Our Legacy Is Our Children... Not Self-Satisfaction

Soon after I became a father for the first time, I found myself experiencing an unexpected, nagging sensation of inadequacy. The reason behind it had nothing to do with anything bad going on in my life. In fact, my life was actually progressing along quite well. I had a good job, owned a nice home, and was going on my third year of marriage to my wonderful wife. And of course, I was also a proud new father.

But when I’d look into my son’s eyes, a perception began to build in my mind, as silly as it might have been, that I hadn’t done enough in my life that he could admire me for. Sure, I considered myself to be a good person. I played by the rules, worked hard, and helped out people when I could — all traits that were certainly worthy of general admiration. But I didn’t feel as though any of that was enough. I felt like I needed to reach a more notable stature and achieve some kind of status that could compel my son to one day, when he was older, look up to me in front of his peers and proudly state, “That’s my dad!”

The desire for a legacy in the eyes of my son was one of the things that got me motivated enough to start working on a novel. Writing was something I had a mild interest in at the time, but I felt as though I was capable of more serious, committed work. And what better way to make my son proud of me than crafting a few hundred pages of creativity and dedicating the end result to him, right?

So in my spare time, I immersed myself in my writing and found that it was something I really, really enjoyed. I seemed to have a real knack for it too, and suspected my wife was being honest when she told me how blown away she was by the first few chapters I let her read.
But as my son grew older, and he began laughing at the silly faces I’d make, learning from the things my wife and I would teach him, and returning the love he was given, it became increasingly apparent that my writing was not my legacy. He was my legacy. Writing was just a personal ambition and a gratifying way of expressing myself. There’s certainly nothing wrong with that, but it really has nothing to do with being a good parent. Being a good parent is about doing what’s best for your children.

I think it’s important to understand the distinction between the two because it seems we have a problem in this country right now with people doing things in the name of their children that they’re really just doing to feel better about themselves.

There are lots of examples of this, but one of the more obvious ones deals with sports. Many parents push their children into sports because they believe that the experience will benefit them. And in many cases, they’re right. Others, however, clearly have some biting need to live vicariously through their children’s competitive endeavors. These are the people who we watch shout obscenities from the sidelines and browbeat referees mercilessly until they’re asked to leave, much to the embarrassment of their children. Who among these people, after a little self-analysis, can honestly say that what they’re doing is more for their children than it is for themselves?

This kind of thing happens in politics as well, although it may not be quite as easy to identify. We watch people adamantly support causes and policies they claim are in the interest of their children, when in reality, their support only serves the purpose of letting them feel good about themselves by demonstrating that “they care”.

The gun control debate going on in this country right now is a perfect example. It doesn’t seem to matter that none of the
proposed legislation, if enacted at the time, would have prevented any of the tragic mass shootings that spawned the legislation in the first place. Even hardened advocates for increased gun restrictions, like Joe Biden, have admitted that. But supporters want to feel as if they’re doing something. The easiest, most impulsive way to achieve that is to identify the lowest common denominator (guns) and go after it. And once they’ve gotten their way, and legislation has passed, supporters can then pat themselves on the back for doing something they perceive as good. Sadly, that false sense of security will only last up until the time of the next mass shooting, and the cycle will begin all over again.

We see this same thing in the way supporters of global warming legislation proudly promote their cause in the name of their children’s future. After all, who doesn’t want to be responsible for saving the world for their kids, right? But that sense of self-importance is so strong that they automatically dismiss any evidence that points to the conclusion that man-made global warming isn’t quite the problem that it’s long been advertised as. Additionally, they never bother to take into account any of the harmful effects that come with increased environmental regulations, including the children who are adversely affected by the loss of their parents’ jobs as a result of those regulations. The premise of being Captain Planet is just too romantic for some people, I suppose.

The syndrome I’m describing can be found throughout our society, and it’s not inherently sinister. It is, however, a sign of how shallow we’ve become as thinkers. As parents, we need to put more consideration into these things, and decide if we’re really serving our children well by taking part in crusades, in their name, that merely increase our own sense of self-worth.

If we’re truly interested in putting the well-being of our children in front of our own, there are plenty of
opportunities to do so in a country that has a national debt of $17 trillion, and a growing culture of dependency and entitlement.

Being honest with ourselves and partaking in a little self-examination, even if it doesn’t come naturally, is a good start.