

THE ROLE OF STRUCTURE

Working with Dr. Michael Schuster has taught me a great deal about the importance of structure in business. I have seen failing companies turn around in a matter of months by focusing on the structure of each aspect of their business. A lot of the ideas Dr. Schuster teaches related to structure comes from Peter Senge, Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT and author of "The Fifth Discipline". One of the primary thoughts surrounding Senge's work, that Dr. Schuster teaches regularly, is that Philosophy/Values drives our approach, which drives our structure, which in turn creates patterns of behavior that ultimately produce our results. Let's take this approach and apply it to raising our children.

Weekly, I hear from parents that their children are not behaving in a manner they would like them to behave. For instance, they do not take care of their toys, they bite, they will not eat their dinner or go to bed on time. This can be very stressful for parents. Most parents I speak with are asking themselves, "Am I doing something wrong" or "Am I a bad parent"? The answer is, no, you're not a bad parent. There is a structural problem.

Let's apply Senge's work to raising our children. To begin we must start with what are our values as parents and our philosophy about raising children. These values will determine the approach you will take in the structure of children's growth and education. Once you have identified and understood the values and approach ask yourself, "Are the results we see in line with the values we hold and the approach we have taken? Are you seeing behavioral results such as crying, biting, poor manners, etc? What results are you seeing with your children. What do these results tell you? These are the hard questions to consider. To answer these questions we really need to be honest with ourselves.

Patterns of behavior produce results. So if we do not like the results we are getting we need to consider there are some patterns of behavior that are not in line with our values. What patterns of behavior can you identify in your own life as parents, that are contributing to the behavior results of your children? Changing patterns of behavior is not necessarily an easy task. However, we have to be honest with ourselves and look at them if we are going to see change.

Once you have identified the patterns of behavior we can begin to look at structure. There are structural systems in each home that contribute to the patterns of behavior. What is your structure for your children regarding their chores and responsibilities? What are your structures regarding TV time or game consoles? Create rules, boundaries, expectations, and consequences. See them through and be consistent. Reward them when they are behaving well. Express to them your gratitude and approval for a job well done.

There are many developmental and behavioral systems to help parents create structure for their children. The key is to stay consistent. Remember progress not perfection.

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