie learning dance moves, and the second in the context of developing yourself as a parent:

- You're not formally taught. You just do it.
- Looking for new ideas? Observe others, find one, steal it, and make it your own.
- Sometimes things work out. Sometimes you fall on your butt.
- No matter what, you just keep learning, and keep on dancing and having fun.

I think that's pretty amazing. We preach Frankie's fun spirit in our dance classes, and we carry it over to the rest of our lives. Keep it fun: fun to figure out, fun to fall on your butt, fun to learn, fun to observe and steal moves, fun to make them your own—and no matter what, just stay out there on the dance floor and have a good time. If you keep that all in mind when it comes to parenting, then you're definitely going to rock this journey to happier parenting!

Congratulations on making it to the end of Chapter 3! Time for some questions and activities.

### **Activities & Questions:**

**Q: What does SOS stand for?**

**A: SELF. OTHERS. SMILES!!!**

**Q: Regarding "SELF," "OTHERS," and "SMILES," which do I work on first?**

**A:** It is important to work on all three of the **SOS**. For me, personally, if I had to pick one that I think is the most important, it would be the *Self-Love*. Not coincidentally, this is usually the most challenging one as well, myself included. I developed a lot of insecurities growing up, which I see now as the source of a lot of the parenting challenges I've been working through. That said, they are all important, and I definitely encourage you to work on all three in parallel.

**Q: Why mindset shifts?**

A: Mindset shifts are powerful agents of change. We explored a few fun examples, such as the “house and furniture” example. I snuck in that 5-minute “coffee break” mindset shift. And then I told my lovely Marie Kondo “socks” mindset shift story, one so powerful that I put a book down mid-page to tidy my socks! Mindset shifts are most definitely powerful agents of change.

**Q: Why the exercises?**

A: The exercises are the easiest way to hit the ground running and give you immediate positive feedback and reinforcement. Daily activity, even for minutes, keeps you in that energy and helps you move forward instead of backwards. This goes back to the idea that it is easier to maintain a car at 60 mph than to repeatedly take the car from 0 mph to 60 mph, to 0 mph to 60 mph, and so on.

**ACTIVITY: “Sock Puppet Theater”**

Yes, we are re-visiting Marie Kondo, to give you a great exercise to get you tallies on all three **SOS** activities in only just a few minutes. Introducing ... SOCK PUPPET THEATER!! Ha, and I’m not kidding. Here’s how it goes: I deliberately did not yet share with you the exact mindset shift I got from the Marie Kondo book. However, I will give you this exercise for you to explore this for yourself. It’s possible you might figure out the mindset shift, you will at least get some good **SOS** activity in.

The activity: Put socks on your hands and have a conversation. First, realize that you are the one putting the words in the socks’ mouths. So, yay, what a gift! Some great **SELF-LOVE** opportunity there! You can have your socks give you some nice compliments: “Hey, whassup Stud-Muffin!” Then ask them how they’re doing. Ask them if there’s anything you can do for them. You might be surprised: “You know, the way you’ve been crumpling me and stuffing me in the drawer, kind of gives me a headache.” It might seem kind of silly, but try it out. Okay, yeah, it really is kind of silly. Still, try it out! If you can empathize with a sock, who knows what can develop after that. You can definitely get all three of the **SOS** aspects in here: **SELF-LOVE** (*your sock gave you an awesome compliment, right?*), **Love of Others** (i.e., things external to you, like a sock),

and do I even need to mention the **Silly** aspect of this? There you go, all three **SOS**: check!

### **What's Next?**

Ta-DAAA!! The simple 3-step **SOS** method has been revealed! If all you take away from this book is just putting thought into doing some sort of **SOS** on a daily basis, you are already rocking this. And there is still so much more book goodness to come! **#GotYourBack**. The next three chapters will go into each of the **SOS** steps in detail: There is a “**Self**” chapter, an “**Others**” chapter, and a “**Smiles**” chapter, each with a breakdown of mindset shifts and building blocks. Believe me, these are three very awesome “in the trenches” chapters waiting for you.

And don't forget your book bonuses—more supplemental content for you! And of course, your full color, high resolution, and print-ready “3 simple **SOS** steps” diagram awaits! You can get them here now:

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

It's time to get to the next chapter and our favorite subject, our**SELF**s! Curious? Good, me too! Let's race over to the next chapter and get started on our **SelfOtherSmiles** adventures. See you there!

## Happier Parenting



*I proudly present to you a few of our tidying photos. The whole family did a “tidy” of our clothes, and to this day, our clothes remain nicely folded and tidy on a regular basis! (And see my socks? They are so happy!)*

## Chapter 4

### Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)

*“If your kids are giving you a headache, follow the directions on the aspirin bottle, especially the part that says ‘keep away from children.’”*

– Susan Savannah, Author

Welcome to Chapter 4, where we get to talk about our favorite subject: OURSELVES! Don’t be shy about it; this one is all about you.



#### Talking with Myself (Oh-Oh, Oh-Oh)

Question for you: How often do you compliment others in a day? What kind of compliments do you give? Also, what kind of compliments do you get? Safe to say, some typical examples might be:

*“Great job on the conference call.”*

*“That’s so nice of you to hold the door open; thank you.”*

*“Wow, you look sharp in those neon shoes!”*

## **#YupSnuckThatLastOneIn**

Giving and receiving compliments is fun, and it boosts the ego a bit, right? Feels nice.

Now, the more interesting question: How often do you compliment yourself? How often do you tell yourself nice things? How often do you congratulate yourself? Have you ever said the following to yourself?

*“Great job on that conference call.”*

*“That’s so nice of you to hold that door open; thank you.”*

*“Wow, you look sharp in those neon shoes!”*

Likely not as often? You’re not alone. It is common that self-congrats are reserved for the most epic and monumental of accomplishments, and even then, the epic accomplishments usually are rewarded with less-than-epic self-compliments.

Let’s look at the flip side of the coin: the opposite of saying something nice. When was the last time you insulted someone? Or they insulted you? I think we can agree that this is not common. Not even in the most epic and monumental of failures, are we likely to insult someone. We are generally polite and civil.

Now, when is the last time we insulted ourselves? What have you done recently for which you beat yourself over the head the rest of the day? Was the level of “failure” even close to commiserate with the level of self-insult?

For me, growing up (meaning from when I was young up until ... well, what time is it right now?), I definitely was one to beat myself up over minor “silly” or “stupid” things. I would carry those around with me for hours, sometimes days, and sometimes even much longer. Heck, when I was 13, I called this girl I had a crush on, and ... let’s just say, **#FAIL**. And I carried that weight of embarrassment around for many years. Thankfully, these days, it’s a great story to tell, with great lessons in there too.

(Wow, it is true: Tragedy + Time = Comedy!)

## *Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*

Let's take a pause here for you. Give some thought please to the compliments and insults you give others, and to the compliments and insults you give yourselves, as well as the level of "accomplishment" required for those compliments and insults with others, and with yourself. Please spend some time thinking about the disparity and disproportion—the level of good/bad thing someone else does, and the level of compliment/insult we give them—compared to the level of good/bad thing we ourselves do, and the level of compliment/insult we give ourselves. Take a moment to think about it before moving on.

Alright, you got some good thinking in? Awesome. This is some great and important info to think about as we move forward through this chapter, so great job and a big thank you for doing that. **#HIGHFIVE**. Shall we continue?

### **The Self-Love Mindset Shift**

In my wife's health and wellness social media group, I help run our periodic 11-day challenges. The best part? WOO, I get to come up with the daily tasks (YAY!). Usually around day 3, I spring on everyone the "compliment challenge": Give out 5 sincere compliments to 5 strangers. It can be about anything; it just has to be sincere. A few of the shyer folks may find it initially challenging; but in the end, everyone ends up really enjoying this one and has a lot of fun with it. (**#AWESOME**)

And ... of course, it's a trap. Because I then put my villain mustache on (**#MUHAHAHA**) and spring on them the next dastardly challenge: the "compliment yourself challenge." Come up with 5 compliments for yourself that day. Just about everyone finds this one much more challenging. Some people really struggle with it.

Oh, hey, bright idea! Let's actually try it right now! (**#SecondMUHAHAHA**)

Take a moment and please give yourself 5 compliments. It can be about anything; nothing is too small. It just has to be sincere. Go ahead and do it. And for extra credit, write them down on paper! Do it before moving on. Yes please. Seriously. **#Dolt #SeriouslySeriously**

## *Happier Parenting*

**“TALK TO YOURSELF LIKE YOU WOULD TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE.”**

— **BRENE BROWN, AUTHOR**

Alright, nice job. Was it challenging? Difficult? Maybe at first challenging, but easier as the ball got rolling? You definitely deserve another high five, for the great things about you that you just complimented yourself on, and for playing in full. **#HIGHFIVE**

With this in tow, let's start our *SELF-LOVE* mindset shifts. We fortunately have three amazing *SELF-LOVE* experts here to tell us all about it.

### **“ScreamFree” Starts with Self-Love**

Our first expert is Hal Runkel, author of *ScreamFree Parenting*. This book was my first exposure to *SELF-LOVE* as a parenting concept. It was after a particularly frustrating parental burnout that I found myself googling “parenting yell less.” Literally. The book title, *ScreamFree Parenting*, popped up one day, and I thought, “Hey. That would be nice. I would love to be free of screaming.” And I promptly purchased the book.

My expectations were that maybe it would be chock full of tips and tactics to manage kids better so that I wouldn't scream at them so much. Again, for some reason, I was looking for more “How to Dos.” And ... wow. I was not ready for what was in store. *Not. Even. Close.*

Lo and behold, it was a book full of super mega “AHA” moments: full of the “How to Thinks.” I started reading with anticipation and suspense, wondering what next gigantic mindset shift I would learn next. One of the biggest mindset shifts? *ScreamFree* helped me with the idea of working on what was in my control, as compared to what was not in my control, and one thing particularly well in my control was almighty *SELF-LOVE*.

## *Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*

**“WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHILDREN AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE; WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO THEM, HOWEVER, FOR THE CHOICES WE MAKE .... I LOVE ME, WORK ON ME, AND BUILD MYSELF UP SO THAT I CAN COME TO YOU FROM A POSITION OF WHOLENESS, A POSITION OF FULLNESS. I TAKE CARE OF ME SO THAT YOU DON’T HAVE TO. I AM THE ONLY ONE IN CHARGE OF ME AND MY WELL-BEING. THUS, I CAN FREE YOU FROM HAVING TO PROVIDE THOSE THINGS FOR ME. THUS, I CAN TRULY SERVE YOU WITHOUT NEEDING YOU TO SERVE ME.”**

**– HAL RUNKEL, AUTHOR**

### **Happier Parenting Means More Self High Fives**

Our second expert is Michael Nitti, author of *The Trophy Effect*. I was fortunate to see Michael speak about his book from stage. He spoke about how we as people do not celebrate ourselves often enough (i.e., give ourselves “good trophies”). When he talked to his clients, it was quite typical that only the most monumental and epic of achievements received self-awarded good trophies, and even then, they were just quickly brushed aside, not of the same proportion as the deed that earned them. Sound familiar?

On the flip side, we barely have any hesitation when giving ourselves bad trophies. For even the littlest non-epic, non-monumental things we may have done that day, the bad trophies come out by the truckload. Again, a disproportionate awarding of trophies. Sound familiar again?

I definitely was a chronic bad trophy giver. Heck, remember the embarrassing phone call at 13 years old? That’s one I not only awarded myself, but every week for years, I would go back and admire it, sometimes take it out, polish it, and cuddle with it, all the while piling in more new bad trophies. And all the while letting my many good-trophy-deserving achievements go ignored.

Part of the purpose of our **SELF-LOVE** study is to recondition our minds to not only see the good trophy moments, but to actually expect them all the time, to bias ourselves to awarding ourselves these good trophies constantly. It’s not that you’re actually doing anything new; you’ve always been doing these good things. It’s now just a matter-of reconditioning our minds to be aware of them, expect them, and make daily awards to ourselves of good trophies to develop our **SELF-LOVE**.

## *Happier Parenting*

**“THE SECRET TO LIFE IS TO REPLACE WANTING TO BE WHO YOU WISH YOU WERE, WITH SIMPLY BEING WHO YOU ALREADY ARE! ONCE YOU EMBRACE YOUR INHERENT MAGNIFICENCE, FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOURSELF IS INEVITABLE...”**

**— MICHAEL NITTI, AUTHOR**

My favorite trophy presentation, by the way, is the high five: quick, easy, portable, always available, universally recognized, and an easy physical action to anchor a trophy award. It is honestly surprising how much positive energy comes out of a simple high five. Make sure to incorporate them into your daily routine! **#HIGHFIVE #SELFHIGHFIVE**

### **Dr. Emoto’s Rice Experiment**

Our third expert is the late Dr. Masaru Emoto, author of *Messages in Water*, and featured expert in the documentary, *Secret of Water*. Dr. Emoto’s rice experiment is one of his many studies of water, and will really open your eyes to the power of how we talk, and this includes not just talking to others, such as our kids, but also to ourselves.

The experiment is simple: Find three containers. Place rice in each of the three containers, and then fill each one with enough water to cover the rice. One container is the Gratitude Container, one is the Insult Container, and one is the Ignored Container. (It helps to label them so that you don’t forget which is which!) For 30 days, every day, you do three things:

1. Gratitude Container: You say “thank you” to it.
2. Insult Container: You say “you’re an idiot” to it.
3. Ignored Container: You completely ignore it.

Dr. Emoto’s results were nothing less than astonishing, even within the first week!

1. Gratitude Container: The rice fermented and gave off a pleasant aroma.
2. Insult Container: The rice became covered in black mold.
3. Ignored Container: The rice was rotting, meaning that the rice had *died* and had started *decaying*.

## *Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*

This, by the way, caught my eye: The negative Insult Container would result in mold, but the Ignored Container would result in a change in the water that could not sustain life! Very interesting, no?

Try it for yourself so that you can see the results firsthand. If you like, you can also google “Dr. Emoto rice experiment,” as many people have posted their findings online. It is definitely eye-opening.

My daughter and I did the experiment, and our results are pictured below. Besides just saying the appropriate daily words to each container, I took it a step further. When I felt happy and thankful, I pictured the gratitude container in my head and would thank it. When I felt anger and rage about something, I pictured the Insult Container in my head and threw bad energy at it. As far as the Ignored Container, well, I never thought about the Ignored Container. (Except once or twice, out of curiosity, before steeling myself not to think about it; kind of like when someone says, “Hey, don’t think about an elephant,” and you have to fight off the urge to not think about an elephant. Yup, that.) Our results were definitely in line with Dr. Emoto’s studies. The color photos show this pretty well; I hope it comes out well in black and white too.

1. Gratitude Container: absorbed the water and gave off a fairly pleasant fermented smell.
2. Insult Container: was very black and moldy, and gave off a bit of a rusty stank smell.
3. Ignored Container: did not actually look too bad. There were spots of rot (?) or something on the back. However, upon opening it, EWWW! The smell was very strong, very pungent, and VERY unpleasant. It smelled like what I thought the Insult Container was going to smell like—burned my nose hairs, I’m pretty sure.



Container 1: Compliments and Gratitude

## Happier Parenting



Container 2: Insults and Hatred



Container 3: Ignore

By the way, notice the lovely emoji-faces I wrote on the labels? Nice, right? I seriously think those helped the experiment. “Gratitude” was always smiling at me—how could I not want to give him a “Hello” and a hearty smile?—while “Insult” was always sneering at me. I totally would see it sneering at me, and I somehow would turn De Niro on him: “Hey! You talkin’ to me?! YOU TALKIN’ TO ME?!” Then there was “Ignore,” which just seemed like it wanted to be left alone. But yeah, just a tip: The faces might help!

**Here’s the million-dollar question:** Consider again the three results:

1. Giving off a sweet scent, a reflection of being complimented.
2. Growing black mold, a reflection of being insulted.
3. Dying, rotting, and decaying, a reflection of being ignored.

How might these results manifest in your kids, as reactions to being complimented, insulted, or ignored? What would “black mold” of the soul look like? What would “rot and decay” of the soul look like? On the upside, what would a “pleasant scent” in the soul look like?

## *Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*

Picture yourself at a mall playground, in your mind's eye; remember back and observe: What were the kids doing that evoked positive or negative responses from the parents (especially the child that was ignored)? I think we've all observed (or even firsthand experienced \*raises hand\*) the child doing something he or she is so proud of—"Mommy! Daddy! Look at me!"—with the parent's response of, "Yeah, one sec ... busy" (aka ignorance).

**Now for the billion-dollar question:** How might these results manifest in YOU, your body, your brain, your spirit, your soul, and your health? What would your soul "growing mold" be like? What would your soul "rotting and decaying" be like? And on the bright side, what would your soul "smelling pleasant" be like? Following along with Michael Nitti's *The Trophy Effect*, it is common to focus our energy on bad stuff and give bad trophies, and also ignore the good stuff and award no good trophies. Where does this resonate with you?

You might be wondering: How closely does this apply to us? Sure, the above experiment is about rice and how water changes can be seen in the rice. To answer this, consider these three things:

First, it did not take much to change the energies in the water. Remember, this is an experiment of how different energies change water, and those changes in the water are easily seen in the changes in the rice. We see in the photos that the water changed very drastically, even though the samples were in sealed containers, and I was a good foot away and even more when I was talking to it or just putting thoughts toward it. And the results were after only 30 days.

Second, when it comes to talking and thoughts, consider that humans have over 6000 thoughts a day. The inner dialogs may happen so quickly that we may not even catch what we are telling ourselves. But does that mean our inner energies will not change and react to those 6000 thoughts a day?

Lastly, let's remember our biology: This was an experiment on how different energies can change water. Human bodies are, in fact, about 60% water.

That's some food (or rice!) for thought.

## *Happier Parenting*

**“WORDS ARE THE VIBRATIONS OF NATURE.  
THEREFORE, BEAUTIFUL WORDS CREATE BEAUTIFUL NATURE.  
UGLY WORDS CREATE UGLY NATURE. THIS IS THE ROOT OF THE UNIVERSE.”  
– DR. MASARU EMOTO, AUTHOR**

### **The Airlines Got It Right**

The brilliant concepts and findings of all three authors and researchers mentioned above, converge to one idea.

**Dr. Emoto** specifically reflects in his documentary that we should look at his research and use it to think about the energy we send to our kids. Are we sending love and “thank you” energy? Are we sending insulting energy? Or are we completely ignoring them? How about the energy we send to ourselves?

**Michael Nitti** and his book, *The Trophy Effect*, shows us how it is practically the norm for humanity to place way more attention on the bad (i.e., lots and lots of bad trophy awards), while at the same time leaving the good almost completely unnoticed (i.e., *ignored*). Are we starting to see how detrimental this can be? And how it could be quite valuable to flip the script on this, and **not** want to focus as much on “bad trophy” incidents, and at the same time **honor** the “good trophy” incidents?

**Hal Runkel** and his book, *ScreamFree Parenting*, ties this nicely together with an important lesson. He notes that most parental stress originates from the tendency to feel “responsible for” our children. When this happens, we are focusing a lot of energy on things external to us. If our happiness and love of life depends on things external to us, and thus outside of our control, is it any wonder that this would inevitably cause frustration? Hal Runkel talks about shifting the focus to knowing what we have within our control, and then being responsible to our children by being great examples, and not for our children by trying to force our choices on them. And when that focus is inward, and we develop ourselves, and love ourselves, we can truly be that calm and charismatic CAPTAIN PARENT, ready to handle any situation. Even if we’re naked.

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**#ThatsAMetaphor**

**#ExceptForTheTimesYourKidsBreakIntoTheBathroomWhileYoureUsingItThen  
ItsLiteral**

**#LongHashTagsWork**

In simpler terms, the sage advice of the flight cabin crew is quite spot-on!

**“SECURE YOUR MASK ON FIRST, AND THEN ASSIST THE OTHER PERSON.”**

**– PA ANNOUNCEMENTS STUDY GUIDE**

### **Building Block 1: Celebrate Yourself**

Imagine driving a car. All of a sudden you see a few large fallen rocks in the road. What do driving schools advise you to do? Keep your eyes on the clear areas!! Almost magically, you will navigate your car safely through the fallen rocks. What does human nature have us do? STARE at the rocks. And what happens, no matter how hard we try to dodge the obstruction? That’s right; we hit them.

When you focus on something, the energy surrounding that thing expands. Look at the open spaces; they will expand. Look at the rocks; they will expand. In parenting, what would serve you more—focusing and expanding the bad trophy-worthy or the good trophy-worthy? Yes, of course, the GOODNESS. How do we do that? Make sure to spend some focus and celebration on that awesome goodness! **#HIGHFIVE**

**“YOU YOURSELF, AS MUCH AS ANYBODY IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE, DESERVE YOUR LOVE  
AND AFFECTION.”**

**– BUDDHA**

### **Building Block 2: Make It Positive**

Celebrating yourself is the beginning of developing and nurturing a positive bias. With the 6000 thoughts a day going through our heads, which we may not even be aware of, what helps us is having that positive bias: the reflex to be positive first, not negative first; glass half full vs glass half empty. Or even better, just being thankful the glass of water is there!

## *Happier Parenting*

Here's a question to you parents: When you talk to your children, do you find you talk more about the negative, or the positive? Which occurs more often? Do you say things like, "Hey, awesome job brushing your teeth!" "Love how you can entertain yourself!" "You cleaned up your Legos! Nice!" Or are they more like, "No! Stop doing that!" "Hey, I told you to stop doing that!" "No! Out of that area right now!"

If you find yourself talking more positively than negatively, great! If you find yourself talking more negatively than positively, that is great too! Remember what we learned from Dr. Emoto: At least the talking habit is there, and we are not ignoring. And perhaps it is just a matter of flipping the negative to a positive. This doesn't mean we are all happy and all positive all the time; don't get me wrong. This is about bias: Which thoughts come first, positive or negative? And what comes out of your mouth more, positive or negative? If you think you could use more positive bias or positive expression, the good news is that this is a LOT easier than you might think! Did you know that every negative has a positive opportunity built in? It's already right there. They're neighbors.

Let's take an example of "putting toys away."

If you notice that your child left their toys out, and you tell them to put them away, that could be noticing a negative (and a correction). "Hey, don't leave your toys out! Put them away." The positive side of this? Well, if they do it, it's right there for the giving: "Hey, you just put your toys away! Thank you! That is awesome; you did that!" Not only that, imagine walking in a room, and it's clean. That can be an opportunity for a positive too. "Wow, I just noticed, there are no toys anywhere. Did you put your toys away the last time you used them? Wow, that is awesome! Thank you!" The opportunities are plentiful; it just takes a bit of practice to acknowledge them and award those trophies.

Here is my favorite example of switching from a negative to a positive bias.

### **The Time-Out Strikes Back**

Let's now bring in a fourth expert, none other than Jack Canfield, co-creator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series.

## *Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*

You have likely heard of time-outs, the type of punishment where if my child does something bad, such as fighting, I would tell my child to go sit in the corner and think about what they've done. Time-outs are a popular choice by today's parents to modify a child's behavior. They are based on B.F. Skinner's popular work in behavioral modification, and are usually accepted as the best way to decrease a bad behavior in a child. I am a big fan of behavioral psychology, and that is how I knew about time-outs and how awesome they are.

But are they REALLY that awesome? (Hint: Yes, mindset shift coming!)

First, a quick explanation of why time-outs are held in high esteem. Behavioral modification means first defining a target behavior; for example, kids fighting. Another example could be the kids doing their homework on time. After a target behavior is defined, then the modification is defined: Do you want to decrease it? Or increase it? For example, maybe the kids fighting is something you want to decrease. The completion of homework on time is something you want to increase.

For decreasing a target behavior, there are two methods. The first is the removal of something good, such as a time-out (removal of freedom), and this is called negative punishment. The second is the introduction of something bad, such as spanking (introduction of pain), and this is called positive punishment.

It has long been accepted that negative punishment (e.g., time-outs) is better than positive punishment (e.g., spanking) because it is less antagonizing and shows longer-term results. Translate that to parenting: A time-out is much preferred over something like spanking to "correct" a child's behavior.

### **#BehavioralPsych101**

Let's return back to me, the awesome dad, utilizer of the awesome "time-out," opting to have my kids sit or stand in a corner and think about what they just did.

### **#NegativePunishment4Life**

## *Happier Parenting*

I was at an event where Jack Canfield was the weekend keynote speaker. One afternoon, he walked us through some powerful experiential exercises, showing us the power of positive thought vs negative thought. It was quite amazing. After one particularly eye-opening negative thinking exercise, focusing on negative energy and how it affected our volunteer on stage negatively, Jack Canfield said, almost as if it was an afterthought:

**“THAT’S WHY TIME-OUTS DON’T WORK. TELLING SOMEONE TO GO TO THE CORNER AND THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY DID, FOCUSES ON WHAT A KID DOES WRONG INSTEAD OF WHAT HE DOES RIGHT.”**  
— JACK CANFIELD, AUTHOR, CO-CREATOR OF CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL

Umm ... WHAT?!?! What did he just say?! Oh, man, I was so glad I didn’t blink. That’s a heck of an “afterthought!” Time-outs are ... bad?

The next few moments, I didn’t catch much of what Jack Canfield talked about. I was too busy rethinking and making notes of my entire “time-out” protocol. I started thinking (and smiling) as the brainstormers flew into my notes, and I rewrote my new time-out protocol—it was so brilliant. And it was so simple. The idea took shape to flip the script, and I couldn’t wait to try it out! (Pins and needles here. Pins and needles.)

Sure enough, the next day when we were at home, one of my kids dropped something he was carrying, and the other picked it up and said, “Here you go.” As soon as it happened, I yelled, “HEY! Time-out!!!”

All three of my kids froze: concerned, scared, shocked! I could see that their brains were oh-so confused, wondering, “Oh, no! Did I do something bad?” Only to look at me and see a huge smile on my face.

*“HEY! You were really helpful! Let’s go to the corner and think about what you did!!!”*

I raced over to the “time-out” corner and started hollering and cheering and dancing. My kids’ confusion quickly turned to laughter, and they ran to the corner and jumped up and down with me. High fives abounded!

*“YAY, YAY! GOOD JOB!! THAT WAS AWESOME!! YAY! YAY!!!”*

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I can't even begin to explain the positive energy that resulted from this—not just for that day but for quite a while. Things went more smoothly, more cooperatively, and there was better communication. The goodness just kept flowing.

Now, imagine making this a practice: positive bias—when observing others, interacting with others, AND more importantly, observing yourself and interacting with yourself—the automatic habit of positive bias. Very powerful food for thought.

### **Building Block 3: Personal Development**

One of the best analogies I have seen about this is from the book, *Foundation: Love. Mindfulness. Meditation*, by Emilie Rawlings. In one of her accompanying meditations, she has us picture in our mind a vessel. This vessel fills itself with water from a river, and then is used to fill all the other vessels in the land. Non-stop, these vessels are coming to be filled; and this one vessel, responsible for filling itself from the river and filling the other vessels, just keeps plugging away, all day, every day. You can probably imagine at some point, if this vessel doesn't take time to stop, be cared for, polished, and mended, then it will eventually crack and break from its burden.

If you haven't guessed yet, this vessel is you. If you stopped for a moment and pictured yourself as this vessel, how would that story unfold? Would you eventually crack and break? Are there times you stop the other vessels so you can polish yourself up? Do you say, "Hey, you vessels! You're all talking to me at the same time! STOP! Give me a moment! I haven't even gotten out of my pajamas yet!!" Can you picture yourself as this vessel, continuing to be burdened, and eventually cracking? Yes? And this is why it is so important to continue to work on *SELF-LOVE*, and to continue to work on yourself. (At which point, perhaps the vessel then sneaks in a game of hide and seek, and plays the seeker and insists on counting to 30—very slowly.)

Chances are that you already knew that personal development and personal maintenance was quite important. I have known this for some time. And if you're like me, personal maintenance sometimes just kind of slips down the priority ladder.

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Fortunately, we have already learned a way to make time easily. My favorite two words: “coffee break.” We already explored the “coffee break” mindset, and meditation can easily be added to this list. Whether the “coffee break” is 5 minutes or 20 minutes, it’s all great. (Emilie’s amazing Self-Love meditation is 20 minutes, by the way). Just remember to give yourself some grace as you work these new activities into your routine. Make it guilt-free! So, if you miss a day, give yourself some grace (which in itself is an act of **SELF-LOVE, accomplished right there #CHACHING**).

In the long run, the goal is to make a daily habit of spending time on yourself. Don’t ignore yourself (yuck, rot, decay!). And don’t insult yourself (mold! Yuck yuck!). Be thankful to yourself and compliment yourself (Oooh, you smelling sweet today, self!). (Thank you again, Dr. Emoto!)

One of my recent favorite quotes sums it up best:

**“CHANGE, NOT BECAUSE YOU HATE YOURSELF, BUT BECAUSE YOU LOVE YOURSELF.”**  
– EMMA LOVEWELL, HEALTH & WELLNESS EXPERT, PELOTON INSTRUCTOR

### **EXERCISE TIME: The Self-Love Exercises**

#### **Building Block 1: Celebrate Yourself**

##### **1. *Compliment yourself today and thank yourself today (with SELF HIGH FIVES)***

Your target goal is ten compliments in a day, OR thank yourself ten times for something (pretty much anything). Your minimum goal is just one compliment and one self thank you (no compliment or accomplishment is too small). And make sure to physically clap your hands high, to award yourself that high five.

***The Quick 10-Second Daily Compliment:*** Another ditty from “Chris and Chris” of the *Investing from the Beach* podcast, this came from a webinar they were holding: We found out that every morning, one of the Chris’s looks at himself in the mirror and says, “Hey, what’s up stud muffin!” I

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laughed; it's a pretty hilarious visual, but the genius of it was also quick to show, as the Chris's expounded:

**"IT'S REALLY INTERESTING HOW FOR SOME PEOPLE,  
NO MATTER HOW GREAT THEY LOOK IN THE MORNING,  
WHEN THEY LOOK IN THE MIRROR, THEY ONLY SEE HOW UGLY THEY ARE.  
COMPARED TO SOME PEOPLE, NO MATTER HOW UGLY THEY LOOK IN THE MORNING,  
WHEN THEY LOOK IN THE MIRROR, THEY ONLY SEE HOW AWESOME THEY ARE."  
– CHRIS AND CHRIS, TEACHERS AND PODCASTERS OF INVESTING FROM THE BEACH**

Wow. Some thought-provoking positive bias talk there, yes? And so, we are duplicating Chris and Chris's easy compliment tip here. Every morning when you look in the mirror, just give yourself that knowing smile, and say, "Hey, what's up stud muffin!" It's easy to remember, vibrant visuals included, to lock the concept in, and it only takes 5 seconds to do it. Or if you're like me, add an extra 5 seconds on the spicier days, where you add a wink, a thumbs-up, maybe a dance, and maybe a flex of the muscles. All are good!

### **2. Ask someone to high five you: "Can I get a high five?"**

You did something awesome. You earned a trophy. Go and get one: Ask for a high five! No explanation is necessary, and surprisingly, most people will give you one, no questions asked; and, in fact, no verbals needed. AND, in fact, this even works with strangers. AND, in fact, it even works with distancing **#AIRHIGHFIVE**. It's just a matter of making eye contact (very important to make eye-contact), smiling, and raising your hand in the high-five signal, and done! There are crazy amounts of energy in just a simple high five.

### **Ask each of your children for a high five today: "Can I get a high five?"**

Same exercise as above, but this time with your children. Share the crazy amount of positive energy in that high five, with the kids. **#HIGHFIVE**

## **Building Block 2: Make It Positive**

### **1. *If you find yourself asking your child to stop doing something negative, work in the acknowledgement of the positive.***

Practice developing that positive bias. Remember that each negative has a positive, like in our “put your toys away” example. It’s interesting if you go out and observe, say at a playground or mall playground, and listen to parents interacting with the kids. You’ll often hear a “stop doing something” from a parent, but very rarely hear the follow-up compliment or acknowledgement, “Hey, thanks for doing that.” Surely, it’s trophy-worthy! But the trophy is hardly ever awarded.

Those are some golden missed opportunities of getting that sweet smelling rice going!

A few examples of what that may sound like:

- *“Hey, you gave me my phone back almost right away!  
I really appreciate that!”*
- *“Hey, you stopped yelling at your brother really quick!  
Thank you; I appreciate that!”*
- *“Hey, you stopped trying to sit on my face when I was sleeping!  
Thank you; I appreciate breathing!”*

Don’t miss those easy golden opportunities!

### **2. Acknowledge the positive with yourself as well.**

Bring it back to us. If you ever tell yourself something negative, make sure to get that positive in there. “Oh, shoot, I left the coffee on top of the car again!” can be followed up with, “Alright! Dang, I must be a great driver; that coffee didn’t spill, and nice job by me for catching that on time! You rock!” Or even the next day, “Hey, I just realized I got in my car and brought my coffee in with me. I didn’t forget it on top of the car. Yeahh!” Remember, it can be about anything; it just has to be sincere. And give yourself some “self” high fives too.

**#SELFHIGHFIVE #POSITIVEBIAS**

### **Building Block 3: Personal Development**

#### **1. Find time to meditate each day.**

**“MEDITATE FOR 20 MINUTES A DAY, UNLESS YOU’RE TOO BUSY.  
THEN YOU SHOULD MEDITATE FOR 60 MINUTES A DAY.”  
– ZEN BUDDHIST SAYING**

I am pretty sure we all know meditation is good for us, but the two challenges people face are usually: 1) making time for it, and 2) how to do it.

If you are really having some challenges getting started, the easiest and most accessible meditation, which can be done anywhere and anytime, is what I call the “space out” meditation. There are guided meditations, like Emilie’s, where I can listen to someone guide me through visuals to help me with personal maintenance. These are really wonderful. And then there are my “space out” meditations. Wonderful too! And it is what it sounds like. In this meditation, just stop intentionally thinking about something. Your brain will choose what it wants to think about; you’re just there in support. I already demand so much of my brain that this style of meditation is me telling my brain, “Okay, no demands on you for the next five minutes. Go and do your thing!”

**“THE QUIETER YOU BECOME, THE MORE YOU CAN HEAR.”  
– BABA RAM DASS, AUTHOR**

***Making time for it:*** aka “Coffee Break Meditation.” This is especially good for those with challenges in making the time. This is the accessible meditation in my tool chest and is the “space out” type meditation; only a few minimum requirements and you’re good to go. See if you can get 10 minutes in, whether in one sitting or in two five-minute breaks. It gets easier as you continue to do them.

***My 5-minute meditation:*** Here’s my easy recipe to do ad-hoc five-minute meditations.

## *Happier Parenting*

- I go and find somewhere I won't be bothered. Inside my car is usually an easy and accessible choice, but pretty much anywhere will work.
- I turn on my timer to 5 minutes, so then I don't have to stress—"How long have I been doing this?" or "How much longer do I have to go?"—because now my timer's got my back.
- I just let my mind wander and "space out."
- Remember to take nice, deep, life-giving, body-appreciating breaths.
- If I have problems letting my brain "space out," my cheat-code start-method is to start by just saying "thank you" to something— anything—and let your brain roll with it from there. If you still really needsomething, start with, "Thank you, self, for this 5-minute meditation; I'm looking forward to it because ... "

***My 5-minute meditation add-ons:*** A few "ala carte" type add-ons here for you.

- If I can, I will do this outside with nature. Meditating with nature is always a bonus. I like to be near grass or trees.
- If I can find a patch of grass to stand barefoot in, that's the mega best. This was first shown to me at a seminar by Mamie Lamley, an amazing lady and coach. I was having some difficulties that weekend and she guided me through some wonderful meditation, at a time when I really needed it (thank you, Mamie). You might be surprised just how much nature is willing to take away your stress and help you stay grounded.
- Some people like using background ambience noise to help quiet the mind: white noise, music, nature sounds. Try those out as well, and see how you like them.
- Word Songs: I also use specially crafted Word Songs as ambience. I love them! What's a Word Song? Glad you asked! These were lovingly crafted for me by a wonderful healer and singer named Monifa Harris. She made them as a custom order for me, and I love them. If you're curious to know more, well, I just might have a little something for you at my book bonuses.

So that's my recipe for my own five-minute meditations. And remember to breathe! As you continue to do these, see if you can eventually work in longer meditations and guided meditations!

## **2. Find time to be active each day.**

Whether it's walking 5 to 10 minutes a day, doing a few pushups, or stretching, keeping your body engaged in daily activity does wonders for not only your physical but also your mental health. You can call it your "coffee break walk" or "coffee break run" or "coffee break sweat." Whatever you call it, keep your body moving! I personally love "30-day challenges." Think about an exercise you are interested in (e.g., planks, sit-ups, pushups). Then google "30-day challenge" for what you are interested in (e.g., "30-day challenge plank"). Most of these 30-day challenges are very manageable in 5 to 10-minute chunks each day!

**"LACK OF ACTIVITY DESTROYS THE GOOD CONDITION OF EVERY HUMAN BEING,  
WHILE MOVEMENT AND PHYSICAL EXERCISE SAVE IT AND PRESERVE IT."**

**— PLATO**

## **3. Find time to read each day.**

You knew it was coming. Reading is a favorite of mine. See if you can make time to read even just a few pages each day, of any kind of book: personal development, humor, history, or any topic that interests you or that you're curious about. Reading is one of the best investments you can make in yourself.

**"THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY TWO THINGS THAT WILL MAKE YOU WISE:  
THE BOOKS YOU READ AND THE PEOPLE YOU MEET."**

**— JACK CANFIELD, AUTHOR, CO-CREATOR OF CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL**

## **What's Next?**

First, I need to mention the book bonuses. I have some very valuable book bonuses available to help you out, in this very important, personal maintenance, *SELF-LOVE* chapter.

I mentioned my five-minute meditations and Monifa Harris's amazing Word Songs. While she made them custom for me—woohoo!—Monifa has agreed

## *Happier Parenting*

to let me make these available to you too! Put them on your phone. Take them with you. Use them for your 5-minute meditations.

I also mentioned longer guided meditations, and referred to Emilie Rawling's Self-Love guided meditation, with the story about the vessel. While this is part of her *Foundations* book and meditations program, Emilie has in fact allowed me to give you, as a special gift, FOR FREE, her twenty-minute Self-Love meditation. What a generous gift!

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

Thank you, Monifa! Thank you, Emilie!

Finally, I would love to leave you with one final heartwarming story for this chapter.

This took place when my daughter was five years old. One day, I saw her in the playroom, sitting at a table and busily drawing and coloring on paper. She was quite hard at work! I was curious what she was working on and slowly made my way in, trying to peek over her shoulder. It looked like she was working on a card. How lovely! I was curious if it was for me, or maybe for her momma, Sheri, or maybe for the both of us!

She noticed me looking and said, "Daddy, want to see?"

Of course, I wanted to see! I took a closer look, and my jaw dropped.

Whoa ... I don't remember when I've ever seen a card made by someone to themselves. Curiouser and curiouser!

**Me:** *"Kayla, why did you write yourself a card?"*

**Kayla:** *"Well, Daddy, you have to love yourself; otherwise, you won't like yourself."*

*Happy Is as Happy Does (aka STEP 1: SELF)*



***“From: Kayla, To: Kayla. I Love You.”***

First of all, I was in shock. Who was this wise child? (She must have awesome parents!) (Ahem!) Second of all, wow! I guess you never know from where or from whom you might learn something amazing. What a great reminder to leave those receptors open. And third of all, to this day, this is still a great anchor for me on the importance of self-love. Remember how those unique visuals can lock in a concept? This is one of them for me, and I happily share it with you to help you lock in those very wise and precocious words:

***“YOU HAVE TO LOVE YOURSELF; OTHERWISE, YOU WON’T LIKE YOURSELF.”***

***– KAYLA YAU, HIGHLY PERCEPTIVE DAUGHTER OF AUTHOR***

What an amazing way to conclude our chapter on *Love of SELF!*

Next up: love for “OTHERS” (and “OFFSPRING”)! WOO! Lots of great stuff in store for us, so get ready to have some fun, and I’ll see you in the next chapter!



## Chapter 5

### Here's Looking at You, Kid (aka STEP 2: OTHERS)

*“Being a parent is wanting to hug and strangle your kid at the same time.”*  
– Calvin’s dad (from the comic strip “Calvin & Hobbes”)

We are turning the corner and heading down the home stretch! Woo! Excited? I certainly am. Let’s talk about love and respect for “Others” (including our “Offspring”).



Since we are talking about “happier parents,” I thought it would be fun to start this chapter with a display of the “not-so-happier” parent.

#### **Tell Me if This Sounds Familiar** (a.k.a. The “Not-So-Much” Happier Parenting Example)

We are about to head out somewhere. I need my son to get his shoes on.

*“Hello! Come over to the front area please. Let’s get your shoes on!”*

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Nothing.

*"Come on, we gotta go! Get your shoes on!"*

Nothing.

Yes, my son was not listening to me. He was just plain ignoring me while playing with some action figure. And as I got near him, he just so subtly and slowly turned away. As I circled around him, he just continued to subtly keep turning away from me, all the while making action figure noises.

This wasn't a first time for this kind of thing. Other versions include:

*"Time to give me back my phone!"*

*"Please pick up your toys."*

*"Hey, stop sitting on me while I'm trying to sleep!"*

Sounds vaguely familiar? I figured. You are my peeps.

You know they can actually hear you, right? This is easily proven by switching it up from "Let's get your shoes on!" to something like "Hey, wanna play?" or "Hey, I'm about to lie down to rest; want to come bother me?" Seriously, just go and lie down; the kids will appear out of nowhere and jump or climb on you. Sometimes not even your kids! (Yes, true story, mall playground circa 2012.)

But when it comes to things like getting the shoes on so that we can stay on schedule, forget about it. And as I try to get within eyeshot of him, and as he keeps turning, this basically turns into a chasing game. I have to admire in hindsight that he was putting on a particularly artful performance of ignoring me. I've since named this the "rotate-away-and-avoid-eye-contact" dance. I am chasing him, both in the emotional sense and the physical sense.

It's like the scene in *Rocky*, where an out-of-shape Rocky is chasing that chicken: The chicken keeps evading him, Rocky finally gives up, the chicken laughs, and the chicken goes back to playing with action figures.

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Very frustrating, right? Certain to put any parent in a ... “fowl” mood! #HAHA  
#DADJOKE

If we had to put a dialog to this dance, it would emotionally, physically, and literally be something like this:

**Me:** “Hey, I need you to come and do this.”

**Him:** “But this is more interesting.”

**Me:** “I just asked you if you can you come do this now. Can you come do this?”

**Him:** “But just look at this. It's really interesting.”

**Me:** “No! I said come do this now. Now come and do it!”

**Him:** “But this is really interesting! Just look. Who, what, when, where, why?”

**Me:** “I SAID COME DO THIS NOW!”

**Him** (reluctantly) “Okay, okay.”

**“HOW COME MY KIDS WON'T LISTEN TO ME? AGGHH!!!”**  
– ANYONE WHO HAS EVER ASKED A CHILD TO DO SOMETHING

With this lovely visual in mind, let's get rolling.

## **The Love of Others Mindset Shift**

Hal Runkel's *ScreamFree Parenting* is what kicked off this particular journey for me, and I can't be grateful enough for it. Here is my big mindset shift I picked up from his book:

**“PARENTING IS NOT ABOUT RAISING KIDS;  
IT'S ABOUT LAUNCHING NEW ADULTS OUT ON THEIR OWN.”**  
– HAL RUNKEL, AUTHOR

In other words, Runkel is putting the idea forth that we are *not raising kids*; we are *raising adults*. Wow, right? I mean, what to even think about that? Your reaction possibly might be .... “HUH?!” Because, well, that was my initial reaction. It was an astonishing mindset shift, and not what I was expecting to see from a parenting book. I had been expecting a bunch of “How to Do” type tips, kind of like the line “Show Me the Money,” but instead, “Show Me the

## *Happier Parenting*

Get-My-Kids-to-Listen-to-Me Tips.” What I wasn’t expecting was a matrix-like moment. I’m asking how to bend the spoon, and I’m told there is no spoon.

**“THERE IS NO SPOON. IT IS NOT THE SPOON THAT BENDS; IT IS ONLY YOURSELF.”**

**– THE MATRIX**

So, in this context, there is no child. There is an adult. I’m raising an adult. And it’s not my child-adult that needs bending; it’s myself? I think?

Okay, let’s go with this just for a bit. Since I’m raising an adult, let’s think about how that conversation would look if it were between two adults. We will do as the idiom says: Let’s walk a mile in the other person’s shoes. The same conversation above, re-imagined between two adults, might look like this:

**Me:** *“Hey, I need you to come and do this.”*

**Him:** *“But this is more interesting.”*

**Me:** *“I just asked you if you can you come do this now. Can you come do this?”*

**Him:** *“But just look at this. It’s really interesting.”*

**Me:** *“No! I said come do this now. Now come and do it!”*

**Him:** *“But this is really interesting! Don’t you want to see it?”*

**Me:** *“I SAID COME DO THIS NOW!”*

**Him** *“Whoa. Why are you shouting at me like that?”*

WOW, I sure don’t sound respectful, do I? In fact, I’m just plain ignoring everything he has to say and am just trying to force my will upon him. Doesn’t sound like I’m someone whom he’d prefer to listen to. Nope. Nada. Denied.  
**#NOBUTTA**

If that’s the case, if you were the other person conversing with me, would you want to come over? I don’t think so. If I were listening to me talking to myself like that, and ignoring myself like that, I wouldn’t want to come over either. I can now understand the “rotate around and avoid eye contact” dance.

This certainly begs the question: Is my son’s reaction actually quite reasonable when compared to what a reasonable adult would do? Or from a very interesting perspective, are we, as adults, still that same child inside? Do we ever outgrow preferring to do what we want to do? And preferring NOT to do what we feel is being forced upon us?

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**"WHEN SOMEONE SCREAMS AT ME TO HURRY UP, I SLOW DOWN."**

**– MARIO LEMIEUX, HALL OF FAME HOCKEY PLAYER**

Let's re-do this conversation between two reasonable adults, and see what it would sound like as a respectful conversation.

**Me:** *"Hey, I need you to come and do this."*

**Him:** *"But this is more interesting."*

**Me:** *"What? What's more interesting?"*

**Him:** *"This right here. Just look at it."*

**Me:** *"Huh. I guess? Maybe just not for me."*

**Him:** *"Yeah, maybe."*

**Me:** *"Anyway, hey, I need you to come and do this right now."*

**Him:** *"Right. Okay, yeah, be right there."*

Yay, much more respectful! Can we conclude a few characteristics of what it means to have a respectful relationship from this? Let's give it a shot:

- Respectful conversation: I won't ignore what you are saying.
- Respect for their opinion: I will acknowledge what you are saying.
- Respect for their choice: I do not control another person's choices or actions. I do not want to force my will upon them.
- Respect for their thought: If I inquire what it is they're interested in, oftentimes that interest is paid back to me of what I'm interested in.
- AND ... I likely won't scream. Screaming generally seems to not be present in a respectful conversation.

Now that we have looked at respectful peers having a conversation, the question remains: How on Earth does this work with kids? We are not talking reasonable adults; we are talking small little children! How does this translate? The mind-blowing answer: It actually works the same way.

## **#MINDBLOWN**

Sure, it's okay for parents to occasionally force decisions on kids. We are their parents, after all, and sometimes it is necessary. Also realize that forcing choices—whether merited or not—can lead to frustration as well, whether it is my child's frustration with "obedience," or my own frustration with

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“disobedience.” Where is the balance?

**“WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHILDREN AND THE CHOICES THEY MAKE;  
WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO THEM, HOWEVER, FOR THE CHOICES WE MAKE.”**

**– HAL RUNKEL, SCREAMFREE PARENTING**

We want to be responsible “to our children,” by being good examples of making choices and owning the consequences. The theory behind this is that first, it will hopefully take away my screaming by removing my emotional dependence on something out of my control. The secondary effect is that we are showing our kids that when we respect their choices, they can respect their own choices. We are not forcing our choices onto our children.

Now, of course, when allowing our children to make their own choices, I would say to use some common sense. Choices can be “age appropriate.” I’m not letting my 8-year-old daughter choose to stay home alone while the rest of the family goes on vacation, even if she could easily outsmart those Wet Bandits and we could sell the story as the next “Home Alone” sequel (#CHACHING!!).

However, once you are open to the idea of having your kids make choices, it is AMAZING the number of opportunities there will be for the kids to make their own choices! And better yet, we are now raising an adult to understand how to make choices and look at consequences, such as choosing between good and bad, and between low priority and high priority. And we start building in the habit and mindset of making choices.

If you are still having a hard time swallowing this idea of letting your kids make choices, I do want to propose this to you: ***Whether you are ready for it or not, your kids are already making choices.*** They already choose whether or not to come to you to put their shoes on. They choose to “behave” or “not behave.” They choose to scream or not scream. They choose to eat their veggies or not. They choose whether to give you back your phone right away or not. Even the young ones choose whether to come to you for a diaper change or run away screaming, with a sagging diaper about to fall off and make a mess.

If they are already making choices, why not give some encouragement? Engage in situations to allow them to make choices. You may find some pretty

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incredible things happening: perhaps less screaming, less emotional attachment to the outcome, and more calm reactions—and that's just in me. For sure, you will likely find this in the kids too. Maybe, in the end, calmer and happier parenting. Not to mention that the kids may respond with excitement and empowerment when realizing they can make their own choices.

**“TELL ME AND I FORGET. TEACH ME AND I REMEMBER. INVOLVE ME AND I LEARN.”**

– BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

## **The Best and Easiest Tip in the Whole World**

*(a.k.a. The Shoe Situation ... RESOLVED!)*

Are you curious about what happened in the above shoe situation? Read on, my friend. I won't leave you hanging. This one's a good one, and if you walk away understanding this one tip and trying it out, I think you'll be amazed at how much this alone can level up your happier parenting. I have found it easy and effective, and one of my main go-tos as a parent.

This tip is developed from all the concepts of respectful choices just mentioned. Let's start this part with a visit to the beloved “Golden Rule,” and see what it says about respect.

**“TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WOULD WANT TO BE TREATED.”**

– THE GOLDEN RULE

This Golden Rule is the standard bearer of the respectful relationship. It is understood practically worldwide.

*“If you respect others, others will respect you.”*

– Japanese Proverb

*“Respect yourself, and you will get it back.”*

– African Proverb

*“Respect a little child, and let it respect you.”*

– Bantu Proverb

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Golden rule now understood, let's return to our shoe situation, because we are about to see that ... (drum roll) ... the Golden Rule is **FLAWED!!** That's right; breaking news, people! The Golden Rule ... **IS FLAWED!**

Because I was employing the Golden Rule, I was showing respect to my child. But was he respecting me back? **SHNOPE! #FLAW!** I was by the shoes, waiting on HIM. I was speaking nicely and politely, explaining quite nicely that it was time to go and he had to get his shoes on. I was offering my time and services. The Golden Rule states that my child should reciprocate my respect and politeness by respecting my time and efforts, and not keep me waiting. **#FLAW!**

Sure, if I screamed at my kids, they would probably comply. But yelling really just equates to demanding them to respect me and comply. As spiritual parents, I think we can all agree this is not the right way to do things. How long would this actually work for? What happens when a child gets older and decides not to be complicit? This is not really the mutual respect we want.

**“NOTHING IS MORE DESPICABLE THAN RESPECT BASED ON FEAR.”**

**– ALBERT CAMUS, NOBEL PRIZE WINNER: LITERATURE**

So, I made an effort to NOT scream. I made an effort to be patient. And thus, I showed my respect. But where was the respect for me?! I was getting nowhere! Oh, Golden Rule, why have you failed me? **#FLAW!**

Let's flash back to earlier in the book. Do you remember the **#BehavioralPsych101** with B.F. Skinner? When we talked about negative punishment as the removal of something positive (e.g., freedom), and positive punishment as the introduction of something negative (e.g., pain)? Okay, so I did leave out one eensy weensy teensy detail that is actually quite important, and it applies to the Golden Rule as well.

Here's the interesting thing: Did you know that perspectives differ amongst people? Yeah! I know! Right? **#MindBlown**

Meaning, what I view as something negative, another person might view as something neutral, or even something positive. In behavior modification, the success depends on making sure our rewards system is accurate. Is **“GO TO**

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YOUR ROOM!” an actual punishment if everything that kid wants is already in his room? The important question: In this example, whose perspective is important to consider when it comes to determining what’s positive and negative?

Yes, you got it: my kid’s perspective!

Let’s return to our Golden Rule and my doggone blasted shoe situation. When it comes to perceiving something as *respectful*, whose perspective counts—mine or my kid’s?

Yes, you got it again: my kid’s perspective!

Whose perspective was I, in fact, using? **#Yup #FLAWOOPSIE**

I realized it was not the Golden Rule that was flawed; it was I who was flawed. In the shoe conversation, from my child’s point of view, I was asking them to do something for me, and his preference was to continue doing what he was enjoying: playing with his action figures. Don’t we all prefer doing what we want to do? From his perspective, I was asking him to do something for me. And as a wise man once said, *“Asking is just polite demanding.”* So, yeah, I failed the Golden Rule. (And who knew 80s icon Max Headroom was so wise?) Let’s bring this idea of correct perspective back to our shoe situation and see how it plays out. And this is now the key to my “best and easiest tip in the world.”

Here I am, trying to get my youngest to try on his shoes, doing my best to hold back any screaming and frustration (which of course means, inside, I’m already screaming). I am reasoning with my son—pleading with him. I want us to stay on time. He continues to “ignore” me and “turn away” from me. Eventually, I just gave up. Dejected, party of one. Dejected, party of one. Your table’s ready. Now that I had given up, of course my son at this point stopped the rotation-to-avoid-eye-contact dance and continued to play with his action figure. I just sat silently and watched him for a few moments. And then I decided, aw heck, I’m not winning this one anyway; I might as well be more than just dead weight. I asked him the toy’s name. My child answered back. I asked what the two of them were playing. My child answered back. We talked back and forth a bit more. AND THEN SUDDENLY, and WITHOUT WARNING, my child got up,

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went over to the shoes, and plopped himself down, waiting for me to help him get his shoes on.

Umm ... What just happened?! Wait, don't ask. Don't think. Just get the shoes on and go! **#LUCKY**

Later that night, I had to know what happened though. The **#ComputerEngineer** in me ran my post-outage analysis. And it dawned on me what had happened. What happened was that I had finally shown him “respect” on his terms, and he returned the “respect” on my terms. In this case, I did not ignore him and continue to politely demand of him; instead, I showed interest in what he was doing, and he returned it by showing interest in what I wanted—meaning that he was aware I wanted to get his shoes on and for us to get out the door. It was that simple.

### **respect (noun)**

1. an act of giving particular attention; consideration
2. in relation to; concerning

All it took was a show of respect, and in this case, just not blatantly ignoring what he was doing, and instead “giving particular attention” and “consideration” to him. And he reciprocated!

Since then, I have experimented with this tip quite a bit now, and it is almost too simple, and really quite effective. I still am surprised today at how effective it can be. (And not just with kids!) I encourage you to try this one out. And as these continue to happen, it actually gets easier. The mutual respect builds into a foundation for a mutually respectful relationship, and things get easier and smoother in the long run.

**Big tip:** Don't fake the show of respect. Don't “show respect” with the motivation that you want them to comply with you. They can tell. Be sincere. The show of respect doesn't have to be complicated. Just show an interest, and don't ignore them. Sometimes it only takes a few seconds, sometimes a bit longer, but it always is easier, less painful, and takes a lot shorter than trying to “force them,” and it is much more favorable than to just outright “scream” at them.

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Another interesting note: The reverse is also true: When you ask them to do something, and they comply immediately, realize this may be perceived by them as a show of respect to you! What do we do when we are shown respect? We reciprocate. We would “give particular attention” or “consideration” back to them. This may be as simple as graciously thanking them for their time.

### **Building Block 1: Deposits and Withdrawals**

Have you ever done something nice for a friend, and it felt really good? Both for you and your friend? It could be a favor, or even a compliment? Has someone ever done this back to you? And did it feel mutually nice?

On the flip side, do you know someone that seems to only talk to you but not listen? Or they only talk to you when asking for a favor? I have a boss who messaged me once: “Hey, Ben, how are you?” And I replied, “Great, thanks for asking; how are you?” only to have them reply back, “I need you to do [blah blah blah].” Mega downer, right?

I call these “Deposits and Withdrawals.” The compliments or favors you do for someone are the deposits. When you ask for something, those are the withdrawals. You want to make deposits, and occasionally you may need to make withdrawals. How do you think it feels to make a withdrawal on someone without making a deposit? How does it feel to you if someone asks for a withdrawal from you without making a deposit?

The idea of deposits and withdrawals is similar to the idea of a bank account. Here are some guidelines:

- Make regular deposits with your child.
- Just like a bank, you cannot withdraw without making a deposit.
- It is perfectly okay to never make a withdrawal! (**#IMPORTANT**)
- If you do withdraw, it's a good idea to make deposits again when you can.
- Deposits and withdrawals are made with proper perspective! (**#VERYIMPORTANT**) (**#BFSKINNERCAMEO**) What you think is a deposit or withdrawal, may not be seen in the same manner by someone else.

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- The reverse is true: Allow others to make deposits in you.  
**(#ALSOIMPORTANT)**

This last one is actually a lot harder for some people than you might think. Some people have a hard time accepting deposits. Do you know someone that loves giving gifts but for some reason has a very difficult time accepting gifts back? How about someone who brushes off compliments? The brush-off is deflecting the deposit. “Hey, you look great today!” “Ah, no not really. I didn’t have a lot of time to get ready. This shirt is all wrinkly. Blah blah blah.” No, this does not do at all. A more subtle version of this is the need to return a compliment with a compliment. “Hey, you look great today!” “So do you!” This can be a way of deflecting the gift of a compliment. If this is you, see if you can just be a gracious gift acceptor and say, “Wow, thank you! I really appreciate that!”

And remember, don’t forget the importance of perspective. The “deposit” has to feel like a deposit. This means deposits done with good will and good intentions; otherwise, it is not a true deposit. They are sincere. They are authentic. Most importantly, they are NOT done for the purpose of making withdrawals. “I’ll do this for you, but you owe me one” is not an acceptable deposit. This is actually a withdrawal. Deposits come from a place of good intention. They are done “just because.”

If you look over those rules, do you see that this system also works for not just your children, but also for your peers, your friends, your co-workers, and pretty much anyone? That’s pretty amazing.

As an add-on to the previous chapter, this also applies to yourself! Do you demand a lot of your mind, and your body, without allowing it to have its own time? Remember Emilie’s meditation about the vessel? This is also a good reminder to make sure to make deposits to yourself of personal maintenance.

**#MEDITATION #SELFLOVE**

## **Building Block 2: Enable Choices**

This is the meat of the *ScreamFree* mindset shift. The goal is to build the culture and habit of our kids recognizing how to be responsible and accountable for themselves, their choices, and the results of their choices. It might take a bit of getting used to. It surely did for me. No worries! Work on this one at your own pace. Dip your foot into the pool if that's you.

*"But ... my kid is only 3! I can't expect them to make choices!"*

Remember, whether you are ready for it or not, THEY are already making choices. I can already hear "*ScreamFree*" responding: "You are sitting in the bedroom, diaper in hand, waiting for them to come so you can change them. They are \*choosing\* to either come, or run away." They already are making choices anyway, so let's support and encourage and guide them!

You can make them age appropriate—use your judgement—and to your comfort level the important thing is to just find a way to start. As a parent, the hardest part for me was letting go of the need to control the outcome. But once I was locked into this idea of allowing choice, I was excited to find opportunities to let my children make as many choices as my mental capacity would allow. This means possibly releasing the anxiety of some of those consequences, like when a child is being a bit careless and it's likely that cup of juice might spill, in which case remaining calm and allowing the spiller ownership of the accident, and the time to remediate it (aka clean it up). Choices, actions, consequences, and accountability = empowerment.

### **The Phone Story**

This is my favorite example. One of my first forays into allowing my children choices was at a time they were always wanting to play with Dad's phone. I was getting more and more frustrated because whenever it was time to give the phone back, they always hung onto it for a few more minutes, and then a few more minutes after that, to the point that I did not want to let them have my phone because it was always such a chase to get it back. Finally, I followed *ScreamFree's* advice and, one day, said to my kids:

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*“Okay, I will let you borrow my phone. However, I need you to agree to this. If you do not give me my phone back quickly when I ask, next time you ask for it you may not get it. Because there might be times when you have my phone that I need to make a phone call, or text someone, and need my phone back right away. If I know you will give it back to me right away, I can trust you with my phone. If I am not sure you will give it back to me right away, I may not always want to give you my phone. Do you understand this? Any questions or anything not make sense?”*

First, it is important to enroll them in this so that they understand it is their choice, and it is their consequence. This is why you see me asking questions in this dialog, to enroll them in our agreement. When they answer my questions affirmatively, they are enrolled in the agreement.

Second, this also means you have to follow through and remind them of consequences when they’ve made their choices. If it was not handed back to you promptly last time, the dialog could be:

*“Hey, I remember last time you didn’t give me my phone back right away. Unfortunately, I don’t know when I will get an emergency call or something, and if you can’t give me my phone back right away when I ask, I’m not sure I can give it to you. Let me think about it.”*

Now, they may get emotional and angry if you do not give them the phone the second time. That has happened to me. At that point, I say something like: *“Well, did you understand that if you didn’t give me the phone back last time when I asked, I may not give it to you again the next time?”*

Now, if they say they didn’t understand the agreement, and I believe they truly didn’t understand it, then I think it’s fair to go over the rules again and then try it out again.

BUT if they did understand the agreement last time, then my follow-up is:

*“Okay, you knew the agreement. Who chose to not give me my phone back when I asked? Was that me or you?”*

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That's a trap question (**#HAHA**). Of course, they know it was their choice, not mine. Now, once in a while, they'll say, "Daddy's choice," at which point they'll smile, trying to pull one over on Dad. I smile and laugh too, and then ask again. "Dad's choice? It was Dad's choice? Are you sure?" And eventually, yes, they admit it was their choice.

*"So, if you made that choice, why are you mad at me?"*

That is some crazy parent voodoo magic, isn't it?

There's something even COOLER about this. Guess what the even cooler thing is? You get to also acknowledge when they do follow through! **#YES!** Make sure to recognize the good trophy moments! For me, this has sounded like the below:

*"Daddy, can I borrow your phone?"*

*"Well, let me think. If I recall correctly, last time you agreed to give me back my phone when I asked. And then when I did ask for it, you gave it back to me quickly, is that right?"*

*"Yup, Daddy, I did!"*

*"That's really awesome! I appreciate that! Sure, you can borrow it again—same agreement, okay?"*

*"Yes, Daddy! Thank you!"*

These are pretty empowering conversations to have with your kid, don't you think? These were even happening at the young age of 3. Once you realize you want to allow the kids to make their own choices, it's like a fun little treasure hunt to find those opportunities for them. And the results are amazing: better conversations, empowerment, and accountability, but also just deflating the emotional charge in these situations—and I don't mean just my kids', but mine too of course! I think the most exciting part is knowing in the long term how these interactions are just continuing to build a quality, mutually respectful relationship; it's a **#WINWIN** all around!

### **Building Block 3: Credibility and Humility**

Okay, now we get into the tricky part. Did you note the possible contradiction arising? If not, I'm about to lay it out for you. Yes, this part might get a bit tricky. (**#TRICKY #RUNDMC**)

It's fantastic that we are building mutually respectful relationships with our kids; however, we cannot forgo the fact that we are still their parents. They are still our children, which means there is still discipline and authority in the parent/child relationship to maintain. Unfortunately, this seems almost contradictory. Can one have a mutually respectful relationship and a parent/child authority relationship at the same time?

**"BEN! DANG! WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? YOU JUST CONVINCED ME THAT I'M RAISING AN ADULT AND TO RESPECT THEIR CHOICES. NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME TO SWITCH IT BACK AND BE THE PARENT? AND MAINTAIN AUTHORITY? WHAT THE...?"**  
– **You, My AWESOME READER, JUST NOW**

Any interesting debate points to insert here about how parents can or cannot also be a best friend to their kid? Yes, it's a tricky little balance to strike.

I did eventually figure out the answer. I was surprised that it was fairly simple, but getting there took some time. In fact, there were quite a few moving parts to this one. But once I figured it out, and I started employing it, WOW, it was a blessing. And I couldn't believe it was that simple. Intrigued? Fantastic, because I can't wait to share it! Let's not keep us waiting!

Just to preface what we are about to cover: This is a two-part answer. Part one of the answer is a bit out of the norm, so just go with it for now and let it marinate. Part two of the answer ... Well, that's just a sneaky little snark that came to me during, of all things, a presentation on sales. Wow, right? So, let's see if we can answer this tricky question (**#TRICKY #TRICKY #TRICKY #HEREWEGO**)!

First, have you ever admitted to your children that you were wrong about something? I don't mean something insignificant or external, like "You're right, I did forget the coffee on top of my car again." Have you admitted something

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wrong that is big, meaningful, or pivotal? Maybe in the way you may have handled a parenting situation with them?

Admitting being wrong, just generally speaking, is difficult in just about any situation. But now, as a parent, to our kids, admitting being wrong? That's just not something parents normally do. I honestly can't recall a time my dad ever admitted he was wrong about something of significance. And I know my dad isn't the only parent. I would say it's mostly true for just about any parent, me included.

If I show that I'm faulty, will I even be able to maintain my authority? What happens if I can't? Anarchy? Then mutiny? And did I get anarchy and mutiny in the right order?

Well, the first part of the answer I propose is: YES, we do want to admit when we get something wrong. Sure, we are risking mutiny and anarchy, and anarchy and mutiny; however, this is characteristic of a mutually respectful relationship. More importantly, we want to remember we are raising adults, so don't we want to be good examples to our kids?

**"DON'T WORRY THAT CHILDREN NEVER LISTEN TO YOU;  
WORRY THAT THEY ARE ALWAYS WATCHING YOU."  
— ROBERT FULGHUM, AUTHOR**

If we never admit we are wrong, if we never show we are faulty, what is the example being set? Do we want to raise kids that will never admit when they're wrong? We are all humans. This means that we are faulty. We are always going to have times when we make mistakes and are wrong. Never admitting we are wrong means hiding our mistakes. Are we in effect teaching our kids to hide their mistakes? Or worse yet, are we teaching them to shy away from trying out anything new for fear of making mistakes?

I shudder to think about any of these outcomes, which means the answer is YES: We parents want to set a good example, and we want to be okay with admitting mistakes, with showing that we are faulty, and that it's fine to not be perfect. This then gives our kids permission to also not be perfect, and to know that it's okay to take risks, even if it means a mistake could be made;

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because not only is it okay to not be perfect, it's quite normal to not be perfect. That is part one of the answer. As a parent, I encourage you to admit mistakes and admit when you are wrong. Feel free to pause and let that marinate for a bit. It might be a bit of a deviation from the parenting norm.

Now, the **#Tricky #Tricky #Tricky** second part: the anarchy and mutiny. Is maintaining the parent/child authority relationship possible amidst the parental admitting of mistakes? I was concerned. However, I had already decided to employ part one. I decided that setting an example of imperfection was worth the risk. Fortunately, it seemed my parental authority remained intact even with the mistake admitting. Maybe I was worrying for nothing?

I remember specifically one of the first incidents of my engagement with part one. I lost my temper with all three of my kids, and then a few moments later, when I was feeling much calmer, I asked them to come over so that I could apologize to them. I remember this because it was the first time I ever apologized for something this big, and admitted wrongdoing as a parent.

I remember the looks on their faces when I asked them to come over. Apprehension? Curiosity? Uncertainty? When does Daddy ever apologize? It went something like this:

*"Hi guys. I want to apologize. When I yelled just now? That's not your fault at all. And honestly, under normal circumstances, that would not have made me yell. I don't want you guys to think you made me yell or caused me to yell. I was already in a bad mood from something else, so I was the one who made me yell. You guys totally did not. And I'm really sorry about that. I made a mistake. I promise I'm going to keep working on that, yelling less, and being better at managing my emotions properly. This was all my mistake, and I'm sorry."*

And the weirdest thing happened. And no, I don't mean the visions of mutiny and anarchy. (Have you noticed I keep switching the order of anarchy and mutiny? **#CoveringAllBases**)

This is what happened.

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First, they asked me how I was doing, which shocked and surprised me. I then realized that yes, even kids have a sense of human nature and empathy. The other surprise? As the days passed, it was clear I hadn't given up any authority. I did not fall to any position of weakness. I was still DAD. Everything went on as normal; except when the kids did something wrong, there were moments I could sense they were a bit less scared to talk to me now—a little less afraid of Dad getting mad, and a little more okay with admitting mistakes.

I really loved seeing this; but at the same time, I still felt puzzled. How did I not lose any authority? Or was that just luck? The next time, would I lose some authority? And then lose more authority? As time went on, I felt more confident in part one and [selectively] acknowledging when I was wrong. And things kept going quite smoothly with my parental authority and with the kids being a bit more at ease in admitting their own mistakes, or at least admitting without fear to their mistakes when I pointed something out that needed fixing. It became, for me, a cautiously optimistic time as I dipped my toe into this part one answer, always being wary of any possible lost authority.

Months into employing part one, on faith that the anarchy and mutiny would not occur, I happened in on a sales presentation. And BAM!!! Part two hit me like a ton of bricks. And here it is:

One of the points in this sales presentation was that sales requires two things of a salesperson: 1) credibility, and 2) humility. The presenter went on to explain the following:

A salesperson with credibility, but no humility, will be applauded, *but get no sales*. There will be respect for my mastery, but they may not buy from me. Why? Sales has an emotional element, and with all this credibility and no humility, I have portrayed myself above and beyond what is accessible and approachable. My audience may not connect with me. And they may not end up buying from me.

A salesperson with humility, but no credibility, will be loved and hugged, *but get no sales*. People will connect with me, but they will not buy from me. Why? Sales has a technical element, and with all this humility and no credibility, my audience may put my expertise in question. My audience may not trust what I say about the product. And they may not end up buying from me.

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A salesperson with both credibility and humility, *will get sales*. People will see my expertise, AND will feel a connection with me. I am one of them, so they can trust me, and they can trust my expertise, which means they are more willing and likely to buy from me.

Naturally, my initial reaction was, “Wow. This is good stuff.” And it was just mere moments later that, BAM! A TON OF BRICKS hit me and I was like, “OH!!! BUT OF COURSE!!” And I furiously starting scribbling down notes—on parenting.

Credibility AND humility: that was the answer. The authority was not lost. Parents have locked in credibility to go with the humility. THAT was the answer. Done. And dusted.

Oh, okay, not quite done and dusted; maybe I could bridge a gap a bit better here for you. Let’s start with a question:

For kids under age 5, generally speaking, how do they see their parents? When you were under age 5, how did you see your parents? I would guess something close to the ultimate authority?

How about kids under age 10? How do they see their parents? When you were under age 10, how did you see your parents? I would guess, pretty much the same as the previous answer: ultimate authority?

How about kids between the age of 40 and 140? How do they see their parents? I would guess, pretty much the same as the previous answer? Still an authority?

That last one, by the way, yup, that is my current age range, 40 to 140. And yes, even today, when I’m around my parents, I still sometimes feel like a kid. I still feel on edge. I still feel in awe. That parent/child dynamic has not gone away fully. And it likely never will. I am always going to be my parents’ kid, and they will always be my mom and dad—authority role safe forever.

Here’s the sneaky little snark: Take off your child hat, and put your parent hat back on. And transfer that information. Do you realize that from DAY 1 of your parenting life, you are born with all the credibility in the world to your kids?

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Do you realize you are and always have been, and always will be, the authority? As long as you continue to live in integrity as a “spiritual parent,” that built-in credibility will be sustained forever. Even when your kids are adults, even when they are parents, from when they are 40 to 140, you will always be their parents and will be that authority figure.

That’s the second part of this answer. That is how the parent/child authority relationship is maintained. You are born with it, and then you live with integrity to maintain it. And that’s it.

To ribbon this amazing building block: As parents, the credibility is inherent in the system! And then it can easily be sustained by living in integrity as a parent. **#AWESOME**. So, I can focus on the humility portion and be emboldened on establishing it. This comes from [selectively] admitting my mistakes, showing I’m not perfect, being okay with not being perfect, setting a good example of not being perfect, and in that way establishing the humility part of the equation.

Credibility AND humility. That’s the answer. Done and dusted! Amazing, don’t you think?

Oh, wait, not quite done and dusted. There’s one final little detail. I mentioned that the credibility portion does have a maintenance aspect, yes? So, we parents are “born” with the credibility from Day 1. To maintain it, I’ve mentioned a few times that the key is to simply live in integrity. Well, what the heck do I mean by that?

Living in integrity just means this: Make agreements, and live up to them. If I say I will do something, I follow through with it. It’s pretty simple, not to mention a great example to set for your kids. Don’t make a lot of agreements and not live up to them. And don’t make too few agreements. You make lots of agreements, AND live up to them.

**“I’M NOT UPSET THAT YOU LIED TO ME;  
I’M UPSET THAT FROM NOW ON I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU.”  
— FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, PHILOSOPHER**

And that is all there is to maintaining the balance between establishing a mutually respectful relationship with your child, while also maintaining the parent/child authority relationship. Credibility and humility. And integrity. Done and dusted!

## **Exercise Time: The Love of *Others* Exercises**

### **Building Block 1: Deposits and Withdrawals**

#### **1. *Make “deposits” into your children’s accounts at least once a day.***

Feel free to first refresh your memory of the guidelines for “Deposits and Withdrawals,” and then ... go! Go and establish your bank account with your kids! And have fun too. Lots and lots of deposits. Compliment them. Take an interest in what they are doing. No need to wait for them to ask you to play; ask them. And hey, if you’re doing something, ask your kid if they want to come over and see what you’re doing. Chances are they won’t, but you may be pleasantly surprised. And at the least, they will know you asked and were willing to share with them. As an example, our stock trading computer is in the play room area, and once in a while I’ll ask them to look at some charts with me.

And actually, we’ve made a little game of it! One day, one of my kids asked me if he could play on his iPad. I was doing my historical stock prediction homework, meaning pick a stock and look at the charts from a year ago, and move slowly forward in time, and predict which way the price will go. I looked at my son and said, “You know what? If you come over here and beat me at my stock prediction homework, then yes. If you get it right and I get it wrong, you win.” He was a bit hesitant at first, but after a few rounds, he really got into it. On about the fifth try, he beat me. And WOW, was he excited! He ran and told Mom, “Hey! I just beat Dad at his stock homework!” Sure, I liked the fact that at least there was exposure to learning about money, but the real point is that just about anything can be turned into a deposit situation; which means there are opportunities all day and every day to make deposits. **#Deposits**

**2. Start being aware of your withdrawals, especially if you aren't making deposits.**

Not so much an exercise, but just a request for you to be more aware of your withdrawals. You may be making them without knowing. See the "Shoe Story." If I did not "deposit" the respect, and instead yelled at my child and forced them to come and get their shoes on, even if I was doing it for their sake, from their perspective, that's Dad making a withdrawal. Observe as an "outsider" the interactions with parents and kids, and note what might make a deposit or withdrawal from the parent's perspective, and from the kid's perspective. Apply what you observe to your own interactions. And remember, each day you want to make sure there are more deposits than withdrawals. That's right, no credit for you! (The interest rates are too risky!)

**Building Block 2: Enable Choices**

**1. Find opportunities to enable your child to make a choice, especially in situations where you typically are "chasing" as a parent.**

Age appropriate, and whatever your comfort level is, and heck, maybe a bit sometimes outside your comfort zone. The easiest way for me to find an opportunity is when I recognize the situations in which I am "chasing" my kids. Chasing is so draining, and it isn't usually effective. See if you can turn this around into a situation of asking your child questions, and see if they can come up with choices. More importantly, resist the urge to control their choice, or to direct their choice. Instead, respect their choice and see it through to its final outcome and consequence. And yes, sometimes this means being okay with spilt milk, literally and figuratively. A very helpful phrase for yourself when going through this process: "Let it be." Which means, let it happen. And then react and go from there. Take a step back, breathe, and say to yourself, "Let it be."

**2. Vocabulary replacement: Use the word "want," as often as you can, in place of "need," "have to," and "should."**

Being particular about words can be very important; sometimes we don't even realize the words we are using. In this case, the words "need to,"

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“have to,” and “should” are words that represent no power of choice. That’s right, NO CHOICE. These are disempowering words. Our goal for this exercise is to enable choices. So, for that reason, wouldn’t we want to use good words to represent choice? And build a language and culture of choice?

**“UNLESS PHYSICALLY RESTRAINED, PEOPLE ALWAYS DO WHAT THEY WANT TO DO.”**

– MARSHALL SYLVER, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Compare these two responses to a child asking if you can play:

*“I would love to play with you, but I **need** to do the dishes first.”*

*“I would love to play with you, but I **want** to do the dishes first.”*

Do you sense the ownership here in the choice words?

When I started making these word changes in conversation with my kids, the results were pretty astonishing: less sulking and pouting, because Dad is making a choice. This also means that when I say, “YES! Let’s play!” they know it is also Dad making a choice. I’m playing with them because I want to, not because I have to, need to, or should to. Yup, should to. You get it. And the change in your child knowing you WANT to play with them? And the change in yourself, and then empowering yourself? This is what comes from using language that empowers choices.

I’ll let you in on one of my typical responses:

*“That would be fun. I want to really finish the dishes first. You know what? I want to play with you too. Can we play for about five minutes? And then I can finish the dishes?”*

That’s right; I’ve actually done a full pivot in the middle of a response. As soon as I said, “I want to really finish the dishes first,” the thought popped up: Do I really want to finish the dishes first? Or do I want to take a break and play with my kid? Especially having built into my system the “coffee break” mindset that I can make five minutes time just about any time, this is an easy pivot. And I will tell you that I have never been turned down

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when I've said "five minutes." I cannot think in recent memory having any pushback on "five minutes" of play, and then excusing myself to go back to work after the "five minutes" are up. This is a serious **#WINWIN**. "Coffee break playtime" anyone?

### **Building Block 3: Credibility and Humility**

#### **1. *Make promises to your kids and live up to them.***

We want to maintain credibility with our kids, and show them we also respect them. You don't necessarily need to start with the words "I promise..." It's just a matter of saying something, and then following through. They can vary in scope and size. Try at least once a week, if not once a day. And do this with other people in your life, not just your children!

#### **2. *Once a week, or as the situation calls for it, admit when you did something wrong.***

We want to establish humility with our credibility. Admitting when one is wrong, I accept this can be challenging. So just stick with it and try. This one gets easier as you do it. Especially after you find out you have still maintained authority. Be selective, choose good examples of your imperfections, and it will continue to give you confidence when you see you are, 1) establishing humility, and thereby making you more approachable, and 2) setting a great example to your kids that it's okay to make mistakes.

#### **3. *Start supporting your kids in building the habit of credibility.***

As opportunities arise, have your kid make agreements with you, too, and follow through with them. And for you, support them in that delivery. When they follow through, make sure to give them a good trophy for it! It's well deserved! Remember my example with the phone? I point out when they didn't follow through, and more importantly, I point out when they DID! The transformation was awesome, and they really took pride in realizing when they followed through with their agreements! **(#HIGHFIVE)**

## **What's Next?**

Wow, what an awesome chapter, right? I hope you picked up on the fact that these are great ways to build relationships with not just your kids, but with everyone in your life. At this point, if you haven't yet, make sure to take a moment and go check out all the book bonuses for every chapter.

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

To close out this chapter, I would love to leave you with one final story:

I saw a poster in a New York subway years ago. My daughter would have been almost 3 at the time. The poster was advertising some sort of sponsored program for parent education. There was a picture of a dad and his daughter, both smiling, as if sharing a little secret. The caption read:

**“I LISTEN TO HER NOW, SO SHE’LL KNOW I’LL LISTEN TO HER LATER.”  
– POSTER IN NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY**

Remember how visuals can really lock in a concept? I saw the photo of the daughter and the dad, smiling together; it was quite endearing, and I knew that it was the relationship I wanted with Kayla. This photo and caption still stay in my mind. (Remember? Vivid and memorable visuals lock in a concept?) This combines so many great ideas we discussed in this chapter. It inspires me to keep making deposits. It inspires me to consistently behave in a way that she knows I will always be available to listen to her. It inspires me to be a great example to my sons on how to listen and respect women, something I think is sorely needed and very long overdue.

It reminds me that I want to give her the space to do her own thing as she grows, to make her choices, and to embrace the results, whatever they may be. I want her to have faith that if a choice comes out “faulty,” that this is okay also, and that if she ever needs me to listen, I’ll be ready. It reminds me of the importance of humility. Credibility without humility may make me unapproachable. What parent would want to be unapproachable to their kids? Especially as kids become teenagers and life adds more pressure, I would always want my kids to feel they can come to me no matter how much despair they are feeling.

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While I wish I would have taken a picture of the poster, I figure the next best thing would be to re-enact it with my daughter.

I listen to  
her now...

so she'll  
know I'll  
listen to  
her later.

**#raisingdaddy**



And now it is time to get to the next chapter! I applaud you for making it through this very important chapter (**#HIGHFIVE**)! You've made it two-thirds of the way through the **SOS** blueprint! We are ready to embark on the final, fun, and very **SILLY** and **SMILEY** chapter. So, what are you waiting for? I'll see you there!



## Chapter 6

### May the Smiles Be with You (aka Step 3: SMILES)

*“You will always be your child’s favorite toy.”*  
– Vicki Lansky, Author



*SMILES* and *SILLIES*. Hoo boy, I got a great chapter in store for you. We start with two mindset shifts, and then a whole lotta *Silly Smiley Stuff*. Are you ready? Woot, here we go!

#### Say Hello to Your Little Friend

**“ADULTS ARE JUST OUTDATED CHILDREN.”**  
– DR. SEUSS

What were you like as a child? Do you remember? Silly? Happy? Curious? Ever see a child being pushed in a stroller: They’re sitting back all chill, food and toys within reach, and you’re like, “Oooh, that’s the life!”

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How about, do you remember the last time you watched kids playing? With reckless abandon and unbounded imagination?

We just recently went to a car wash that had stations with cleaning equipment like vacuums and condensed air spray guns. My two boys each took a condensed air dispenser and started spraying each other, playing “cops and robbers,” giggling like crazy. Unbounded imagination. Reckless abandon.

On a different note, ever watch a sad news story involving a child? Something that makes you stop in your tracks and makes you want to go and find your kid and give them a hug? And hold on to them for just an extra few seconds? Children represent things like happiness, silliness, play time, smiles, and innocence. And hope.

As adults, we are no longer those children. Why is that? Well, it’s because we are now adults, right? However, did you know that down deep we are still that child? The “adult” part is just layers of experience and responsibilities piled on top of that child. Imagine your kid lying on your bed, and you just did the laundry, and you start throwing piece of clothing after piece of clothing onto the bed. (That’s a fun game!!) But the visual being, imagine that each piece of clothing represents a piece of knowledge or experience, and as the pile gets bigger, that represents you getting older and then becoming an “adult.” That child is still down there somewhere, buried under article after article of clothes, aka adulthood layers—but still wanting to giggle and have fun.

This child underneath the pile of clothes is commonly referred to as the “inner child.” My perspective is that calling it the “inner child” almost makes it sound like a different person. But it’s still the same person. Down deep inside, that child is still me, and I’m still him. I just happen to also have adult “responsibilities,” the layers and layers piled on top of me-the-child.

So let’s think about him as me, and yours as you. Your child is still inside you. And our child versions of ourselves still like to come out and play every so often. For example, maybe they enjoy being pampered (**#SPADAY**). Maybe they enjoy the occasional get-together with friends to scream and cheer on a favorite sports team (**#FootballSunday**). Maybe they still laugh at farts and fart jokes (**#BUTOF COURSE**). I mean, sure, maybe we aren’t laughing on the

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outside, but how many of us laugh at least on the inside anytime anything remotely sounding like a fart pops up? Straight face, outside. Giggling like crazy, inside.

When we become an adult, we now have “adulting” responsibilities, and thus “adulting” hours in our day, which takes away from those “child” hours we want to have. Especially as a parent, it can sometimes be too easy to continuously be in “adulting” mode. In dire consequences, our inner child rarely, or in some cases never, gets to come out and play. In other words, ignored.

Have you ever heard about or seen an ignored child act out just because they wanted or needed attention? Temper tantrums, likely?

Now think about the inner child in you. If it is ignored, how might it act out? I am thinking that per Dr. Emoto, it’s almost a survival instinct: If it didn’t act out to get attention, the alternative would be to decay and rot. However, instead of temper tantrums as we know them, they may act out in different ways, like ... (drum roll) ... sabotage! Sabotage? Yes, sabotage!

Do you know people that somehow always seem to get sabotaged in the same way? Always being late to a meeting, always getting sick, that kind of thing. Maybe you have something similar happening in your life? Some would consider that to be forms of internal sabotage. Yes, indeed. **#SABOTAGE**

**“THAT CHILD DOESN’T GO ANYWHERE. WE STILL HAVE THAT CHILD IN US; EACH ONE OF US HAS THAT CHILD THAT WE NEED TO PLAY WITH EVERY DAY, AND WE WOULD SLEEP BETTER. I DON’T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS, BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY WE JUST GET SO JADED, WE LOSE THAT JOY, AND THAT BLISS. WHEN YOU LOOK IN A CHILD’S EYES, THEY’RE HAPPY WITH JUST ABOUT EVERY SINGLE THING.”**  
— ELLEN DeGENERES, COMEDIAN/WRITER/PRODUCER

You have possibly heard that “everything in moderation” is a key to success? I interpret this also as balance. It’s a great saying, and applies to honoring and spending time with you, the child. If you “ignore” your child, and give it no time, it will act out, and sabotage. If you honor your child, woo hooo, balance; which then means success. For the success and sustainability of any long-term endeavor, an element of honoring that inner child and giving it time to play must be present.

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Let's have a look at a great example: money.

In the book, *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*, author T. Harv Eker focuses on money management and talks about this inner child that wants to play. He uses examples, such as a person who is inherently a spender that decides to do some hard-core saving. What do you think the spender-inner-child might think of that? Yup, no fun at all. This eventually results in the inner child tantrum and sabotaging the money saving plan. Somehow, the money just gets all spent! Despite the person's desire to save money, somehow it just gets spent.

Another great example, one that hits close to home: exercise and diet.

Back in high school, I had a "bad trophy" moment, which resulted in me being very motivated to lose weight. I remember severely restricting my diet to just vegetables. I would estimate that my body composition was about a 1300 calorie a day body, minimum. When I restricted myself, I'm estimating I was taking in no more than 800 or 900 calories a day. And I was adding in aerobics for 30 to 90 minutes a day. My inner child was not happy. Sabotage? It came in the form of eventually bingeing on a whole box of Powerbars in one sitting. Yes. Powerbars. Calorie wise, in one sitting, that's 12 bars times 200+ calories, which equals 2400+ calories. One sitting. And yes, seriously, Powerbars.

### **#WOW**

With the two examples above, money and diet/exercise, we see what can happen when starving and ignoring our inner child. Let's now see examples of including our inner child.

With the money example, T. Harv Eker designed his money management system to make sure to include the inner child. Amongst the jars to contribute money to, there is a "Play" jar. The "Play" jar is emptied out once a month, and everything is to be spent in full. No judgements. No reservations. Spend it all and honor that inner child. Wow, just as I'm writing this, my inner child is yelling out, "WHEEEEE!!!!" Do you feel it?

In effect, the inner child gets attention, gets played with, and is satiated enough that the other parts of the money management system do not get

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sabotaged. This is what makes T. Harv Eker's money management system sustainable.

With my real-life dieting and exercise example, my inner child loves chocolate and peanut butter. He also loves Jack in the Box onion rings and tacos. YUM! While I eventually got my weight and diet and health under control by the time I graduated college, as I entered my 40s, it did get harder to maintain my weight AND enjoy all those inner child spark-joy foods. Severely restricting my diet? Inner child was going to have none of that; I had already learned my lesson. Fortunately, just like T. Harv Eker's money management system, my wife, Sheri, helped me figure out a new diet regimen—or to use Harv's terminology, a “nutrition management system.”

It was something easy to understand, easy to follow, and most importantly, included my inner child, similar to the “Play” jar concept; which meant this system, in the long run, has been sustainable, and also successful! It has been over three years now, and I am very happy with my health, my energy, my fitness level, and of course, my inner child is happy too!

The moral of these stories: When it comes to any endeavor, especially one related to change and development, it's easier to sustain if it is simple, easy to follow, and includes honoring your inner child. It can't be so restrictive that your inner child doesn't get to play.

If you haven't guessed yet, that's the reason for this chapter. This is why the **SOS** system includes “*Smiles*.” Let's face it; some of the parenting responsibilities can be quite stressful, and they can be in your face, all hours of the day. There's a reason I refer to it as the “parenting trenches.” This section is to make sure you make time to honor your inner child, and take joy in playing with your actual child. When you, the child, is happy, then you, the adult, is happy too!

## **The Love of Smiles Mindset Shift**

### ***PAY ATTENTION!!***

(Did that get your attention? Awesome blossom!)

Please sit up for this one; I have saved the best mindset shift for last—and in my mind, it’s the most important. I especially consider it to be very important because of the critical time factor involved. Yes, there’s a sense of urgency on this one; this one, I implore that you pay attention before it’s too late.

Now, if that turns up the stress level a bit in you, then good. That’s my hope. This one is so crucial that it is the one that finally pushed me to write this book. I wanted to get the word out so badly on this one. It’s that important, and furthermore, I don’t recall seeing this in any other parenting book. While I think it is based on common sense, I don’t recall seeing it being discussed at this level, or any level, in other parenting books, which made it even *more* important for me to *get this message out*.

Are you ready for it?

Let’s start with one of the best pieces of advice I have ever been given. This was from a co-worker, right after we gave birth to our first daughter. I was such a happy dad, especially after the years of infertility, and I swore I would never take this blessing for granted. My co-worker had this advice for me:

**“I ALWAYS HUGGED MY KIDS. ANYTIME THEY WANTED A HUG, I HUGGED THEM. ANYTIME THEY WANTED TO SLEEP IN MY BED, I LET THEM. BECAUSE I KNEW, EVENTUALLY, THEY WOULD GROW UP AND STOP ASKING. AND THEY ARE TEENAGERS NOW, AND THEY STOPPED ASKING A LONG TIME AGO. SO ALWAYS DO THAT.”**  
— **BERNADETTE, MY CO-WORKER**

Being the doting and happy new dad at the time, my thought was, “Ha! You don’t have to tell me twice! Of course, I’ll always do that!”

But of course, what short memories parents can have, because I, in fact, did forget. In those intense moments in the trenches of parenting, it can be quite easy to forget to step back and see the forest from the trees. Sure, every now

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and then, something would remind me to enjoy the blessings that are my kids: one day, it would be a movie; another day, a sad story in the news about a child. I would remember to go and hug my kids and hold them close.

And then everything would return back to routine.

Does that sound familiar? Likely yes? This is why a big part of the **SOS** goal is to help you maintain that perspective often, because here is the part I think we parents are truly missing out on. I came upon this realization at a seminar, and I got goosebumps, so I knew it was something good. My goosebump-o-meter never fails me.

Let's begin our journey with a small exercise. I want you to think of things that bring you joy. Or as Marie Kondo would put it, what in your life *sparks joy*? What gives you an immediate little spark of "ZING!" in your body? To bring it back to this third "S" of "Smiles," what in your life brings you a smile? Little smile, big smile, goofy smile, any smile—maybe you don't even know why it makes you smile. It just does, and that's enough to know.

What would be on your list? Just to get the ball rolling, off the top of my head, here is a list of some of my absolute-spark-joy things that, for whatever reason, "ZING!" my soul:

- Watching and playing sports, and playing Fantasy Football
- Browsing online shopping (eBay, Offerup)
- My autographed Cortez Kennedy and Walter Jones jerseys
- Vietnamese iced coffee
- Peanut Butter Cups
- Quality time with friends (especially with our old One2Swing Jitterbugs dance teammates)
- Standing on a sandy beach, watching and listening to the ocean
- Riding our Peloton (especially with Sam Yo and Emma Lovewell)
- Listening to and watching myself type fast (What a weird one, right?)
- Bad **AWESOME** DAD jokes (because all DAD jokes are both bad and awesome!)
- Humorous action thriller TV shows like Monk, Leverage, White Collar, and Burn Notice
- My favorite jeans

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- My first car, a 1996 Toyota Camry named Sherman. I drove him for 22 years.
- Wrestling with my kids
- Holding hands with my wife

Alright, that was to get the ball rolling. Your turn! Create a list of the stuff that brings you smiles. It could be superficial, it could be meaningful—big or small, as long as it sparks joy. Grab a sheet and write them down. Time yourself for five minutes; how many will you come up with?

Got some? Great, let's move on.

Check out your “spark joy” list and consider each of those items. How do you “engage” in those things that spark joy? Meaning, how do you make time and resources in your schedule for them?

Almost without exception, we look for these things. We seek them out. We make time in our schedule for these things. We budget money for these things, or sometimes we spend the money and budget after the fact. It's that inner child in us; it shouts with glee! My favorite Vietnamese iced coffee is a pretty good detour away from work, and I giggle with joy every time I make time and head there to get one.

Put differently, who wouldn't enjoy just doing what they like doing? Like in the shoe story and my boy wanting to play with his action figures. (Yes, that shoe story is so applicable to many concepts in this book!) For the things that spark joy, you make time for it, and you do not want to be forced away from it. You want it!

Now let's apply this idea to how we, as parents, see our kids.

It's a given for any parent reading this right now, that your kids spark joy in you. They bring you some of the biggest smiles and happiest moments in your life! This is an absolute for those that fit the definition of “spiritual parents.” Sure, sometimes we forget because of all the parenting trenches we are battling in. But take a step back? Wow! We love them. They make us laugh and move us to cry. How else can I be so very frustrated at my kids all day, only to have it disappear in an instant with one good-night hug and kiss, and a “Daddy,

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I love you.” It just melts my heart, and I don’t even remember what the rest of the day felt like. **#ParentalAmnesia**

Question: If our kids spark smiles and joy, do we engage in them in the same way as all those other things on our list? The common answer, I have found, would be “no” or “not often.” At least when compared to, say, Fantasy Football, or Vietnamese iced coffee, or something else on that list that we go out of our way and seek out. Is that strange? A bit? Yet it definitely is something I have found to be common, even in the most awesome of parents.

A frequent theme in self-development is that what you put focus on, expands. The law of attraction tells us that the universe will learn what’s important to us by what we put focus on. What you do not put focus on, the universe does not think it’s important to you. Do our actions tell the universe that our kids spark the ultimate smiles and joy in us? I think you see what I’m getting at, and why this is an extremely important message.

There is an Adam Sandler movie called *Click*. I liked this movie a lot from the first time I saw it. It really resonated with me and has some visuals that will always stay with me. There are funny parts, heartwarming parts, parts that make you think, and also parts that make you cry.

The premise is that Adam Sandler’s character obtains a “smart remote” for his television, only to find out it doesn’t just control his television, it controls his life! Adam Sandler can slow motion, rewind, fast forward—all of it. Skip a boring meeting? Sure! Fast forward through a dinner with all the extended family around, that you don’t want to be at? No problem! The “smart remote” does even one better; it learns what you want to fast forward through and then does it for you. Imagine a remote learning that you don’t like commercials, and understanding to automatically fast forward through a commercial. In this case, though, this remote is learning what you consider in life to be important and will slow down, and what you consider in life to not be important and fast forward.

As you can guess, the remote quickly learns that Adam Sandler focuses a lot on work, and makes sure to slow down for work achievements. It also notices that Adam Sandler does not focus on family (spending all his time on work to get ahead), and it fast forwards through all the family time. Eventually, Adam

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horrifyingly realizes the remote is making him miss all the special family moments he doesn't want to miss, but he can't control the remote anymore, well into his old age, and is living through the repercussions of years of neglecting his wife and kids. **#SemiSpoilerAlert**

Ponder this for a second. If you had a remote like this, what would your actions be telling the remote? What would it fast forward for you? What would it slow down for you? Now just replace the word "remote" with "universe." The universe expands when we focus on something, and it contracts when we don't. If we asked the universe right now what sparks the most joy for you, where would your kids be on the list?

Before going on, I want to take a moment to *really* encourage you to watch the movie. (No, not now. You and I got this book thingy going at the moment!) When you can, though, I really hope you find time to watch the movie while keeping in mind what we've gone over in this book so far. With the perspectives presented in this book, you will find many great things to think about after you watch this movie. **#WatchTheMovie #ClickTheMovie**

It was a tough pill to swallow for me when I realized that, no, I was not letting the universe know how much my kids meant to me. It was a hard pill to swallow, because I had considered myself not just a good parent but a great parent! I made time for my kids. I loved when they asked me to play. The dishes could always wait. If they ever asked me a question, I would stop to answer. If the dishes couldn't wait or I couldn't give an answer, I would make sure to let them know I would get back to them later. With all those things I did, I figured, wow, and I boasted to myself that I was doing a lot more than the "normal" parent. I thought I was being a great parent.

But what do my actions tell the universe?

Let's use as an example my spark-joy Vietnamese iced coffee. Oh yes, that certainly sparks joy in me! I love Vietnamese iced coffee! And how do you think my relationship with Vietnamese iced coffee is? Do I just sit and wait for Vietnamese iced coffee to come and ask me to play? And wait for a fortuitous time for me to take a break: "Oh sure, I guess I can have a sip right now." AW HECK NO! I go and get some! I divert my work commutes to get some. If

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my home supply is running even somewhat low, I go and restock. Yup, this boy loves his Vietnamese iced coffee!

Compare that to me, while doing my adulting work and responsibilities, and my kid comes and asks me to play. What do I do? Maybe yes, maybe later, not sure, I need to do the dishes, I need to do work, etc. What did all that just tell the universe about how I saw my kids? If I had the *Click* universal remote, what did it just learn?

Oh yes, when I realized this—how I was in discord with how my kids really sparked joy, but that wasn't consistent with my actions—I realized that I was all backwards and wrongwards. Is that one of the most out-of-this-world thoughts? And yet it is such (un)common sense! Not to compare my kids with inanimate objects, but the point being, the things that give me joy, I don't wait for them to come to me. I go and seek them out. People make time and space for the things that bring them joy. Like a child who would rather play with action figures than put on shoes. Like how I giggle and go out of my way to get my Vietnamese iced coffee. Were my actions telling the universe that my kids spark joy?

What does this all mean? This is one of the parts that I don't ever recall seeing in a traditional parenting book. Maybe it's because this is a point that came from a book about the life-changing magic of tidying your house. (Yes, the Marie Kondo book!) Make sure the universe knows what's important to you. Focus and expand the energy, and be consistent with what sparks joy. In other words, go make sure to make time to seek out your kids! Don't just passively wait! Go seek them out! Go ask them to play!

### **URGENT! (And I Don't Mean the Catchy Pop Song By Foreigner)**

Now we start to get a little spicy, because here's the second part to this. We just talked about sparking joy, and now we get into the time critical factor. I hinted at it with co-worker Bernadette's advice she gave me when Kayla was born, and how of course I knew this and vowed to not take it for granted, before going ahead and taking it for granted. Here's the paraphrase of it that digs deep and hurts:

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**“BECAUSE I KNEW EVENTUALLY, THEY WOULD GROW UP AND STOP ASKING. AND THEY ARE TEENAGERS NOW, AND THEY STOPPED ASKING A LONG TIME AGO.”**

**– BERNADETTE, MY CO-WORKER**

And is it any coincidence that around the time I started planning this book, I happened to be having a conversation with my co-worker, Jesse, about his son’s basketball team; and just out of the blue, he says this to me?

**“YOU KNOW, I MISS PICKING UP MY KIDS. I WISHED I HAD PICKED THEM UP MORE. EVENTUALLY THEY GET TOO OLD AND TOO BIG. KEEP PICKING UP YOUR KIDS, BEN.”**

**– JESSE, MY CO-WORKER**

Uh oh. After the feel-goods of the last section, yup, I lay the smack down with the time critical stressor here for you. This is the important part, the second part I do not think I’ve seen in other parenting books, so please, for your sake, pay good attention here.

To give you an idea of this urgency, what I’m about to share with you, this is something I shared at a personal development seminar not too long ago. The response to this was stunning. I didn’t realize I was going to strike such a chord in so many parents in the audience. Parents in the audience were tearing up. Many parents came to talk with me throughout the rest of the weekend to thank me for the breakthrough. One parent told me she called her son on the very next break to talk to him. Another parent came up to me and said he wished he had realized this earlier, before his son was all grown up. One parent told me how they now wish they had sought out their child to play, but now his child is grown up and it’s too late. Because, indeed, one day, they will stop asking.

This is the reason I need you to hear this. I think I haven’t seen this in a parenting book yet because most parenting books are about the children: about raising children, and about the parents striving to be better parents to raise children better.

This last point here is not for your kids; this one is for YOU. My parent friends, this is about your happiness and JOY. I don’t want you to lose out on the joy before it’s too late.

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Have you ever heard parents say something like:

*“Oh my, they grow up way too fast.”*

*“I can’t believe my kid is already [X] years old!”*

*“I wish I had spent more time enjoying them when they were younger.”*

The interesting thing is that you will hear parents say these things, regardless of the age of their kids. The parent of a teen will say this when they see a 9-year-old. The parent of a 9-year-old will say this when they see a 4-year-old. And so on. Even the parent of a 3-month-old will say this when they see a newborn.

The lament is the same: Where does the time go?

The lesson here? What I want so desperately to share with you?

Show the universe how your kids truly spark the ultimate joy. Seek your kids out. Check the things that spark joy on your list, and see how you make time and resources for those, and find the equivalent with your kids. The time will expand, and most importantly, you won’t regret later that you did not seek them out. Do this before it’s too late, when your kids are older and you have missed out. Keep that inner child in you happy by letting it play with your real child.

I hope after reading this, years from now, you don’t think, “I wish I had done [so and so] more often.” I hope instead, years from now, you can tell me that because of these realizations, you remembered on a weekly or even daily basis, and you sought out your kids for some joy and smiles, and are very grateful you did it before it was too late.

### **Building Block 1: Go with the Flow**

Fun story for you from my early years: I first moved from Seattle to California for college. Specifically, I went to Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California, which is in the northeast part of Los Angeles County. Being at college, I have to say the feeling of independence was exhilarating! While growing up in Seattle, one thing I really enjoyed but was heavily restricted on by my par-

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ents was riding my bike outside my neighborhood. I must have been a gypsy. I so longed for adventure outside the great walls of my neighborhood. I would sneak out and ride to the local drugstore or 7-11, and buy candy and play video games—OH yes, that was the life.

So, of course, it was not long after I moved to Claremont that I bought myself a bike! I decided that every Saturday morning, I would go out for some nice, long bike rides. What could be more fun? I would ride out early morning, stop for lunch, maybe a snack, find some video games, and then head back for dinner. I really was looking forward to some new adventures!

The day came for my first bike ride. I was so excited!! My campus was bordered by Route 66, so as I exited the campus parking lot, I turned right onto Route 66, and headed east. And I just rode. AND WOW, did I ride! Wait, calling it riding doesn't even do it justice. I FLEW! I'll admit that on the morning before embarking, I wasn't sure how it would go, because even though I worked out, I had never really cycled for long distances. I was pleasantly surprised to see that my cardio and leg strength were more than up to snuff, because I was seriously FLYING! OH YEAH! EUPHORIA ALL AROUND!

As the day turned to late morning, I decided that would be my stopping point. I grabbed a light snack, pattered around the shopping areas, and as noon rolled around, I figured that was the perfect time to head back. It was a two-hour ride out, so I figured a slow and relaxed ride back might be three hours. I would roll into campus for a late afternoon nap and then dinner. It was perfect. It was turning out to be a perfect first Saturday bike trip.

At this point, a bit of trivia for you might be fun: Did you know there are these things in Los Angeles called the Santa Ana winds? I mention this because people not from Los Angeles may not know this. For example, a kid born and raised in Seattle, and only recently moved to Los Angeles, wouldn't likely know this.

Did you know that these winds start maybe around early September? You know, like when school starts?

Oh, ha, fun fact: These winds blow north to northeast from Los Angeles. For example, the winds may start in Los Angeles and blow north, like to the city of

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Claremont, home of Harvey Mudd College. And from there, they blow east; for example, like the same way as the kid riding his bike, from about seven paragraphs ago. Ha, that kid would probably feel like he's flying. Pity him if he ever decided to turn around and head west against these Santa Ana winds. Like, say, back toward Harvey Mudd College?

Oh, another fun fact: These winds can blow up to 40 mph. Not bad ... if you're in a car.

Not to milk the narrative any longer—dang those 40 mph winds—let's just say that on my return trip back to campus, heading west into the 40 mph winds, I did not fly. No euphoria. **#NOBUTTA**

I planned to go at a slow and relaxed pace back. Well, I nailed the slow part for sure. The joggers were faster than me. Heck, I think I even move faster on the Peloton today than I did on that windy day at Harvey Mudd. Peloton, by the way, is a stationary bike. **#YUP**

After much biking, resting, and walking, I finally rolled myself into campus around 9 p.m. I definitely “napped” very well that night, that's for sure.

Moral of the story? A lot of the time, it's just easiest to go with the flow. Fighting against the wind, or the circumstances, you can try if you need to. Or, you can just go with the flow.

How does this apply to parenting? “Go with the flow?” But of course! There are already some great examples from earlier in this book. The shoe story? The one where I stopped fighting and chasing and decided to just see what my kid was up to with his action figures? That's a great example. Here's another one: Have you ever been doing something of your own, and suddenly one of your kids comes up to you and says something or asks something seemingly out of left field? It could be a comment, a question, or a request to do something or say something. Sometimes I will just drop what I'm doing and listen to them, converse with them, and enjoy the back and forth. Some of my most fun moments are when I stopped what I was doing and went with their “flow.” In other words, when your child presents you with a “flow,” a metaphorical 40 mph wind, feel free to stop what you're doing and take the time to ride it, especially since some of those will turn into experiences of FLY-

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ING EUPHORIA! And you might find they make for great “deposits.” And you might find they will help you along with your parenting as well.

**“NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE,  
IF A LITTLE KID HANDS YOU A TOY PHONE ... YOU ANSWER IT.”  
– DAVE CHAPPELLE, COMEDIAN/WRITER/PRODUCER**

Here’s a favorite “go with the flow” story:

One day, my two boys and I were at the park having a picnic. I was attempting to get my older son to eat some carrots. Normally, he is a really good eater, especially when it comes to carrots. But not this day. I would hold the carrot right in front of him, and he would ignore it. I would say “Ahhhhhh” and motion the carrot toward him, and he would ignore it and turn away (the rotate-my-head-and-avoid-eye-contact dance).

Some backstory: My older son had taken Hapkido for a short amount of time, so he liked air punching and saying “Hap-Ki-Do” on each punch. And of course, my youngest son was immediately “monkey-see-monkey-do,” and followed suit—two little boys, running around, punching, and yelling “Hap-Ki-Do! Hap-Ki-Do!”

Oh, did I mention that one of their favorite things to punch was Daddy’s butt? Earlier that day was no different. For much of the day, the two boys were following Dad around, playing what I affectionately call “Hap-Ki-Do Punch Butt,” which basically is punching Dad’s butt while saying “Hap-Ki-Do! Hap-Ki-Do!”

**#SimpleNamesWork  
#HapkidoPunchButt**

(By the way, if you see a dad walking around with two young boys following him and punching his butt and chanting out something, and you want to know what it is but are too shy to ask, they are probably yelling out “HAP-KI-DO! HAP-KI-DO!” And then feel free to tell that dad you enjoyed reading his book! He’ll thank you!)

And I’ll admit, I have myself to blame for the HAP-KI-DO Punch Butt, because I encouraged the HAP-KI-DO as playtime exercises too. For example, I would

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say “left block” and then move my hand toward the left side of his head, a signal for him to move his left hand up to block my hand. There was also “right block,” “overhand block,” and “jump.” And finally, there was “duck,” where I would swipe at his head and he was supposed to duck under my swipe.

Back to the present: So, after the many failed repeated attempts to feed him his carrot, I decided to practice some “Go with the Flow.” I remembered the “HAP-KI-DO Punch-Butt flow” (not something I ever thought I’d type in quotes) my kids had been in all day. Hmmmm ... Can I use this?

*“Quack!!”*

Yes, I quacked out loud.

This was followed by a few seconds pause, and then I playfully swiped and connected with his noggin.

*“HEYYYYY!”* my son said, and looked at me incredulously. I smiled back and waited a beat.

*“Quack!!”*

I looked at him, smiled, and then gave him another playful swipe on the side of his noggin. He looked at me half confused, half puzzled, and half laughing (yes, three halves! **#NEWMATH**).

I smiled back, opened my eyes really big, and then louder and more frantic this time:

*“QUACK!!!”*

This time, I made a big motion of my arm, looking to swipe his noggin. This time, he laughed and ducked.

(DUCK?! GET IT?) **#DADJOKE**

For good measure, again ...

*“QUACK!!!”*

He laughed and ducked. And on it went for a few more swipes. *“QUACK!” \*duck\* “QUACK!” \*duck\* “QUACK!” \*duck\*.*

Yes, I call that going with the *“Hap-Ki-Do Punch-Butt flow.”* **#HapKiDoPunch-ButtFlow**

Oh, wait; remember the studies of mutually respectful relationships? The Golden Rule?

After a few moments of silence, I held up a carrot to him and said, *“Carrot?”* He opened his mouth—*“AHHH!”*—and then ate it.

Absolutely, all these stories and concepts overlap with each other. For this specific building block, look for opportunities to not resist (*“Eat your carrot now, please?”*), and just go with the flow (*“QUACK!”*).

## **Building Block 2: Pattern Interrupt**

This is another great tactic that helps when you want to communicate something and your child is either oblivious OR emotionally charged (angry, sad, upset). You utilize ... (DRUM ROLL) ... SHOCK AND AWE! It may be funny at the outset, or it may first be shocking, and then funny. Two great examples we've already covered: The previous story, when out of nowhere, I yelled *“QUACK!!!”* at my son, is an example of a pattern interrupt. The *“TIME OUT for positivity”* is a pattern interrupt as well. *“Hey there! TIME OUT for you! You did something awesome!”*

The pattern interrupt is a good way to ease tensions, or just to add energy to the status quo. It is a fun and random addition of silliness and joy to the day. Another example of a pattern interrupt, this time with the tables turned on me:

One day, I was in our playroom, and I was feeling a bit grumbly because I was cleaning. On that particular day, I felt like I was always cleaning up after my kids. So, there I was, grumbly me, picking up playing cards off the floor.

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My older son (5 years old at the time) came running into the playroom excitedly:

*E: "Daddy! Daddy! Want to play 'Celebration?!"*

*Me: "Sure. Sounds fun. What's that?"*

*E: "I'll show you! Can I have the cards you're holding?"*

*Me: "Ummm ... Okay?"*

*E: (grabs stack of cards): "3 ... 2 ... 1 ... CELEBRATION!!!" (And he throws the stack of cards way up in the air and they go everywhere.)*

*E: "YAYYY!!!" (runs out)*

I was ... shocked. So much so that I couldn't stop laughing!

The adult in me wanted to protest and yell after him, "HEY!! Who's going to pick these up?!" In reality, the child in me won out. I was so shocked but then just started laughing so hard, and I kept laughing as I bent over and picked up the cards again. "That kid ... dang, he's hilarious." Grumbly emotional charge released, I had to admit it was pretty darn funny. And it even worked on me the next two times he did it!

Here's another for you, one of my favorite stories!

I was at a personal development seminar, and the subject was dealing with limiting beliefs. Our trainer, Robert Riopel, told us one of his tricks: Catch your brain when it is sending you limiting beliefs, and call your brain out on it by yelling at it out loud:

*"AHA! GOTCHA!!! I CAUGHT YA! YOU'RE NOT PULLING THAT ON ME TODAY! NOT TODAY!!!"*

It was so funny, so hilarious, and so shocking! The entire audience was shocked by this pattern interrupt, and we just couldn't help but laugh.

Besides being hilarious, this is a serious pattern interrupt! And it is one that evidently my crazy lateral thinking brain stored away in high regard, because I knew I had to pull this on my daughter in an inspired and unpremeditated moment (of course).

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My daughter and I had been having some emotionally charged outbursts at each other. We were talking with raised voices, charged emotions, anger, and more. I was still, as a parent, taking things way too personally. Kayla happened to inherit this from me as well, it seems.

So, in one of our battles, my daughter said something that would have previously caused in me a charged reactive outburst. For some reason, in some inspired moment, I pointed at her and yelled: *“AHA!! GOTCHA!!!”*

My daughter froze and looked at me, shocked!! My shock-and-aweness stomped forward.

*“I GOTCHA! I GOTCHA!!! THAT WOULD HAVE ORDINARILY MADE ME REPRIMAND YOU HARSHLY, AND MAYBE EVEN RAISE MY VOICE. BUT NOT TODAY! YOU ARE NOT GOING TO GET ME TO DO THAT TODAY! BECAUSE I GOTCHA THIS TIME! GOTCHA! GOTCHA!!!”*

She started to laugh. How could you not? And so, I just continued ranting for another moment, and running around and whooping like a madman.

*“AHA! GOTCHA! GOTCHA! GOTCHA!!!”*

We laughed, we had fun, and after the laughing subsided, we eventually resolved our issue, smiling the whole time, and went on with the rest of our evening.

### **Building Block 3: PLAY!!**

***“IF YOUR KNEES AREN’T GREEN BY THE END OF THE DAY,  
YOU OUGHT TO SERIOUSLY RE-EXAMINE YOUR LIFE.”  
– CALVIN (FROM THE COMIC STRIP “CALVIN AND HOBBS”)***

While you are working on your happier parenting, remember to keep the joy in your life! Don’t starve that inner child of joy, for both your sake and your children’s sake!

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Sometimes, if you're busy with work or chores, or managing the house, it can be tough to remember to pull back and take a moment for fun. As parents, we are so used to setting down rules, teaching our children "rules of society" and what not: what's good, what's bad, what not to stick in your mouth—that kind of thing. In the trenches of parenthood, the battle may become habit, and we really may forget how to play.

**"IF YOU OBEY ALL THE RULES, YOU'LL MISS ALL THE FUN."**

**— KATHERINE HEPBURN, ACTRESS**

So, remember to take a step back, break a few "rules," and enjoy life!

A few fun stories for you:

**Run in a Circle!**

The first story involves a day at the mall. Sheri had taken Kayla to the bathroom, and so, the boys and I were outside ... bored. The youngest asked to play on my phone. I said, "No, not right now." He started to whine. Out of DESPERATION—I have no idea where this came from—I said, "Hey, let's run in a circle!!!"

All of a sudden, both boys' heads just popped up and looked around, like eager dogs, smiling and panting. (Well, not really, but if they were dogs, they would have been.)

And all of a sudden, I just got up and started running in a small circle.

The boys started running in a circle behind me. Whooping. Hollering. Laughing.

We did it for nearly 10 minutes straight; basically until Sheri and Kayla were out of the bathroom. And what happened then? We did not go on our merry way; nope! Instead, Kayla joined in!

You might be surprised at two things: First, how well this one works, and second, for some reason, if you get a younger kid involved, older kids will get involved too!

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I did this again at a recent National Swing Dance event. A youth team was sitting near us; I would gauge maybe 12 to 18 years old. As soon as they saw us laughing and hooting and running in a circle, one by one, they all joined in! We were a group of maybe 10 or more kids, teens, and adults, hooting and running in a circle! That's some silliness and joy for sure!

### **Eat Your Food**

This one started when Kayla was 3. One day, she didn't want her vegetables or chicken. So I said, "Great, I'll eat them! Chicken is good for muscles!" And then I took a small piece off, ate it, and then flexed my muscles. Okay, I just didn't flex my muscles; I was doing it professional wrestling style: grimacing, growling, and flexing. Kayla laughed, and she ate a piece of chicken and flexed and growled back at me.

Since then, proteins "build muscle!" And whenever you eat some, you get to flex your muscles.

For vegetables, they "clean your insides," so after eating one, I would "ooh" and "ahhh" as I ran my hands over my skin, saying, "Oooh, I'm so clean inside! So beautiful from all these vegetables!" This practice has carried on to today!

### **Boys in the Shower**

One of my most favorite, FAVORITE stories:

Our kids were in swim classes one summer. After class, I was in charge of getting the two boys showered and changed and ready to go. Now picture two very high energy boys (age 3 and 5 at the time this happened), and me trying to corral them. You can pretty much picture Rocky Balboa chasing that chicken again. And then add a second chicken; and the other parents in the locker room giving me a "look" that says, "That dad can't control his chickens." My two boys continued to run around, shriek, play, duck in and out of shower stalls, wrestle in the shower, and scream with joy.

For weeks, this completely stressed me out. I felt stressed trying to keep a schedule. I also felt embarrassed at how much noise the boys were making and how out of control they were.

*May the Smiles Be With You (aka STEP 3: SMILES)*

Fast forward, I had just come back from a week-long workshop/conference about personal development. I swore I would try something different this time, and I came up with just one rule: If they aren't killing themselves or anyone else, then it's okay (metaphorically speaking of course!).

What did I find out? Well ... the boys were having fun entertaining themselves, of course. And they weren't killing themselves or anyone else (metaphorically speaking!!); which, when I let it go, gave me a lot of time to go about my process! I had time to get the different bags set, get the swimsuits in the machine dryer, go to the bathroom, and get my changing areas on the benches set up.

I did caution them not to run, because they may slip and hurt themselves (see rule #1), and that was it. Not only could I calmly go about my preparation, I actually really enjoyed watching them have fun! The part of me that was previously afraid of the ruckus they were causing? Being able to let it go, I could actually watch them and smile. They were really funny, and how could someone not love their jubilant giggles and smiles! And then, out of the shower, they would run to the full-length wall mirror and start dancing naked—and flexing their muscles. I just could not stop smiling.

I did get some “looks” from a few other parents, and I could almost literally hear their thoughts about me being a parent that couldn't control his kids. I was shocked at how easily I let it pass. The kids were having fun dancing and playing; and not coincidentally, they actually LISTENED to me more quickly when I asked them to come over and get their clothes on, get their sandals on, and sit and enjoy their post-swim snack. No chasing! (**#ShoeStory #GoWithTheFlow**)

We still were able to get out of there on schedule; fancy that, because that was a lot of running around! And what really made my day was when this older gentleman saw me and the kids, and said, “Yeah, remember when we were like that too? Before we had to become adults?” I could only smile and agree.

## **Exercise Time: The Love of SMILES Exercises**

### **Building Block 1: Go with the Flow**

#### **1. Find Your Kid and Go with Their Flow**

See if you can do this once a day: Find where your kid is at, and go with their flow. This means, whatever they are doing, acknowledge it in some way, and participate in some way. Show interest and ask them what they're doing, and maybe see if you can join in. You get a **#Deposit** potential and will show the universe (and that universal remote) what's important when you seek your child out.

**#WINWINWIN**

#### **2. Turn a Chase into a "Go with the Flow"**

As the opportunity arises, see if you can catch when you are "chasing" your kid (such as the shoe story, or the eating carrots story), and self-correct. See if you can stop attempting to parent, and go with your child's flow. Sincerely flow with them, and if needed, bring them back to YOUR flow (such as the shoe story, or the eating carrots story).

**#MUTUALRESPECT #GOLDENRULE**

#### **3. Repeat the Mantra: "So Be It. What's Next?"**

Piggybacking on the previous two exercises, this is a tip to use for any situation that seems to be going against you. Or when you feel that the things that are out of your control are starting to create stress. It is my ultimate "Go with the Flow" tip.

This is a combination of two phrases I like to use. I use them often, with great results, sometimes individually, sometimes together-

**"So be it"** is a phrase learned from a personal development seminar. It is an acceptance of a situation as it is, and the second part is to then figure out how to move on. Whether it's the weather, the crazy driver next to

## *May the Smiles Be With You (aka STEP 3: SMILES)*

you, or a toddler running away from you when you want to change his diaper, it's a realization of the many things out of our control. **"So be it"** is my acceptance in these situations, and it actually helps me release emotional charge and get back to being calm.

**"What's Next?"** is a line from the TV show, *The West Wing*. President Bartlet used it as a way to let his staff know he understands what is being talked about, and that he doesn't need any further info, and simply wants to move on to the next step. In fact, when his staffers attempt to give him more information about a situation, he will even interrupt them—"I understand; what's next?"—because he doesn't want more information; he wants to know what to do next. I think this works well with "Go with the Flow" when combined with **"So be it."** You have acknowledged the situation, are ready to move on from what is outside of your control, and are ready to focus on what you are able to do next that is within your control.

### **Building Block 2: Pattern Interrupt**

#### **1. Pull an "AHA GOTCHA!!!"**

Whether on yourself or on your kids, this is a great one. A quick "AHA!!! GOTCHA!!!" will stop everyone in their tracks. And that's when you can go on with the diatribe:

"I GOTCHA KIDS!! YOU WERE ABOUT TO GET MY EMOTIONS ALL CAUGHT UP IN A KNOT BY YELLING AND SCREAMING AND FIGHTING! BUT NOT TODAY, BECAUSE I CAUGHT YA!! NO WAY YOU'RE GOING TO GET ME CAUGHT IN THAT MESS!"

And to be clear, yes, I mean yell this out loud! Try once this week, maybe once every week, or as the occasion arises. But once this week, now that you know about it!

#### **2. Be Creative and Make Stuff Up**

Inspired by Calvin's dad, from "Calvin and Hobbes," this is where we get to use our creativity! Such as when our kids ask us questions: "Why does

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this happen?” or “Why does that happen?” Just answer and make things up once in a while!

**Calvin:** *“How do bank machines work?”*

**Calvin’s dad:** *“Well, let’s say you want 25 dollars. You punch in the amount, and behind the machine there’s a guy with a printing press, who makes the money and sticks it out this slot.”*

**Calvin:** *“Sort of like the guy who lives up in our garage and opens the door?”*

**Calvin’s dad:** *“Exactly.”*

Granted, this will maybe make us smile at the expense of our kids. (Google “Calvin and Hobbes dad wisdom” for more!) But who doesn’t like a tall tale? And besides, by the time the kids figure out it’s a tall tale, it’s way too late to matter. And this can then only become a fun little story to tell at their wedding or graduation. Or if you’re like me, you won’t be able to keep a straight face telling a made-up story, and they’ll get that you’re pulling their leg, pretty much right away. Either way, it definitely gets the creative juices going, and it’s definitely fun. CAUTION: Use sparingly; we want it fun, not annoying!

More seriously, a way to engage in this, which you might like better, is in a more cooperative style, such as storytelling. My kids and I really love our bedtime storytelling. I improvise the bedtime story as I go, and often use them as characters, and sometimes turn them into “Choose Your Own Adventure” stories. Besides helping stretch my mind and keep it creative—because in stories, ANYTHING can happen—it’s also a way to connect with my inner child.

### **3. *Do Something Randomly and Suddenly***

Start small; slowly push your comfort zone, and do it just for fun! A few examples:

## *May the Smiles Be With You (aka STEP 3: SMILES)*

- Blurt a gibberish word or phrase out loud randomly (inspired by Steve Carrell's character, Evan Baxter, in *Bruce Almighty*)
- Give yourself a high five and a "WOOT!"
- Walking somewhere? Break into a sprint!
- Walking somewhere? Out of nowhere, do the "down the stairs" pantomime thing. My goal is to do this while walking across a crosswalk and in front of a stopped car. I haven't yet. When I do, I'll keep you posted on the results!
- Side walk on the sidewalk! Sure, maybe most of those watching won't get it, but a few of those will. And why not? (The more interesting version would be to cross walk on the crosswalk.)
- Wear a clown nose! You don't need to act like a clown; simply go about your everyday business, but with a clown nose on.

You can probably think of a ton more at this point. The point is, all of these are pure pattern interrupts. The purpose is to get the body and mind out of its status quo. This is one of the key elements in the book, *Living with a SEAL*, by Jesse Itzler (and starring David Goggins as the unnamed Navy SEAL). It's a great book, and gives great examples of just trying new things out and shaking things up to keep life interesting and fresh. Sometimes the effect is astonishing; there are times, from a pattern interrupt, I can feel like every cell in my body has just snapped to attention.

And sometimes this will have an interesting effect on your surroundings. You will have just done something significant. If someone sees you do this, they may wonder about it, think about it, and even talk about it. You've just stirred up some energy in the universe.

### **#SidewalkOntheSIDEWALK**

#### **Building Block 3: PLAY !!**

##### **1. *Seek Out Your Kids and Ask Them to Play.***

This is dovetailing on the "Go with the Flow," but this time with deliberate intention to play with them. See if you can get to each of your kids, three times in a week. It can be any kind of game, or it can be to ask them to come and see what you're doing. I've found, more often than not, I can

ask my kids to play just about anything, and they love it. Your kids really do love spending time with you, and I think it's just such a rare thing when a parent asks a kid to play—they will enjoy it!

## **2. *Pattern Interrupt Plays***

I've actually found asking my kids to play as a way to do a "pattern interrupt" type parenting resolution. There have been times when all three kids have come up to me to gripe about something—usually each other—and instead of resolving it, I let out a "Hey, who wants to play 'I SPY' with me?" and all three kids magically forget their gripes and play with me!

From a parenting perspective, this isn't necessarily a resolution as much as it is a distraction or a reprieve. If you just want to alleviate the situation and turn things back to play, I have had great success with this. And heck, sometimes the kids, and the parents, may not be in the mood for a lengthy resolution either! Other simple games work here too: rock-paper-scissors, hot hands, dots ... Duck-duck-geese works too. Or just make something up, like the "FLOOR IS LAVA!"

## **3. *Come Up with a "Secret" Handshake***

Who doesn't love a handshake? There is a certain amount of adrenalin that gets created with a successfully executed handshake—just like a high five, but even more special. Plus, it's a way to bond with your kids and have something special with your kids. You can come up with one for the whole family, or one for each individual kid.

Currently, I have one with my daughter and one with my oldest son. I am sure that by the time this book is on the market, I will have one with my youngest soon too. And I will possibly have forgotten them and need to do new ones. It's all good! I just remember that I have yet to ever have a secret handshake request turned down. In fact, sometimes the kids are proud and want to show off the handshake to their friends. Of course, I happily oblige each of these requests!

## **What's Next?**

WOW! We just finished all three of the **SOS** chapters! How amazing do you feel? Good stuff? I am really excited for you, and I have some special plans for our last and final chapter of the book.

First, another quick mention of the book bonuses. I have a few ideas in mind of some supplemental material. In fact, my daughter keeps telling me to record all the bedtime stories and add them to the book bonuses (**#SMARTKID**). Either way, I'm looking forward to see what I continue to update this section with. Go and get registered now, and see what's there!

<http://happierparentingbook.com/bonus/>

With that said, congratulations again!! You graduate! Which means, what the heck is coming next? There is still another chapter? Yes, I have been saving some of my favorites for last. I have three wonderful stories to share with you as we celebrate you finishing this book. Are you ready? Then what are you waiting for? I'll meet you over there right now!



*Just clowning around!*



## Chapter 7

### Just Keep Swimming

***“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the things you did.”***

**– Mark Twain, Author**

Yes, we are nearly done! Before we go, I have a few more special stories to share with you, and one of my most important lessons for happier parenting. I have saved the best for last!

First, a little story about the title of this last chapter. When I was starting on this book, what actually came to me first was this very chapter title. I wasn’t sure how it was going to fit in, only that I love the “Just Keep Swimming” phrase from the movie *Finding Nemo*. I even love the “Just Keep Swimming” song! Good thing too, because that song gets stuck in my head WAY too easily. This story goes back to when Sheri and I were dating. I was in love with Sheri. However, my life was in a bit of flux. I was laid off, not working in IT anymore, and trying out a few different things. And ... I had some sort of mental block about asking her to marry me. Something felt unsure and unknown, and that was uncomfortable for someone like me who grew up in a family of problem solvers and knowledge seekers. I felt like there was some problem to solve first, or something to be resolved, before I could ask her to marry me. I wasn’t sure what it was, just that the feeling was there.

Skip ahead a few months, and we were attending our first ever personal development seminar, “The Turning Point,” with Marshall Sylver. Let’s just say that the entire weekend was one big huge mindset shift, with many “AHA” moments that we still carry today. Specific to this story was how Marshall said

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that in business and in life, some people overthink and overanalyze, to the point of inaction. You don't need to know the whole plan to move forward. You don't need to have the entire problem solved before taking action. It was succumbing to this analysis paralysis that was the downfall of many an entrepreneur. Instead, he said to think of driving through the fog: sometimes you just have to go five feet so you can see the next five feet.

It was after that seminar when I realized that whatever I was not sure of, or whatever was not known, didn't really relate to my relationship with Sheri. The one thing I knew was that I wanted Sheri to be part of my forever. And so, I was certain of the next steps to take, and that after I drove those five feet, the next five feet would be revealed. Within a couple of months, we were engaged! A little over a year later, we were married!

Shortly after we were married, the movie, *Finding Nemo*, came out. Naturally, I saw myself more in tune with "Marlin," the over-worried, over-thinking, everything-could-go-wrong fish. Which is why I also treasured the courageous and wonderful Dory, who lived by a very simple motto:

**Dory:** "Hey, Mr. Grumpy Gills. When life gets you down, you know what you gotta do?"

**Marlin:** "I don't wanna know what you gotta do when life gets you down."

**Dory:** (singing) "Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming, swimming."

Suffice to say, it has now been many years that this theme—of driving through the fog, just turning those pedals, just going five feet to see the next five feet, and just keeping on swimming—has been a source of guidance and inspiration. Whether it was jobs, careers, business ventures, getting married, and yes, of course, parenting, this mantra has helped me a ton, and I am grateful for it.

**"JUST KEEP SWIMMING. JUST KEEP SWIMMING."  
— ELLEN DeGENERES AS DORY (FROM THE FILM, FINDING NEMO)**

For this reason, I am grateful to you too. Look how far we've come! Whatever your situation was coming into this book, and whatever it was you were look-

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ing for, I am honored that you found value here, and that you continued to “just keep swimming” with me to the end.

And here we are, ready to finish this particular journey I’ve presented to you in this book. First, we’ll have a quick look at what we’ve covered, then a fun little trophy we can award ourselves, and then I will send you off with some wonderful specialness. Shall we?

### **To the Summary ... And Beyond!!**

**In Chapter 1:** We welcomed you to Crazy Town! And, more importantly, we honored you as “spiritual” parents.

**In Chapter 2:** Our chapter about parenting challenges of today: WHY IS IT SO HARD? It’s hard because, as “spiritual” parents, we want the best for our children, and sometimes that doesn’t turn out how we expect. The point of this chapter was to take a step back and realize that whether it turns out how we like or not, we are always doing our best, and that is an amazing truth to build upon.

**“PARENTS, GIVEN WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES THEY ARE IN, ALWAYS DO THE BEST THEY CAN,  
TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY.”**

**– THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH OF PARENTING**

**In Chapter 3:** The 3 simple **SOS** steps to Happier Parenting are revealed!!

Love of **SELF**,  
Love of **Others**,  
Love of **Smiles!**



**In Chapter 4:** Our deep dive into Love of *SELF*. We talked about the importance of shifting your mindset to be one where you focus on yourself first, for your sake and for the sake of all those in your community.

**In Chapter 5:** Our deep dive into Love of *Others*: creating and cultivating respectful relationships in your external environment. This includes not only your *Offspring*, but also your co-workers and community. There are no limits to what and whom you can have a respectful relationship with.

**In Chapter 6:** Our deep dive into the Love of *Smiles* (and also *Sillies*!!), and yes, my personal favorite! We learned how to play again and why it is so important. We also talked about the sense of urgency with this as well. It's a "use it or lose it" proposition. We definitely don't want to lose it, because we often don't realize we've lost it until it's too late and we've already missed all of life's wonderful opportunities with our kids, for joy and *Smiles*.

**And now we are here in Chapter 7!**

Wow! Here we are! I hope you have found a lot of great takeaways here; or, at the very least, you learned my dance moves, are ready to steal them, and make them your own. That all said, in my experience, it is quite easy to get sucked back into the parenting trenches. That is why it is important for me, and for you, to know and internalize our greatness. We are fantastic parents. Remember that easy litmus test? Just by virtue of reading this book, you have

the heart and motivation to continue to improve and make things better. Which brings us to ...

**We Interrupt This Book to Bring You a Special Trophy...**

Do you remember what I said was my most favorite trophy? To lock in a concept? Yup! It's that super energy-giving **#HIGHFIVE** !! This time, however, I am giving you a big huge high five to take with you. It's waiting for you on this special page. Bookmark it! Dog-ear it! Any day, every day—anytime you need my support and a high five—it's right here for you! Let's do it!

**HIGH FIVE !!**



## **Laugh, Think, Cry: That's a Heck of a Day**

As we near the end of this book, which also marks the beginning of your journey from this book, I wanted to share with you one last golden nugget, something I hope you can really hold on to and remember as you live your life as a happier parent and a happier person.

Below is one of my most favorite quotes. It is from the late Coach Jim Valvano, aka Jimmy V, as part of his acceptance speech at the 1993 ESPY Awards. It was in the midst of his yearlong battle with cancer that he became the honored recipient of the inaugural Arthur Ashe Courage and Humanitarian Award. Two months before he passed away, he accepted his award at the ESPYs, and proceeded to give one of the most memorable speeches I've ever heard. My favorite part of his speech is below:

**"WHEN PEOPLE SAY TO ME, HOW DO YOU GET THROUGH LIFE OR EACH DAY, IT'S THE SAME THING. TO ME, THERE ARE THREE THINGS WE ALL SHOULD DO EVERY DAY. WE SHOULD DO THIS EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES. NUMBER ONE IS LAUGH. YOU SHOULD LAUGH EVERY DAY. NUMBER TWO IS THINK. YOU SHOULD SPEND SOME TIME IN THOUGHT. NUMBER THREE IS, YOU SHOULD HAVE YOUR EMOTIONS MOVED TO TEARS, COULD BE HAPPINESS OR JOY. BUT THINK ABOUT IT. IF YOU LAUGH, YOU THINK, AND YOU CRY, THAT'S A FULL DAY. THAT'S A HECK OF A DAY. YOU DO THAT SEVEN DAYS A WEEK, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL."**

**— JIM VALVANO, 1993 ESPY AWARDS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

**"Laugh, Think, Cry"** has been a mantra close to my heart for some years now. It has often helped me take a step back, breathe, and be grateful for the many things in my life. And fortunately, it turns out that my kids do a great job fulfilling Jimmy V's maxim for me: My kids make me laugh. They make me think. And they move me to tears. I bet when you take a step back and have a moment to breathe and reflect, you'll realize the same with your kids. That is one of the most wonderful gifts my kids have given me: "Laugh. Think. Cry." As Jimmy V says, *"That's a heck of a day. You do that seven days a week, you're going to have something special.* That's pretty darn cool, isn't it?

Which brings us to my last three stories I would love to share with you. (Oh yes, I definitely saved the best for last!)

## **LAUGH**

One night, Wyatt, our youngest, was not having anything to do with sleep. Wait, what do I mean one night? That happens many nights! Maybe he takes after Dad? The other two kids are usually in bed by 8 p.m., and most nights asleep for sure by 9 p.m. But not this little guy. Sure, he may lie himself down with his brother and sister initially, but within 30 minutes, he comes storming out the door like Kramer on *Seinfeld*, as if to say, “Hey, everyone! Where’s the party?”

He’ll keep running around, going about his business—reading, playing, checking in on our business—all the way up until 10 p.m., 11 p.m., and even way past midnight on occasion!

I think he likes the after party, or maybe the quality time with Mom and Dad after the other two are asleep. He’s not even angry or cranky tired. He’s actually really quite happy, running around, smiling, and wanting to play.

We used to stress about him not getting enough sleep and being cranky the next day. But sure enough, most of the time, he’s pretty much up early the next morning, happy and chatty. “So be it.” We’ve learned to let it go.

There are times when he’ll wander to my computer desk to see what I’m up to. He loves when I print out coloring pages from the internet for him to draw and color. And he’ll plop himself at the coloring table (next to my computer station) and color while I work.

One night, I decided to “seek my child out.” After I printed some coloring pages and was about to hand them to him, I thought, well, why the heck not switch it up a bit?

*“Hey, Wy-Wy, can Daddy color with you?”*

Wyatt shrieked with excitement!! “YAYYY!!!” he cheered, and cleared room on the coloring table for me, and pulled a stool next to him for me to sit on. I went and got some scratch paper from the crafts drawer, and Wyatt went and got an assortment of pens for me to use.

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Now, to set the scene here, I am not a good drawer. I am not a good colorer. And when it comes to a blank sheet, I'm not a good picker of stuff to draw and color. But I was also just too lazy to print out a coloring page for me. So, it was just the blank sheet, and with that I usually just doodle or squiggle. Often-times, my eyes will just wander; then something will catch my eye, and I'll draw that. This specific night, that's what I did. Something caught my eye, I smiled, and I attempted to draw it. Or, more specifically, I attempted to draw him.

While I was drawing, Wyatt looked over to see what I was up to. He saw what I was drawing and smiled, stopped his own coloring, and watched me work. He was highly enjoying himself as he watched me draw and color. And as bad a drawer and colorer that I was, he recognized immediately what I was drawing.



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Wyatt pointed to the little guy and giggled: “Wy-Wy?” I smiled and chuckled back. “Yup. That’s Wy-Wy.” He pointed to the larger guy: “Daddy?” And I smiled. “Yup. Daddy!”

I guess my drawing wasn’t too bad! I’m happy he recognized us! To say my artistic talent could rival a 5-year-old, might be an insult to a 5-year-old. Then again, hey, look at the detail on his pajama pants!

When I was done, he disappeared to the art cart and came back with a piece of tape. He asked for the picture and asked me to follow him. “Come, Daddy!” I followed him to his bedroom. He bounded the whole way, smiling, and we ended up next to his bed. He taped my drawing to his bed frame and pointed to it: “WY-WY! Daddy!” He giggled, crawled into bed, and gave me a good night kiss.

Awwwwwwww.

The next morning, he couldn’t wait to show it to his brother, sister, and mom! He was so excited! He woke up bouncing off the walls! And the other two played along just perfectly (YAY!). Sometimes mornings can be rough, but not this morning. The siblings played along: “Oooh, Wy-Wy! Who’s that?” “Is that you?” “Is that Daddy?”

It’s now years later. My son is a few years older. And this is still taped by his bed. I smile each time I see it. I chuckle when I remember this little happy partier, “Mr. After-Party.” I remember the glee and smile when he saw what I was drawing. And it always brings me a smile and a laugh. And I’m so grateful I took a bit of extra time to spend with him.

Sometimes life is about going with the flow, and you never know what you’re going to get. Maybe it’s a parenting moment. And just maybe it’s a treasured memory for both of you, one that will continue to make you smile and laugh for years to come.

**THINK**

This story/poem goes back to when my daughter, Kayla, was in kindergarten, and already becoming quite the young lady! It was the eve of the parent-student dance at school, and more importantly, it was our first “date!” Not just *our* first date; it was her *first-ever* date! I was VERY excited.

I left work early and, on the way home, started thinking about how fun this date would be, and in my mind’s eye, the years skipped ahead, and I thought about how, eventually, boys would be coming to take her out on dates. Then college. Then more courting. Maybe a United States President type thing in there too. Yup, the whole shebang was going through my head. It’s a fun thing to think about as parents. And as I started thinking about her future, I couldn’t help but feel an overwhelming sense of ... PANIC!!!! (You’ll see!)

***“The Corsage”***

*I was racing home, not wanting to be late.  
Tonight, I was taking my young daughter on her first date!  
Oh, how this proud papa, was loving the chance,  
To accompany his young daughter to her school’s parent-student dance.*

*Driving home, I zoned out, and in the blink of an eye,  
My daughter became a young lady, a tear streamed from my eye.  
Boys soon would be calling, to take her out for the eve.  
Snickered I, “First they will have to get past me!”*

*I’d invite them in, they’d see my martial arts trophies in the hall.  
(Sssshhhhh!! It’s our little secret, online I bought them all!)  
They would need to work hard to earn her respect,  
Because her dad taught her well, so she’d know what to expect.*

*“That’s right, y’all better bring a gift or a bouquet...”  
“OH CRAP!!” I snapped back to the present day!!  
DANGIT!!! I am my daughter’s first ever date!!  
And I don’t even have a gift! Empty handed! No way!!*

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*Where's the nearest flower shop? SCREECH!! Pulling in, driving wild!  
"I need a wrist corsage!!!" I cried. "Do you have it sized for a child?"  
I breathlessly explained what I was looking for.  
The employees started to smile, as did others in the store.*

*"We can help you, don't worry! Be quick as can be!"  
In 20 minutes, they handed me a corsage, packaged nice and neat.  
I rushed home, and as my daughter at the door gave me greetings,  
I gave her a hug and a kiss, and rushed to get suited up for the evening.*

*I came out, smiled, made a big show of her gift.  
Presented her with her corsage, she smiled, just a slight bit.  
Then confused, she tried to figure how to put it in her hair.  
I grinned and pointed to her wrist, "You wear it right there."*

*"What is it?" she asked, as she gazed on in wonderment.  
"It's a corsage ... a gentleman brings it for his date as a gift."  
"Oh!" She then smiled shyly as she looked up at my face.  
I smiled back, put it on her wrist, it fell neatly in place.*

*Realizing then, now and forever, I need to make sure to do my part;  
To set the example of respect and admiration, for a man to earn her heart.  
At last, I chuckled at the faceless boys; better work hard,  
or you don't stand a chance.  
"I'll make sure of that." I smiled silently,  
as we walked hand in hand to her dance.*

**– Ben Yau, Author**

Whenever I read it, or even just think back to this story, it starts that whole curious thinking again: curious about what the future holds for my daughter, and for all my kids, one day venturing out on their own. Dating. Education. Careers. Retiring Mom and Dad. (Yup, I like sneaking that one in now and then). And then I find myself thinking about doing the best I can to be an example, such as how I think a gentleman should treat a lady with respect, an example for my daughter and my two boys. And then I often find myself smiling. I really enjoy this story because I love thinking about the future, and it always makes me smile, wondering what is in store for my kids.

## *Happier Parenting*

Sometimes life is not so much about parenting your kids; it's also about getting the chance to think and ponder. Sometimes it's about thinking of the examples you want to be for your kids, and just maybe, sometimes, it's just having fun thinking about the future, and wondering about the places everyone will go.



*Thank you to the flower shop in this story, “The Flowerman,” for being so gracious, for calming this panicked Daddy down, and for making my daughter the most beautiful wrist corsage!*

## **CRY**

Of the three kids, I think Emmitt was the closest to being a “momma’s boy,” meaning that I could sense a slight distance between him and me when compared to him and Mom. Thankfully, those days are past now (see the “Hap-Ki-Do Punch-Butt” story), but as an infant and toddler, I sensed it. It’s possible I was being sensitive. But at the same time, considering everything, it wasn’t unreasonable either; considering that at the time, I wanted to do everything I could to help after he was born (the whole leap of one kid to two kids). It ended up manifesting into my spending a lot of time with Kayla so that Sheri could focus on baby Emmitt. It almost felt like I was a single dad with a toddler daughter, and Sheri was a single mom of a newborn.

## *Just Keep Swimming*

Then when Wyatt came along, whoooo boy! He was definitely a little rascal. He was the one that made us realize why child proofing was invented. Imagine the scene in *Kung Fu Panda*, where Po was singularly focused on getting Monkey's cookies in the top cupboard, oblivious to the havoc left behind. That was (and is) our Wyatt. And that necessitated both my attention and Sheri's attention, just to keep our household sane; which meant, for that bit of time, I didn't get to spend the time with Emmitt like I had hoped to.

Thankfully, with the years passing, I feel that he and I have made up a lot of time. I've gotten to spend more time with him, play sports with him, and it's been awesome (YAY!). Kayla was getting older and could take care of herself, and even helped out with baby Wyatt as well. I got to achieve more balance in spending time with all the kids. Sure, there's the Hap-Ki-Do Punch-Butt stories—all Emmitt. But also, those "Hey! Stop Sitting On Me!" references? Yup, also all Emmitt. And it's not just Emmitt, because Wyatt tags along after everything "big bro" does. Some might call Emmitt inspirational. I would say he's an instigator. And I love it.

Back to this story: While eventually we were at a place where I was happy with the quality time I got with Emmitt, once in a while, thinking back, I would feel maybe a small bit of sadness—like somehow I had missed out on something that I wouldn't get a chance at again. And I would wonder if Emmitt had felt it too, because now he was a big boy, already in Kindergarten, and those years would not be coming back.

And then one day, a small bit of wonderful happened.

Ever put on an old coat and find something in the pocket that you forgot about? Sometimes it's money, sometimes empty wrappers. Okay, for me, maybe a lot of the time, it's empty wrappers. **#WooHooChocolate**

Here I am at work one day. The air conditioning, for some reason, is blowing really hard, directly on top of me. I just so happened to have an "emergency hoodie" in my desk drawer. I almost forgot about it because it doesn't really see much use. California doesn't have many cold days, and on the days it's cold, I am usually wearing a jacket to work. It's a rare occurrence on a not-cold day that I feel cold. As an example, a hot day where for some reason, the AC is blowing really hard, directly on top of me.

## Happier Parenting

Which means my emergency hoodie-in-the-drawer finally got to come out. I put it on, put my hands in my pockets for a momentary warm-up, and ... immediately, my fingers jumped out of my pocket in surprise.

“WHOOA!!!!”

There was something in my pocket!

This hoodie had been in my cabinet for years. How could something be in the pocket?

I put my hand back in my pocket, thinking, “Hmmm ... What exactly does many-year-old chocolate actually taste like?” Because really, what else could it be besides chocolate? The mystery thickened as I realized it wasn’t chocolate. It felt like plastic, like a small toy.

I pulled it out to look, and as I realized what it was, I just started tearing up then and there. Even though I’m sure I saw it before, it also felt like I was seeing it for the first time. It was a keychain Emmitt had made in his daycare, when he would have been about 2 or 3 years old, past the time already that I had felt I didn’t get enough time with him. And now he was already much older and in elementary school. I looked at the keychain and realized that his teachers had asked him, “What do you think of Dad?” and then wrote 2-year-old Emmitt’s answers on the keychain.

“I like running with him.”  
“He eat chocolate cake with me.”  
“I like playing with you.”



## *Just Keep Swimming*

My heart just melted. And yes, I was moved to tears. I had felt those years were lost, and wondered if Emmitt had sensed it too. As it turns out, he remembered all the times I did play with him, ran around with him, and ate treats with him. I felt relieved, and I cried.

Sometimes life is about going with the flow, like maybe out of the blue asking your kids if they want to run in a circle with you. Or maybe seeking them out and asking them if they want to play. You never know what you're going to get. Maybe it's a parenting moment. And sometimes, just maybe, it's a treasured memory for you, one that might continue to bring a tear every now and then as the years go by, a reminder to have faith that you are a great parent, and your kids DO notice and WILL remember.

Laugh. Think. Cry. That's a heck of a day.

### **Activities & Questions:**

Surprisingly, these won't be too complicated.

#### **Activity 1: Laugh**

At some point in the near future, laugh. Tickle fight. Pillow fight. Silliness. Watch some stand-up comedy. Read some jokes. Tell some jokes. Just take some time out to laugh.

#### **Activity 2: Think**

At some point in the near future, think. Ponder. Wonder. Contemplate. Meditate. Just take some time out to think.

#### **Activity 3: Cry**

Cry. It could be good or bad. It means to be moved to tears. Whether you actually cry or not, don't worry about that. The spirit of the quote is just to be moved every day. And in both extremely happy ways and sad ways. Read some inspiring news. Read some sad news. Be moved.

## **What's Next?**

Great question because, guess what? We are here! We are finished, which means what's next is now the beginning of a whole new set of adventures for YOU—a whole new set of stories, a whole new set of mindset changes, a whole new set of exercises to do every day.

And I would LOVE to hear how you are doing! Please connect with me at my book website:

<http://happierparentingbook.com/contact/>

Not only do I want to hear about how you are doing, this book, for me, is also the beginning of new adventures and many more fantastic projects to come, and I sincerely hope you will continue to join me on this wonderful ride, as I would also love to join you on yours!

***My mission is to help parents become happier parents.  
Because happier parents make for happier kids.  
And happier kids are tomorrow's happier parents.  
If we keep this cycle going, the world will be a happier place.  
I want to help make the world a happier place.  
Let's help make the world a happier place.***

**#WOOHOO**

**#HappyDanceBreak**

**#NeverEnoughHappyDanceBreaks**

It has been my pleasure to be here for you, and it will certainly be my pleasure to continue to support you on your amazing journey to happier parenting. Remember, life will have its ups and downs. Parenting will have those good days and bad days. Through it all, my hope for you is to please have faith in yourself and love yourself, because you are worthy and you are awesome.

**“JUST KEEP SWIMMING. JUST KEEP SWIMMING.”**

**— ELLEN DeGENERES AS DORY (FROM THE FILM, FINDING NEMO)**

## About the Author

Ben's mission in life, and the legacy he would love to leave, is a simple one: make the world a happier place.

Whether he is swing dancing with his beautiful wife, using his computer engineering skills to plan out a diaper change, sharing his life lessons through writing and teaching, or just helping the world smile with a perfectly timed bad joke, Ben continues to work toward this goal to make the world a happier place.

A big part of Ben's goal is helping parents become happier parents. This will lead to happier kids, and happier kids become tomorrow's happier parents. Ben hopes these ideas will help contribute to a never-ending cycle of happier families.

Ben lives in Los Angeles, CA, and is a stock trader and investor. He also currently works full-time as a senior computer engineer. He enjoys being active, playing sports, wrestling with his kids, Vietnamese iced coffee, and, oh, have we mentioned, he loves really bad/good jokes!

Most of all, Ben loves the time he gets to spend with his family.

Ben is available for appearances for appropriate audiences. To inquire on availability, please visit the website: **happierparentingbook.com**.

To order more books, you can order them through the book website: **happierparentingbook.com**, or from **amazon.com**.

Finally, if you have been entertained and inspired by this book, the best thing you could ever do is pass that on and be a shining example for others. There is always more room for light in this world.

