

Making Time For Family and School

“I am convinced that if we as a society work diligently in every other area of life and neglect the family, it would be analogous to straightening the deck chairs on the Titanic.”

–Stephen Covey

Ten years ago, Stephen Covey, followed up his best selling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* with a book applying these 7 habits to families. In our fast pace, high tech and low touch information age, at a time when some families might be considering themselves an endangered species, Covey shares some valuable thoughts, words of encouragement, and practical suggestions. I am convinced the family is the building block of society. Former First Lady, Barbara Bush, said it best in an address to students graduating from Wellesley College: *“As important as your obligations as a doctor, lawyer, or business leader will be, you are a human first, and those human connections- with spouses, with children, with friends- are the most important investments you will ever make.... Our success as a society depends not on what happens in the White House but on what happens inside your house.”* Because the family and family involvement is so instrumental to a child’s success in school and life, it might be helpful to consider some of the “gems” mentioned by Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*.

All families get off track at some time or another, the key is to know where you are going. Covey suggests having a vision as a family of your destination. Regardless of how bad or hectic your situation might be at the moment, it does not have to be that way in the future if what you envision is a better situation. Once you have a vision or destination, you need a plan. Covey suggests embracing his 7 Habits as a tool or guide to help families reach their goals. Adapting his original habits, he defined the following:

Habit 1: Be Proactive- *Become an agent of change in your family*

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind- *Develop a family mission statement*

Habit 3: Put First Things First- *Making family a priority in a turbulent world*

Habit 4: Think “Win-Win”- *Move from “Me” to “We”*

Habit 5: Seek First To Understand...Then Be Understood- *Solve family problems through empathic communication*

Habit 6: Synergize- *Build family unity through celebrating differences*

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw-*Renew the family spirit through traditions*

Though all the habits share important messages, I am immediately drawn to Habit 3, because of how it speaks to the priority of family. This priority can and does have the greatest impact on school. I believe parents are the greatest teachers their children will ever have. Sure teachers at school may be considered the “expert” and certainly as a profession we work diligently to help all students learn, but we can never ignore the vital role families play in the support and education of their children. A parent’s role never ends. Your influence and need for your influence never ends. Of all the roles in life we can take on, family is one of the few permanent roles we will ever have. Covey makes an accurate statement when he says, *“In the end, life teaches us what is important, and that is family.”*

Popular culture, technology, laws, and the economy all affects the family in someway. So what can we do in a culture that put so much pressure on the family? For one thing, in the area of popular culture, we can get our children to spend less time watching television and playing video games and more time engaged in healthy, family friendly activities. I recently encouraged students to participate in National Turn-Off TV Week. In the end, only 48% of our students took me up on my challenge. Clearly our children would be better off if they weren't exposed to the hundreds of acts of violence seen on television or displayed in video games. Also, just consider how much reading, creative expression/play, and healthy exercise could be fostered if children engaged in activities other than television watching. Similarly, during the month of March students were challenged to read at least 15 minutes each night as part of our yearlong Parents As Reading Partner (PARP) program. The goal for the whole school was to collectively read 141,000 minutes. We were disappointed when only 40% of our students returned their March PARP reading calendars. As a result we missed our goal by almost 50,000 minutes. I wonder how many of our students watched more than 15 minutes of television each day during March. Covey asks some pointed questions that are worth reflecting on- *"What does your own heart tell you? Does watching television make you kinder? More thoughtful? More loving? Does it help you build strong relationships in your home? Suppose you were on your deathbed. Would you really wish you'd spend more time watching TV?"* You see, when faced with a turbulent world, there are still some things we can control.

At school we recognize the many pressures families face today. After all, most teachers have families of their own. We also know, without exception, that family involvement is one of the most important factors in a child's success at school. So like the many other pressures of our modern culture in this era of high standards, we too add to a parent's already "full plate". We ask families to- make sure their children are reading or being read to each night; have conversations each day about what their child is learning; supervise the completion home/study links in math; make sure homework is complete; etc.. In asking these things, we consider this parent-teacher relationship a partnership and investment in child's future. At times we find ourselves asking- are we expecting too much or too little of families? Regardless of the answer, we want to be sure our expectations are realistic and lead to success. Our work at school and a parent's work at home needs to pay dividend in the achievement of a student. In the upcoming weeks I will be asking parents to provide me with some feedback on homework and reading at home. Be looking for this information and please take some time to tell me what you think. Your input and comments will be read and considered as we move forward as a school to encourage meaningful family involvement.

In these challenging times when there just does not seem to be enough time, I invite you to continue to make your family a priority. Family time, even spent reading or reviewing homework, is time well spent. After all, we can't afford not to spend this time.

I wish you all the best as we close out the school year.

Mr. Wolf