



THE DISTELFINK – Hide and Seek

September 14, 2009

Before sending out the essay introducing the Children’s Series, I shared it with a variety of trusted friends, several of whom have agreed to be part of an informal advisory group for these writings. One is a teacher, two are child psychologists, others still include a former owner of a daycare and collaborator with Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, a magazine editor, and a school trustee. And so you see, this is a diverse group, and yet one who cares deeply about children, both the ones they raise and the ones they influence. Interestingly it was feedback from a Chief Investment Officer of a well known hedge fund that struck me as especially poignant, though also so simple. He wrote:

“The things that always get me are the ways families hide from each other. Fathers always at work and then playing golf on the weekend. Kids always on their TV/Gameboy/Internet. There is no substitute for a parent spending time with a child. That’s the only way to find the “teachable” moments. I find that getting outside with a kid is the way to do it. Ride the chairlift, go biking or hiking, get in a canoe, even a nice road-trip - you need to create the window of opportunity.”

I think this gentleman is spot on, and I am so grateful for his wisdom from which we can all learn and be inspired. In our role as parents we cannot force our children to listen, nor can we make them learn what we want them to. Finding shared experiences and windows of time though, do permit opportunities to teach and relate. One of my cousins talked about how she used to love driving carpool or home from her daughters’ athletic events with other teammates in the car. She would enjoy eavesdropping on the conversations to learn more about what the girls were doing, thinking, prioritizing in those years. With that knowledge, it gave her new angles to talk about personal topics or sensitive subjects. Windows abound for us to make connections with our kids – we just have to be patient and look for them, and be ready with a plan when they come.

Back in March I introduced an observation of my own. I posited that:

“It is the individuals who are most happy and secure with their wealth, who are the ones most likely to best prepare their children and grandchildren for the financial responsibilities they will face some day. And those who have struggled, or felt guilty about the wealth they have managed, have also struggled in how to prepare, and share, with the next generations. I believe that to work with individuals and families is not just about focusing on the current financial situation, it is also about helping to prepare future generations to be enhanced by their wealth, not overwhelmed or constrained by it.”

Whether a family’s wealth comes by an inheritance, or the creation and “sudden” sale of business, or following a long career of hardwork, shouldn’t matter in how we impart knowledge to the ones we love. The message should start coming from US – during bike rides, playing board games or driving home from soccer practice. It should come out as lessons learned, successes, and mistakes made and learned from. The messages should be about the family’s own stories and experiences first – after which there can be delegation to more scholarly programs such as those

offered at Wharton or Stanford for older family members who may not have enjoyed parental or grandparental wisdom at an earlier age. So please, make the time, find the creativity, seek the inspiration and share your stories with your children about how to be wise stewards of wealth and hopefully generous philanthropists some day. It is in all of us to do, whether we have been well prepared ourselves or not. We owe it to our families' future generations to start now, and stop hiding from one another.

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