

LEADING BY AUTHORITY OR INFLUENCE?

Mankind has always struggled with authority. But authority is absolutely essential, because law and order for the family and the society is dependent on its proper administration. The first place children learn about authority is in the family, from parents. That is why the right administration of parental authority is necessary. Parental authority is too often taken to extremes. Too much authority leads to totalitarianism, while insufficient authority leads to injustice and social chaos. So what is the balance.

When your children are young, lead them by the power of your authority, when they are teens lead them by the strength of your relational influence.

Here is one basic truism we encourage our parents to embrace regarding the use of authority: When your children are young, lead them by the power of your authority, when they are teens lead them by the strength of your relational influence. Between the two points, the need for parental authority should decline directly proportionate to the child's increase in moral self-control. So by the time your child hits adolescence, you will have exchanged rule-centred leadership for principle-centred leadership. Here is an example of what we mean.

At the end of one of our parenting classes, Carla, a young mother of three, approached Anne Marie with a question. She listened attentively to Anne Marie's response, reluctantly agreed to try what she had suggested, and went home. When she returned to class the next week, she shared enthusiastically the following results. Here is a transcript of her conversation as she spoke to an audience of her peers.

"I have three girls. Whitney is ten, Brenda seven, and Carissa is four. Like most parents, I have some apprehensions about the next phase of parenting, especially with my ten year old. I had a little talk with Anne Marie last week about an incident involving Whitney and sharing.

I explained to Anne Marie that Whitney had a bag of popcorn and Brenda asked for some. Whitney said no, and this really bothered me because my seven year old is so generous with her sister, almost to a fault. So I intervened and told Whitney that she had to share. She finally did.

When I thought through the incident, I knew I had not done the right thing but I didn't know what I did wrong. So I asked Anne Marie what she thought I should do. I was surprised when she told me to think about not always intervening with my authority and forcing my kids to share with each other. This seemed like a frightening prospect for me. I said to Anne Marie, how long will I be doing this? What if this goes on forever? Anne Marie assured me it would not, but asked that I try this for several weeks and see what happens.

In God's perfect timing, the next day another incident took place. Whitney had some mints



and Brenda asked for some. Whitney said "no," and Brenda immediately looked to me for help." I told Brenda, "If Whitney doesn't want to share with you that's fine. God wants sharing to come from our hearts or it is not real sharing." Brenda protested for a few moments, and I went about my business.



A little later my ten year old came to me and asked: "It's okay if I don't share, Mum, is that what you said?" I said, "Yes, that's what I said." Whitney left, but in that very moment, I could see something had changed in her heart. Five minutes later she was generously sharing all her mints with Brenda. The next day, all I heard from the two girls was: "Can I borrow your this, can I play with your that?" Yes you may this, and yes you may that." I was shocked. Non-coercive sharing was foreign to my children. It was foreign to me.

So I called my nine year old aside and asked, "Whitney, why are you so willing to share all of a sudden?" And this is what she told me. "Mum, this is how I always felt, but you never let me do it without telling me I had to. I wanted to show you how I feel but you never let me do it without making me. I want to show you that I know how to make a wise decision and do the things you and daddy taught us."

With Anne Marie's encouragement, I went home last week and gave up trying to control all the outcomes by using my authority. I started to use the power of my influence by speaking truth in love with my kids. I can tell you in one weeks time, Whitney has become a different child - mostly because she has a different mum. And while I am still using my authority with Brenda, I can see why I need less and less of it to guide Whitney.

And there is one more thing I learned through this experience. In the past, when I tried to control all outcomes, I was actually robbing my kids of the joy of doing right. I can see that now. At Whitney's age, there is no joy of doing right when the actions required are always tied to my authority..."

Can you relate to Carla's story. We sure can. We remember similar situations in our preteen parenting days. Please note what Carla did *not* do; she *did not* abandon her God given authority. What she did do was start the process of giving up her power to control all outcomes. Now she works to bring about right outcomes by the leading through her influence - her relational influence.

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