



THE DISTELFINK – Listening Lessons

November 23, 2009

Thank you, readers, for joining me this Fall while I have poured out my thoughts on our children. As one of you shared with me back in September, “This Series is both timely and inspirational; a simple reminder that we are the most important people in our children’s lives and they in ours.” Could anything be more true? I believe this is the fundamental reason I felt so compelled to write these essays. Parenting is such a challenge, and nothing is more exhilarating than when we get it right, and few things are more heartbreaking than when we don’t. I hope you have felt that we are all in this together. And if I have been able to offer any glimmers of hope, or ideas to try with the children in your life to make them more financially responsible today, or better prepared in the future, then I am happy to have been able to help.

A very sage therapist, whose wisdom I trust enormously, gave me some valuable feedback about my recent pieces focusing on what our children see, and I want you to benefit from her thoughts too. She wrote:

“I think a mistake people often make in their ‘modeling’ to their children is NOT being open, not being clear about their children’s (individual) needs and NOT realizing they can learn a great deal about their children and themselves by being *open askers* and *listeners*. This does not mean being intrusive meddlers. But realizing their children nearly always see things differently than they do and being open to seeing this and absorbing it is a great way to learn. Parents’ sharing their own experiences, as you do in your writings, is a good way to encourage their children to be more open with them.”

I italicized the words ‘askers’ and ‘listeners’ because I think they are so important. Perhaps you feel as I do sometimes that there is so much to impart to our children, however, we should never forget to ask our children to share with us too. We can do this by asking open-ended questions, posing specific questions and pressing for more details. We can show them we care about what they’re doing, feeling, or saying by mirroring their responses with accurate reflections of those responses to demonstrate our understanding. We can also validate what they are thinking. This does NOT mean we have to agree with what they share with us, but only to express that what they tell us makes sense. Okay, so I recognize this might be really hard because I’m not sure anything a teenager does makes a lot of sense, but you have to trust me on this one.

We need to keep the dialogue open with our children – children of all ages – and the most effective way of doing this is by making them feel safe, appreciated and understood. So we must try to make connections with them in our conversations through these experiences of mirroring and validation, and ultimately, empathy. We must search for ourselves in our children. We must channel back to times that many of us would rather forget, and try to experience the emotions our children are feeling. Because it is through the transcending of separateness, through empathy, that we can make a meaningful connection with our children.

This meeting of two people - this connection – as well as awareness and mutual respect (but not always agreement) will help us to maintain more effective dialogues with our children. I am confident we will enjoy more teaching moments, more family stories and more lessons learned if our children feel they are equally heard when they have issues they want to share with us. Issues related to money can be among the trickiest and most sensitive of all to discuss within families. Therefore, the better communication is between generations, the better a chance that family's children have of being financially prepared and successful.

Thank you again, friends, for your patience, your interest and your frequent words of enthusiasm. Quite simply, I have loved writing this Series, and I am so happy to have been able to share it with you.

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