

# What Do You Want Your Child to Be?

Ask any young person – even a young child – “What do you want to be?” and just about everyone will answer, “a doctor,” “an engineer,” “a teacher,” “a firefighter,” “an airplane pilot” or a member of some other profession.

This is completely understandable.

But I have a suggestion that would change your child’s life – and the world – for the better. Tell your child to answer, “I want to be a good person.” This would completely change the way your child sees himself or herself.

As a rule, people become what they want to become. If you devote the entire first half of your life including your most formative years to being a good student in order to be a good professional, you probably will become ... a good student and a good professional.

Think of how long it takes and how hard one has to work to accomplish those two goals. Why wouldn’t it take as much time and effort to become a good person? How would anyone become proficient at anything that wasn’t his or her goal to achieve?

Every generation in recorded history has witnessed a terrible amount of evil. One would think that making good people would therefore be the first goal of every decent society, indeed of every society that wishes to long survive. But with a few exceptions, this has not been the case – and is not the case today.

What preoccupies parents today is not that their child be a good person but that their child be a good student, get into a “good” school and become good at some profession. You can test this. Ask your child, whether he or she is 5 years old or 50

years old, "What do you think I, your mother (or I, your father) most want (or most wanted) you to be: smart, successful, good or happy?"

For 30 years, I have suggested listeners of my radio show do this, and for 30 years, parents have called to tell me how disappointed they were that their children did not answer, "good."

But given how few parents make goodness their children's primary goal, why should they be surprised?

To be fair, one obvious reason few children respond, "a good person" to the question "What do you want to be?" is that the question (often ending with "when you grow up") implies a profession.

But the very fact that the question is only understood to mean "What type of work do you intend to do?" is precisely the problem. Therefore, parents need to change the meaning of the question, and they can easily do so by having their children answer, "a good person."

Just imagine how adults asking the question would react to a child who gives that answer.

And that answer would force you, the parent, to work on your child's goodness. The moment you tell your child to answer, "a good person," you will have to start communicating that you value their character more than their grades.

There is another reason virtually no parent tells his or her child to answer, "a good person." Most secular parents think that human nature is basically good and, therefore, that all most children need to be good is love, not moral instruction.

Unfortunately, even the answer "a good person" does not ensure character development. Among too many parents, "a good person" has come to mean holding the proper political positions. Many

parents, especially among the best educated, believe that if their child believes that America is racist; that all whites have “white privilege”; that patriarchy is a serious problem and needs to be eradicated; that carbon emissions threaten life on Earth, that economic inequality is a great evil; that there are scores of genders; that Republicans are deplorable people; and other left-wing positions, then their child is good person.

But, while political/social positions do indeed have a moral component, they are not necessarily related to a person’s character. With regard to young people, we should be much more concerned with how they treat their parents and teachers, how they treat their peers, whether or not they cheat on tests and how honest they are in general than their position on carbon emissions.

Finally, if “a good person” strikes you as too corny or objectionable for some other reason, how about telling your child to answer the question “What do you want to be?” with one or more of these responses:

- “A good man.”
- “A good Christian (or Jew).”
- “A good American.”
- “A good father and husband.”
- “A good mother and wife.”

They’re all better answers than any profession.

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