

CHARACTER CULTURE

— MONTHLY —

A publication based on *The Biggest Job® We'll Ever Have* and the Hyde School® Program for Character-Based Education and Parenting

Volume 9, June, 2004

THIS MONTH:

INSPIRATION: Job #1

Throughout all the issues of Character Culture Monthly, we have talked about how achievements alone will not inspire our children. In fact, achievements can actually alienate our children from us and from their own potential, as they may perceive us in unrealistic terms. I once observed a student say to his father, “Dad, I used to look up to you for being good in sports. Now that I have seen you get emotional and share yourself, I have a new respect for you.”



Inspiration is a partnership.

We have observed three basic ways that we inspire our children:

1. Sharing struggles and getting real with our children.

This is hard for most parents. We often try to convince ourselves that our children may not be able to handle us in what seems like a vulnerable role. Our struggles can be deep and tough or they may be more of the “everyday variety.” Regardless, our children deserve to see this side of us. Since it is likely that they are struggling at some level with something of which we are unaware, they will be comforted by our honesty about things we have not figured out.

2. Growing and changing ourselves.

As adults, we often live our lives within a range of comfort. In this mode, our risks are calculated and we justify this fact by defining our behavior as that of a responsible parent. Encouraging parents to reach beyond their grasp does not mean casually embracing skydiving or rock climbing. Rather, reaching beyond our grasp demands that fears be faced.

It can involve exhibiting the courage to take a class, run a race, share your feelings with your mother, learn to sing, climb a mountain, paint, and so on. It is also about the courage to live our lives based on deep principles. The reality is that when we take risks, our attitudes present authentic pictures of who we are to our children.

3. Getting up everyday and doing the right thing.

Modeling character is a daily challenge. Our kids notice everything—including those little acts of character. Throughout our day, we have many opportunities to sow such acts: picking up litter, being honest, treating others kindly, taking the high ground, helping a friend,

listening. We do not need to look to find these opportunities as they come at us each day.

While our children may not admit this (in fact, some will voice quite the opposite), we believe that the deepest yearning of our children is to be inspired by their parents. When we focus on the three points mentioned in this article, we give them an example to follow. Even if they reject this model for a period of time, they will respect us for it and embrace the best of it later.

—Laura Gauld

Inspiration: Job #1 is the final issue of Character Culture Monthly. We hope you have enjoyed the stories and insight shared in this publication during the last year. If you have any feedback about CCM, please send comments to lgauld@hyde.edu.

HOW TO INSPIRE CHILDREN

The most important Hyde parent priority is **INSPIRATION: JOB #1**. The question that immediately comes to mind: what does it take to inspire children?

The first definition in Webster's Dictionary for "inspiration" is: a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him to receive and communicate sacred revelation.

I'm sure modern day parents will be quite taken back by this profoundly deep and serious definition. To think we are even capable of emitting "sacred revelations" smacks of a "holier than thou" attitude—even blasphemy.

Yet, truly inspiring children emanates from realizing our own deeper purpose in life, which in turn reflects our deeper and more spiritual potentials.

Parents sometimes mistakenly think that their achieving fame, prestige, and fortune will inspire their children. What inspires children is parents actually living their larger purpose in life. My son Malcolm taught me this lesson.

When Malcolm was a student at Hyde, he wrote the following passage about a time when I had inspired him:

I can well remember when my father was just a regular teacher in a regular school. What stands out most clearly was his deep desire to be a headmaster, inquiring about schools as far away as the West Coast.

I didn't then perceive my father as having any unique ideas about bettering American education. In fact, I envisioned him as maintaining

the traditional form, setting up shop with us as "the first family" on some campus. (Note: Malcolm is absolutely correct.)

When I was around ten, it looked as though my father would land a headmastership in Florida. Pops was so excited about the prospect he could barely control himself. I tried to fake enthusiasm; after all, I was proud he was going to be a headmaster. But I shuddered at the very idea of leaving rural New England.

Then, right after returning from Florida, Mom and Dad had one of their "serious" conversations in the living room. Their

expressions told me we wouldn't be moving—at least not to Florida. I heard them use some big sounding words. The word that stood out was segregated—the reason Dad had refused the job.

I was so proud of my father for refusing to work at a school that wouldn't admit blacks, I bragged about it to all my friends. I didn't know if they understood my enthusiasm, but I really didn't care.

Perhaps my father believed all this slipped over my head or perhaps he didn't view it as a major decision on his part. But I needed that example. I had liked being the son of the head coach, teacher, and administrator; but that image had a hollow ring. It was his refusing the Florida job that gave me something I could really understand, look up to, and follow.

It is remarkable that the transformation in Malcolm's thinking exactly follows my own transformation. I interviewed for the Florida job after I had a crisis of conscience on New Year's Eve, 1962. The crisis occurred when, at a party, I

was suddenly hit by the fact that despite all my "achievements"—head coach, teacher, administrator—I felt inherently unfulfilled. Had I interviewed for the Florida job before this revelation, my ego might have allowed me to take the job, choosing to believe I could integrate the school. But later, my conscience directly confronted the situation, and I admitted to myself that the trustees had no intention of integrating the school.

Before my crisis of conscience, my focus was on myself and what I wanted. But after it, I became committed to my larger purpose in life—finding a better way to prepare all kids for life. Teaching in a segregated school would clearly violate this commitment.

The inspiration for Malcolm was my example that achievement in life was secondary to honoring one's principles. At age 10 he naturally feared he might not achieve a high status in life, but he knew he was capable of doing the right thing.

Children enter life as basically self-centered beings, thus they are naturally compelled to pursue achievement, which can be a vital means to develop their self-confidence. However, they can be even more deeply motivated by the belief that they have a purpose and a destiny in life to fulfill the purpose.

A significant childhood experience can initiate the transformation from their initial self-centeredness to a larger sense of purpose in life that calls upon their unique potential to fulfill.

At age 44, Catherine West was appointed president of the US credit card business for Capitol One Financial Corp., where she has the responsibility of running the company's largest business, with more than \$46 billion in managed loans.

She achieved her immense success in her career by being able to manage



Parents inspire kids to strive for excellence.

HOW TO INSPIRE CHILDREN CONT.

massive change, an ability that prompted her bosses to often say, “Let’s see what else we can throw Catherine at.”

Catherine herself credits an inspiring experience she had at 15 for her current success. She was preparing to become a summer camp counselor when, suddenly, the sailing instructor quit two days before the camp opened and the

director asked her to take the job. Probably knowing Catherine’s character, the director added, “If you don’t do it, there’ll be no sailing class.”

Catherine knew absolutely nothing about sailing, but she dove into books about sailing, learned by doing, and by the end of the summer she had helped her camp win a regatta.

As she now says, “That one little event in my life...I hold on to in every challenge and say, ‘you know what? I won that regatta.’ It’s a sense of when people count on you and you feel an obligation to them, you rise to the occasion.”

What inspired Catherine is the realization that we humans are far more powerful when we pursue the larger purpose of helping others than when we are helping ourselves.

This lesson is what will inspire our children. ■

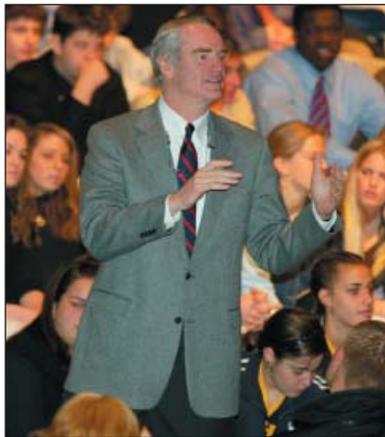
—Joseph Gauld

“From the Heart” Sharing

A student and parent talk about what inspiration means to them.

Parent:

Inspiration used to mean to me doing something incredibly amazing and looking wonderful. A few years ago, at a Hyde family weekend, I was looking



We inspire our kids through actions.

at the worksheet for one of the seminar exercises and it was about inspiration. I realized that the times when I have most inspired myself are not the times when I have done something incredibly well or done something that people view as amazing. It is when I think I’ve been absolutely awful at something, but have done it anyway. Those are the times when I hear people tell me that I’ve

inspired them.

A good example of this is when we go to Hyde’s wilderness property. I am NOT an outdoors person, nor a hiker, and it took me 12 hours to hike Cranberry Mountain. I felt like I was holding the group back. I think I fell five times, but when we were debriefing the hike as a group, one of the students said to me, “The person who inspired me most on this trip was you, because every time you fell down you got back up again.”

I never would have considered myself inspiring that day. I would have considered myself exactly the opposite, in fact. It changed the way that I look for inspiration from other people now, in that it doesn’t have to be a monumental achievement. Inspiration is found in the little every day things, such as taking the grocery shopping cart back to the corral in the pouring rain, even though you’re 20 spaces away.

Sure, Albert Schweitzer is inspiring.

When I look at someone like that I think, “I could never do something like that in my life.” But I can do those things in my life that are hard for me to do, and just give it all I have. Even when the outcome is less than impressive, my hard work and efforts will be inspiring.

Student:

To me, inspiration means something I can work towards. Hyde has inspired me to really look deeper at myself and to find things within me that other people know exist, but I have not seen.

There was a time I didn’t know what I wanted, I didn’t believe in myself, and I had no real relationship with my family. In the last two years, though, other people have seen things in me and I’ve counted on that. I’ve heard other students’ stories about how they’d been in the same place I was but had gone on to become seniors....that really inspired me. ■



Taking risks is inspirational to your kids.

INSPIRATION ACTIVITY

As a family, group, or team read the following excerpt from *Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson, quoted by Nelson Mandela in his 1994 inaugural speech, and then answer the questions that follow.

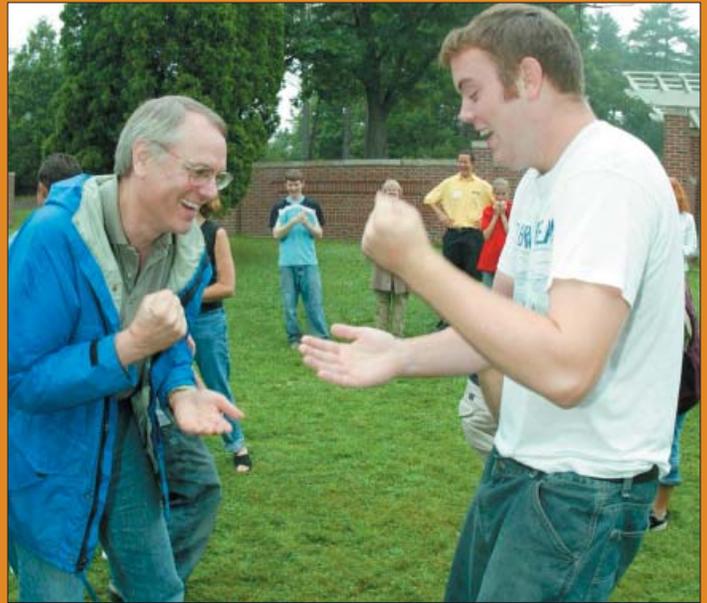
“...Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we’re liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others...”

- **What strikes you most when you read this?**
- **What is your “light?” Does it intimidate you?**
- **How might you shine your light in an effort to give others permission to do the same?**
- **How might you liberate yourself from fear in order to liberate others?**

Quote of the Month

“Our chief want in life is for someone who will make us do what we can.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



Kids look for inspiration from their parents.

JOURNAL WRITING

USE THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS TO REFLECT ABOUT “INSPIRATION.”

1. **When I was growing up, who did I admire?**
2. **When was I inspired by my parents?**
3. **When was I disappointed in them?**
4. **When have I inspired myself with my courage and risk-taking?**
5. **What are my dreams for my child/children?**
6. **What are my deepest dreams and vision for me?**
7. **When have my family members inspired me?**
8. **What does my family mean to me? Does anything prevent me from sharing this with them?**
9. **What specific action steps could I take to honor the highest vision in our family?**

WHEN IN DOUBT ABOUT HONESTY, “BET ON THE TRUTH.”

Q You talk about sharing ourselves with our children, but there are things in my past that I do not feel good about. I do not want my children to follow that example. How do I know what to share and what not to talk about?



Laura and Malcolm Gauld

A: Most of us, as parents, can relate to your question. Along with the accomplishments and benchmarks, our lives are filled with obstacles and moments where we were clearly not operating at our best. We believe that the weight of our foot needs to be in sharing the struggles we had. It can accomplish two important things:

1. It helps our children see that having principles doesn't always mean that you live up to them. Often the deepest lessons we learn are when we compromise ourselves and then have to deal with the consequences. It also teaches, by example, the power of learning from failure and obstacles—both of which our children face on a regular basis.
2. When we share truths in the family, we reinforce a powerful message—truth is your friend. Keeping secrets of any kind will eventually wear away at one's genuine confidence and sense of self. It is liberating to admit mistakes and acknowledge lessons learned.

Having said this, we are not telling parents that they must share every incident or experience that happened to them growing up. A lot depends on the age of your children and what your own parenting instincts are telling you. At Hyde we say, “When in doubt, bet on the truth. Still in doubt, bet on more truth.” You may decide now that you feel it is not the right time to talk about a particular issue, but be open to the fact that later you may decide it is appropriate to address the issue. When our middle school daughters had an experience with alcohol, we decided to share some of our similar experiences with them. What struck us was how much they listened and asked questions. Remember, as a parent, you do not have to be right. You just need to try and do the best you can. Good luck!



Parents can inspire their children by sharing both accomplishments and struggles.

Note to Parents:

- Share with your children issues or problems you have not resolved. Ask them for help.
- Make a point everyday to look for inspiration in yourself, your family, and your community. When you observe it, say it out loud.
- If you are not working on yourself, you will not have much to give to your family. Take the time to do the thing that you daydream about.

The Character Culture Monthly™ is dedicated to helping parents and educators learn insights, gain practical tools, and be inspired by personal sharing. We hope you will find this resource useful and we welcome your thoughts and suggestions. For more information about the Hyde character-based schools and programs, call 207-443-5584, or 860-963-9096, or log on to www.hyde.edu • www.biggestjob.org.

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