

Setting Big-Picture Goals

If we don't have the slightest clue about our hopes, dreams, and aspirations, then the chance that we'll take the lead is significantly less. In fact, we may not even see the opportunity that's right in front of us.

—Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*

Kim G., a mother of two children and a customer service representative at Southwest Airlines (SWA), works for a company with a big-picture vision. SWA's guiding principle is that everyone in the company—from the president on down to the maintenance workers—pulls together to accomplish the airline's goal of great customer service.

As a supervisor, Kim tries to uphold the company's core value of respecting people and allowing employees to do what they need to do to get the job done. This isn't always easy when on some occasions her gut reaction is to reprimand her employees who make decisions that she herself wouldn't make, but she sticks to the company's big-picture vision.

Kim knows that only this atmosphere of collaboration and initiative can allow SWA employees to meet their core goals of affordability, customer service, and quick turnaround.

For instance, if a plane is late, everyone—the pilot and the ground crew—pitches in, bustling down the aisles and cleaning out the seat pockets. All employees, no matter what their job description or formal title, know that their first priority is to do whatever is necessary to get that plane turned around in fifteen minutes.

Kim only wished that things would run as smoothly at home. But with a husband who gets home late, and children who have busy elementary school schedules, the guiding principle in her household seemed to be chaos. She'd come home to find the kitchen piled with dishes, cat litter scattered on the floor, and four important things she had forgotten to do for the kids' school the next day. After maintaining her composure and equanimity all day at work, she'd find herself screaming at the kids—or at least the cat.

One evening, she arrived at home with only one hour until dinner guests were due to arrive. Everything seemed scattered and frazzled, and she was ready to suggest that they just go out to dinner or order in Chinese food. But instead she decided to try something she'd experienced that day at work, when the employees managed to turn around a late plane—with empty cups and newspapers strewn all over the seats—into an on-time departure just fifteen minutes later. She called her children into the kitchen and told them they were going to play an airplane game, where they had to get the house ready for the new passengers who were going to arrive in just half an hour. She told her daughter, Tricia, seven, that she could be captain. Todd, five, was the main flight attendant. They were going to do everything possible to pick up the mess and get the “plane” ready for company.

Instead of starting their usual whining when asked to do chores, the kids got into the airplane game immediately. Tricia put on a pilot's hat, and Todd spoke into his toy cell phone as if it were the plane's intercom. Soon they were scrambling around, picking up books and toys, and participating with enthusiasm—the same kind of cooperative spirit Kim usually only saw at work. By the time the guests arrived, the house was in order, the food was on the table, and everyone was cheerful.

Kim realized that what made her company work—sticking to its big-picture goals—could work at home too. She made time to sit down with her husband to talk about these goals, and they came up with their own big-picture parenting goal: to teach their children responsibility. Once they articulated this goal, they felt they could more easily set up a game plan for their household—allocating chores and sticking to them, having family meetings to recognize success, and refusing to do tasks the kids were perfectly capable of doing—that would make things run much more smoothly in the future and cultivate responsibility.

SETTING CLEAR GOALS AT HOME

I begin most of my parenting seminars with a question: What are your primary goals or core values at home? Think big picture, beyond getting your kid to bathe every other day without screaming. Here are some typical responses:

“I want to raise a compassionate child.”

“I want my child to be happy.”

“I hope my kids find work that is meaningful and makes them happy.”

“I want my partner and I to work together to raise our child in a loving and supportive environment.”

“My biggest objective is for my children to think about the greater good and do their part to heal the world.”

“I want my relationship to model what a relationship should be for a child as they grow up and have their own relationships.”

“I want to give my children the room to discover who they truly are.”

“I want to be free to discover who I truly am so I can provide the guidance, support, and modeling for my child to discover who he truly is.”

Uplifting goals indeed! And that's just the point. Focusing on your big-picture goals elevates the daily grind into something more stimulating. Many moms in my seminars tell me they've never articulated these goals before. They can see, right away, the usefulness of defining their real objectives.

As one grantwriter put it, "I would never write a grant without a clearly articulated and compelling goal. It's funny that I worry about all sorts of relatively minor details at home, but I don't think about my overall goals."

Bingo. The challenge is to keep this mental picture in your mind as you drive the carpool, insist that the chores get done, and find yourself in the middle of a power struggle. When we don't set goals, we are susceptible to all sorts of enervating detours that take us away from where we want to go.

REFOCUSING ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Workplaces across America are filled with cynical, burned-out people languishing in the meaninglessness of their workweek. The challenge for us all is to actively seek the meaning in our work, just as in other aspects of our lives. Helen, a customer service representative who answers the help line for a bank and won a customer service award, says she gets a lot of satisfaction from figuring out simple ways to explain complicated bank forms. The guy from AAA who fixed my flat tire says he gets a kick out of seeing the expressions of people stranded on the side of highways transform from anguished grimaces to smiles when he arrives. In contrast, the bad-tempered person who fixed my dead battery a couple of months later gave me every reason to believe he hated his job. Same job, different attitude. One saw his job in a broader context—that he's contributing to a person's safety and well-being—and the other saw his job as nothing more than a paycheck.

The reason goal setting is so important for business leaders and parents alike is that articulating a goal and committing to it

focus our attention on the bigger meaning and inspire us not to lose our motivation over those niggling details.

BIG-PICTURE DISCIPLINE

Kim at SWA was well aware that actions speak louder than a motto on an airplane napkin. The credibility of a vision or value statement is only as good as the actions that back them up, especially during difficult times. Let's look at how big-picture goals come to life (or don't) when your child misbehaves and your emotions cloud your vision.

A Child's Revenge

Zachary, eleven, knew that his sister, Elissa, then nine, wanted a pony more than anything in the world. He nudged her awake at 7:30 in the morning, dragged her out of bed and down the stairs, and told her there was a big surprise for her in the backyard. Elissa believed that finally her dream had come true—a pony of her very own. But by the time she opened the sliding glass door leading to the backyard, Zach was laughing his head off. "Ha ha. April Fools!" Elissa, furious and devastated, ran back up into her bedroom and slammed the door.

When the tears stopped, she plotted her revenge. She knew what Zach liked more than anything: playing the piano. So that night she tiptoed into the bathroom, grabbed a jar, checked to see if the coast was clear, and sneaked into the living room to smear gobs of Vaseline over the keys of the grand piano. Once every last key was slimed, she returned the Vaseline to the bathroom and joined her parents in the kitchen, gleefully anticipating her brother's reaction when he went to play his adored piano.

So goes the story I heard my friend's daughter Elissa tell during her Bat Mitzvah. What hadn't occurred to Elissa in the heat of her vengeance was that she had ruined her family's prized grand piano. As she explained in her speech, the sweetness of

revenge quickly soured when she saw the horror in her parents' eyes and realized the seriousness of her act.

I tell this story because there's no denying that Elissa misbehaved—big-time—and the situation would outrage any parent. Elissa felt vulnerable and ashamed. She knew her brother had triumphed with his pony shenanigans, and now he was, once again, the victor. Elissa's parents needed to discipline their daughter, but how?

The answer lies in focusing on the big picture. Great leaders and parents turn difficult situations into transforming teaching opportunities by keeping the ultimate goal in their mind's eye.

Teachable Moments

Let's take a look at how Elissa's parents might respond. I'm sure you have comparable maddening stories and teachable moments in your life as a parent. How you respond to situations like these can accelerate your child's development . . . or simply invite a power struggle. It's just like when you're at the office and you hit a glitch. I've seen this pattern countless times: flailing businesses confront problems, turn them into crises, and then use the crisis as justification to abandon their long-range goals. They bounce from one strategy to another, people grow cynical, and each day feels like a slog. The best businesses, in contrast, run into just as many challenges, but instead of creating crises, they make it their job to understand what happened, learn all they can, and commit to different actions that will help them get to the same end goal.

Ineffective Responses

Strong leadership is hard to pull off when your best employee fails to deliver. How about when you're furious about your child's misbehavior? Let's look at a few possible responses:

1. "You ruined the piano! What in the world were you thinking?! How could you be so irresponsible and thoughtless?"

2. “You’re grounded. Go to your room and think about what you did and how you’re going to pay to get our piano repaired.”
3. “Elissa, you must have been very angry at your brother. Do you want to talk about it?”

When we think about our own angry, knee-jerk reactions, the first two responses are understandable. In the long run, however, all three of these responses obstruct your higher purpose: to raise a respectful child who checks her impulses and is sensitive to the consequences of her actions. And here’s another big-picture goal to keep in mind during any difficult interaction with your child: to maintain a supportive, loving connection.

Labeling

The first response—labeling—sets up a dangerous outcome because it imposes a fixed view of Elissa as irresponsible and thoughtless, undermining her motivation to improve. Elissa is apt to think, *If I’m seen as irresponsible, then there’s nothing I can do to change your view of me (and worse, my view of myself)*. According to this mindset, she might as well smear the rest of the furniture in the house. Too often, we act as though our children’s misbehavior indicates an unchangeable character flaw. If her parents had reacted this way, Elissa would be well on her way to considering herself irresponsible, insensitive, and overly emotional.

One of the worst aspect of labels is that they are self-fulfilling and therefore inhibit improvement. I see this phenomenon in the workplace all the time: the boss, disappointed in some aspect of the employee’s behavior, labels him a weak performer. Having set this low expectation, the boss then views the employee with a lack of trust and with little confidence in the employee’s abilities. The employee grows apathetic, throwing up his hands and saying, “Nothing I do will change her view of me, so why try?”

We can get locked in to the same self-reinforcing cycle with our children. Obviously when we're furious because our child ruined a prized possession, only a robot-mom can react calmly, but it's important to learn how to express your authentic feelings while not letting your anger humiliate or degrade your child. You can say, for example, "I am so furious and upset about this," without adding the blame and labeling—"What in the world were you thinking?! What an awful, irresponsible girl you are." Adding to Elissa's self-criticism would only rob her of exactly what she needed to learn from this experience—that she could remedy the situation and still be seen as a good person worthy of her family's love. The trick is to convey the message that Elissa is a good, responsible girl who made a bad choice.

Immediate Punishment

The second reaction, immediate punishment, denies Elissa the opportunity to come up with her own consequences—and remedies. Grounding her right away and telling her to pay for the piano give her no chance to make amends, because the remedy (paying for repairs) was not her idea. Clearly, a consequence is appropriate, but imposing it this way allows Elissa no chance to earn back her self-respect or the respect of her parents. What's more, this tactic will likely perpetuate her feeling of being wronged. A much better approach, especially for an older child, is to include her in establishing a consequence. Adults and children alike are more likely to buy into a solution if they participate in creating it.

Inauthentic Talk

The third reaction—"Let's talk"—makes sense on the surface but lacks an authentic edge. There is a time for listening and talking, but the first order of business is to convey a strong message that this act is outside the zone of acceptable behavior. Your true feelings, whether sadness or anger, send your child a clear and ultimately helpful message that when she acts in

certain ways, her behavior elicits a strong and human reaction. Too many parents bend over backwards to protect their children from anything unpleasant, abdicating their leadership. Barbara Waterman, Ph.D., a child psychologist, sees many parents who are reluctant to critique their child's behavior in a strong, steady way. When parents neglect opportunities to correct misbehavior, they miss opportunities to teach empathy and morality.

"To instill morality, you need to instill a positive form of guilt, which is very different from shaming them for their misbehavior," says Dr. Waterman. "Guilt can be good. When kids do wrong, they feel guilt, triggered by thoughts of their parent's disapproval, and that guilt allows them to self-correct their behavior."

I tell bosses all the time that creating some discomfort prompts behavior change. Too many times, I see managers who sugarcoat feedback or shy away from giving hard-hitting feedback, wanting to be popular. They only foster mediocrity. The same thing can happen at home.

The Big-Picture Response

What Elissa's parents, Michelle and Lorne, did was express how upset they were, making it clear they disapproved. They could see from Elissa's face how ashamed she was. They acknowledged their authentic reaction—disappointment—but resisted the urge to go a step further and humiliate or criticize her.

Later, when everyone's emotions settled down, they had a long talk with Elissa about being more aware of how her actions affect others. They also talked about Elissa's chronic frustration with her brother and made clear to Zach that his teasing had to stop. They listened and validated Elissa's hurt feelings that compelled her to get even. Michelle and Lorne discussed with Elissa other ways she could have expressed her anger more appropriately.

"I was so grateful my parents didn't take their anger out on me. They knew it wasn't my intention to ruin the piano," says Elissa.

If you discipline with respect, your child will respond by trying to win your approval. If you try to correct misbehavior through humiliation, your child is more likely to retaliate. Good leaders cultivate mutual trust.

At her Bat Mitzvah, Elissa spoke about how her big mistake gave her an occasion to learn the limits of revenge and how reacting in the heat of the moment led her to do something that she later regretted. She realized how terrible it feels to disappoint people you love. Her parents could have come down on her hard, with punishments and harsh judgments. Although that approach would have been understandable (and admittedly, I've criticized my kids for far more minor infractions), Elissa's parents saw that the situation presented a defining leadership moment, which they used to full advantage. It wasn't that they didn't seethe with frustration over the experience, but Michelle and Lorne had the wherewithal to give Elissa room to reflect, take responsibility for her actions, learn that her choices have consequences, and grow.

PROMOTING GROWTH

Transformational leadership is fueled by a deep belief that children and adults are works in progress, and will, if given guidance and trust, learn from their mistakes, change, and grow. Great leaders both at work and at home act with a mindset that says, "You are a person capable of growth, and my job is to figure out creative ways to nurture your development. I will help you learn from your mistakes and give you the unconditional acceptance to recover from failures and get back on track." With this mindset, you're constantly on the lookout for opportunities to promote growth.

Failure as Opportunity

The most effective leaders know that the biggest growth opportunities come at times of failure. Sadly, most people become

bosses, not *leaders*, wielding power when things go badly. Failure brings the perfect lessons for positive development *if* you reject the belief that failure indicates some innate character trait and *if* you view failure as a path to mastery.

For great leaders, mistakes are inspiring because they motivate people to take a look in the mirror and think about how they can improve and hit their mark the next time. These leaders see it as their job to help people dispel the notion that failure means that there is something innately inferior in them. Failure becomes a stepping-stone to success.

I worked with an executive, Harriet, who was embroiled in a power struggle with her budget manager, Randy. All had been fine between them until Randy made a budgeting error that threw the company into a deficit. From that point on, Harriet collected ammunition to justify her view of Randy—that he was careless and lacked the detail orientation and analytical skills required for the job. The bottom line: she was determined to fire Randy.

Randy launched a job search and, after five months, landed a job in a Fortune 500 company three times the size of his former company. One year later, he rose to the position of chief financial officer, managing a multimillion-dollar budget.

Randy looks back on his former boss with disdain but also amazement.

“I can see now in retrospect the power her view of me had on my performance. I really thought I was not cut out for this type of work. I believed I lacked some inborn quality that other successful finance people possessed.”

The Growth Mindset

Randy’s reaction wouldn’t surprise Stanford’s Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. In her research, she showed that people succeed or fail based on whether they have a fixed or growth mindset. With a fixed mindset, you believe that success is due to inborn abilities. If you hold a growth mindset, you believe that success comes from

practice, hard work, and a readiness to persevere after failure. Harriet labeled Randy as inadequate and irredeemable and that led to his fixed view of himself. The good news is that the fixed view can be reversed under the right conditions.

The dangers of a fixed mindset are significant for parents. You inadvertently embrace the fixed mindset when you praise your child's intelligence, athleticism, or artistry. I fall into this myself: when Leah won a poetry contest, I said, "You're such a good poet!" or after Anna's karaoke rendition of "Bohemian Rhapsody," I said, "You are a great singer." Kids get the message that being smart or talented at something is simply inbred, not the result of effort. The consequence: kids avoid taking risks for fear that if they fail, they'll lose their coveted label. And why try hard? Being smart, athletic, or artistic shouldn't require hard work if it's innate.

A growth mindset, in contrast, brings huge benefits. If you hold a growth mindset, you convey messages that success takes practice and that setbacks are part of the journey to achievement, not proof of inherent flaws. In one of Carol's experiments with junior high schoolers, her research team told half the students that their brains are like muscles that can be developed with exercise and that the math would be hard initially but then, with practice, would get easier. Sure enough, the kids who were given growth mindset messages significantly outperformed their peers.

When your kids say, "Keegan's a good artist" or "I'm bad at math," they are holding a fixed mindset about themselves and others. This view comes naturally to them (and us), so it's our job as parents to combat such thinking with messages like, "Keegan's mom tells me that Keegan practices sketching for hours after school each day" or "Math doesn't come easily for anyone. It takes a lot of hard work and practice."

Another way to conquer a fixed mindset is to foster a healthy respect for mistakes. I like to tell my kids what I call failure success stories to help them see that even their heroes

encountered failure first. My daughter Anna's favorite story: the Beatles were turned down by a recording company because the executive didn't like their sound and said that their type of music was on its way out. Charles Shultz, the creator of the *Peanuts* comic strip, was turned down by his high school yearbook. Albert Einstein failed his first college entrance exam, and Dr. Seuss's books were rejected by publisher after publisher. Failure success stories teach children a powerful lesson: success comes only after lots and lots of effort and perseverance.

I advise work teams to make a habit of sharing their mistakes and discussing what they learned as a result. You can do the same at home. In her role as executive director of UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, Christine Carter, Ph.D., studies what makes children happy. At the dinner table at home, she regularly asks her two daughters, ages five and seven, to share what mistakes they made and, if they can, to talk about something they learned from them. This, she says, is a great way to promote the growth mindset.

STICKING WITH YOUR GOALS

The best business leaders have clearly defined the results they want to achieve. They set goals and ask themselves, *What must I do each day to support my goals and lead to my desired outcomes?* Goals drive success, but we all know people who constantly articulate goals but don't stick to them. There are several essential things to keep in mind to make sure that your goals turn into actions that in turn lead to desired results.

Making Your Goals Vivid

The clearer your mental picture of your desired outcomes, the more likely you are to behave in a way that supports your goals. For example, if on New Year's Eve I announce my resolution—to become more physically fit—I know the likely outcome.

I'll exercise like crazy for a few weeks and then go back to my old ways. If I really want to sustain positive change, there are three secrets I need to follow:

1. **Keep a vivid picture in mind.** The image of hiking in the mountains with my kids into my old age keeps me on my exercise routine. Sometimes it's a picture of my maternal grandmother hunched over with osteoporosis that gets me out of bed and on the hiking trail. It's best if your picture includes the benefit of achieving your goal as well as the costs of not reaching it.
2. **Chart out the specifics.** I'm going to hike on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings on the trails a mile from my house. Announcing to your coworkers that you're going to join a gym won't cut it.
3. **Enlist support.** I'll invite my friend Diane to join me; she'll motivate me and keep me, literally and figuratively, on my path. The more friends you enlist—the more people with whom you share your goal—the deeper your accountability and the greater your chance of following through.

Once you establish a crystal-clear intention, you have set up a clear accountability for yourself with a goal that is easy to track and measure. If I have defined “physically fit” as hiking three times each week, I can't get away with saying, *Hey, look at me, I'm more fit now—I get up to change the TV channel instead of using a remote.* This approach works the same way on the job. If you have clear, measurable goals, you're far more likely to get where you're aiming to go than if you say something vague like, “We are going to provide better customer service this year.”

For example, I worked with an organization that was losing customers like crazy. In a poll, customers said they didn't like the surly service at the retail outlets. Profits were at an all-time low. The fear of bankruptcy had everyone on edge. The company

needed a specific strategy for change, achieved through concrete goals. Management began by asking simple but essential questions: What does better customer service look like? How will you know you're providing better service (in other words, How will you measure progress)? Be more courteous? Great, but one person's courteous is different from another's. What does courteous *look* like and *sound* like? We smile, make eye contact with customers, help people find what they're looking for by walking them to the merchandise, return phone calls and e-mails within three hours . . . Now you have something concrete to measure, and you're on your way to real improvement.

Likewise, with parenting, it helps to define, specifically, what you *do* when you are a big-picture parent. What do you do to motivate, empower, set an example, connect, and focus on the big picture? Try committing to just one or two specific actions to support your big-picture goals and develop as a leader at home and at work.

Big-picture parenting requires articulating your higher purpose and acting in alignment with your highest priorities. But it all starts with a big-picture *mindset*. I want to share with you a parable that powerfully brings home the importance of creating a clear mental picture of your higher purpose:

One day I came across three bricklayers. I asked the first bricklayer what he was doing.

"Laying bricks," he told me.

I asked the second what he was doing.

"Making a brick wall," he told me.

I asked the third what he was doing.

"Building a cathedral," he explained with a smile.

It is more the rule than the exception that the leaders I meet at home and at work are unclear about why they are doing what they're doing each day. Their sights are restricted to merely

doing tasks (laying bricks); they don't see how the bricks fit into the big picture. Similarly, if we as parents don't stop to reflect on the big picture, we are simply getting through each day with no sense of progress toward a larger goal.

DEFINING CONCRETE GOALS

Take a few moments to write your thoughts about the following questions. Think of two or three specific actions you want to commit to in order to support each of your three goals. Ideally, these actions represent something you want to do differently from what you're doing now. For example, if your primary parenting goal is to raise happy children, you might want to commit to actions that will enhance your own happiness and help you become a living example of your goal.

1. What is your primary parenting goal?
2. What is your primary career goal?
3. What is your primary relationship goal?

Once you articulate your goals and several actions to support them, go through the following checklist:

- Does each goal give you a clear mental picture of what success will look like?
- Do the actions move you toward your mental picture of success?
- Have you enlisted people who will help keep you on track? Have you shared your goals with these people and specified what you need from them to support your goals?

Keeping Focused on Your Goals

It's hard to pack a healthy lunch for your kids, get to work each day, conduct coherent discussions with colleagues, come home and keep your cool when your children are tired and cranky—when you're tired and cranky yourself—and still stay focused on your long-term goals. This is the challenge of leadership at home and at work. There are three strategies that help keep you focused on your big picture:

1. Stay self-aware and accountable.
2. Pursue *your* dreams.
3. Keep your priorities straight.

Stay Self-Aware and Accountable

Every parent I've ever talked to has experienced moments when they stop in their tracks and say, "I can't believe I said—thought, did—that."

Last month, I had an eye-opening lesson with a violin. Anna, my now thirteen-year-old, forgot her instrument on the city bus. When she got home from school, the phone rang. It was her friend Julian. He had noticed that she had left her violin behind and took it home. I thanked Julian profusely and hung up the phone.

The forgotten violin came after a long string of lost jackets, watches, and bus passes. I was at the end of my rope. Instead of saying something like, "Don't feel bad—Yo Yo Ma forgot his \$2.5 million cello in the trunk of a New York City taxicab once," I said in my Wicked Witch of the West voice, "I hope you take this as a lesson and never forget your violin again." I went on, reminding her how expensive replacing the violin would have been and what if Julian hadn't saved the day, and she needed to stop being so scatterbrained, etc., etc., etc.

Maya Angelou said, "You can tell a lot about a person by how they deal with lost luggage." Moms deal with the equivalent

of lost luggage every day. What if I responded to life's nuisances with a sense of calm? What if "goddammit" hadn't leapt from my lips when Anna left her violin on the bus? Keeping perspective is a pretty tall order, especially when I'm having one of my short-on-patience days.

When Anna left her violin on the bus, could I lighten up because, as leadership consultant Tom Peters says, excellent failures bring excellent learning? What would happen if I responded without judgment, if finger wagging transformed, somehow—breathe-breathe—into a hug? Could Anna learn to treat her own mistakes with compassion?

During Anna's confession, her tears and quivering bottom lip told the whole story. If I continued with my heavy-handed approach every time she made a mistake, I might drive Anna to hide her mistakes from me. What am I teaching her when I'm critical—to be self-critical, guilty, impatient with herself and others? My big-picture goals were just the opposite. I wanted Anna to be self-respecting, forgiving, and compassionate. Anna was fully equipped to learn her own lesson. All I needed was to firmly but calmly (no spewing, no humiliation) share my feelings and then get out of the way and give her the space and support to learn and grow. I could have said something like, "It makes me nervous that you left your violin. I can see you feel awful about it, but I do need your commitment that you'll be more careful with it."

Many workplaces, especially the successful ones, conduct some form of failure analysis to build self-awareness and accountability. Hospitals routinely use morbidity and mortality conferences to analyze, understand, and learn from mistakes. The U.S. Army is known for conducting after-action reviews to analyze and learn from their successes and failures. Barclays Global Investors calls mistakes process improvement opportunities. Are you prepared to conduct a failure analysis on yourself when you mess up?

Promoting personal accountability means asking yourself how you contributed to the setback or mistake (or, in my case, made a mistake worse by failing to seize an opportunity to promote growth). This crucial question gets to the heart of accountability—honest and deep reflection. Even if you’re only 5 percent responsible compared to your coworker’s, spouse’s, or child’s 95 percent, you have far more capability to change your own behavior than someone else’s. It’s not about condemning yourself each time your temper flares when you’re trying to get your kids out the door to school. Staying self-aware and accountable is about making a habit of listening to yourself and watching your behavior and its impact on others so that you build your leadership muscles every day.

It’s hard to shift from finding handy excuses to looking inward. Easier to say, “You made me so angry” or “It’s your fault I lost my cool” than to take a more accountable position: “What triggered my anger, and how can I better regulate my anger next time?” or “What part of this problem can I take responsibility for and learn from, so that I can change my behavior the next time?” (You’ll learn more about how to foster accountability in yourself and your children in Leadership Strategy 4.)

Staying self-aware and accountable takes practice. You can say, “I’m a hothead. It’s just the way I am”—good fixed mindset thinking—or you can commit to practicing self-awareness, responding to difficult situations in ways that get you closer to your big-picture goals.

Pursue Your Dreams

The most enjoyable and powerful way to live with your big picture in mind and take your parenting, job performance, marital satisfaction, and personal fulfillment up a notch is to pursue your *non-mom* goals. This may seem counterintuitive, so let me explain.

When Anna was barely four and Leah was born, I was all mom, through and through. But after the excuse of sheer exhaustion of

a newborn wore off, there were several more years when I abandoned hiking, reading, bicycling, writing, seeing movies, and more than a few friends. A new friend I met at a work conference, Erica, a single mom, manager of a medical department in a university, and opera singer on the side, asked me what my passion was as a non-mom.

I drew a blank. I made something up from my past.

“Writing,” I said unconvincingly.

“What do you write?” she asked.

“I’m on hiatus,” I said. But I couldn’t leave that feeling that I had lost part of myself. A mom of a friend of Anna’s had said to me once that her life was on hold until her kids were grown. Was I doing the same thing?

I met Clara Alvarez, twenty-seven, a welfare recipient and mother of two toddlers, while coaching the leadership team at the Merced County Human Services Agency. Clara told me that she felt shame collecting welfare. She went to school at night, held down three jobs, slept five hours each night, and still barely managed to pay her bills. I asked her what kept her going each day. She said that she got her strength from realizing that her children wouldn’t fulfill their dreams if she didn’t pursue hers.

“I lie in bed every night and decide that the next day will be one step closer to getting out of this mess and living a life I know I and my kids are worthy of living,” said Clara. She was able to look forward to a time when all the hard work would be worth it.

In coaching leaders, one of the first lessons I teach is this: to perform your best and inspire the best in others, you need to step back from the pressure and nurture yourself. Whether we are running a company or a carpool, when we don’t take a breather and focus on our non-mom selves, our joy is too often displaced by feelings of resentment and pointless drudgery. How can we expect our children to pursue their dreams when we defer our own? If you’re like most parents, you want to raise a

happy, self-respecting child who pursues her passions. One of the most powerful ways you can do that is to be a living example of a person who finds happiness in pursuing her own dreams.

Keep Your Priorities Straight

My mom, a single mother and schoolteacher, had a picture on the refrigerator of a woman on a chair, recoiling from a vacuum cleaner below. The caption said, “Inordinate fear of housework.”

We had a saying in our house—“Soak your way to freedom”—which justified the piles of dirty dishes. I know this view of housework was unconventional, but it taught me an important lesson. The untouched dirty dishes meant, for a working mom like mine, that we could enjoy a Scrabble game or cuddle up on the couch watching *Rhoda*.

I try to remember my “soak your way to freedom” lesson: the dishes can wait. The e-mail can wait. When I’m tired, when I’m frustrated, when I reach a wall, I need to take a breath, drop the compulsion to clean, to cook, and, the hardest one for me, to check e-mail.

Barbara Leslie, a lobbyist who works long hours, let go of home improvements so that she could focus on priorities more important to her and her family. She loves her job and enjoys family time, but the thought of remodeling put her and her husband over the edge.

“We’ve had paint swatches on our bedroom walls for over four years, broken light fixtures for five years, holes in the walls, and no door knobs. Our bedsheets are so threadbare that my husband’s feet ripped right through them the other night. It’s bad. But we take great family vacations and eat dinners together. It’s all about setting clear priorities,” says Barbara.

It’s standard operating procedure for working moms to live out of alignment with their priorities. We’re just too busy, too tired, and too overwhelmed. Here are some examples of out-of-sync parenting. Any sound familiar?

“I wanted to go on a family camping trip, but had to cancel because of my relentless workload.”

“I know family dinners are important, but rounding up my four kids is like herding kittens. I can’t manage to get everyone at home and fed at the same time.”

“I scream at my kids on a daily basis. I don’t mean to, but when they don’t listen to me, I finally just lose my head.”

OBSTACLES TO BIG-PICTURE PLANNING

There are myriad seductive detours that steer working mothers away from the ultimately more rewarding big picture. Let’s explore the top two detours: self-sacrifice and micromanaging.

Self-Sacrifice

It takes courage and discipline to check your impulses and rearrange your calendar. The first thing you can do to clear the path to your big-picture goals is to find ways to rejuvenate. The path of least resistance for many working mothers I talk to is to bend to the boss’s pressure and work through the weekend. Are you one of these moms? On the edge of collapse, you still shuttle the kids to and from soccer; schedule the orthodontist, dentist, and doctor’s appointments; and plan birthday parties. Your husband becomes a source of resentment—can’t he take some of this on? You don’t dare ask, because he can’t do it properly (you remember the time he delivered the kids to school without brushing their hair or their teeth), and besides, he works night and day also. This becomes your normal way of being—pulling the double shift, snapping at your husband and your kids, abandoning the hobbies you used to enjoy—but it’s not healthy or sustainable. Your Good Mom expectations grab you by the heart and pull you into a myopic whirlwind of activity.

Here’s the paradox: we avoid pursuing our more ambitious big-picture goals to make life “easier” today. It’s easier to do the

chores yourself than negotiate a shared load with your partner or engage in a battle with your four-year-old. It's simpler to make a second dinner when your toddler pushes away the green pesto. And another paradox: we deny ourselves nurturing pleasures that we enjoyed in our pre-mom days—the romantic date, the shopping spree, the walk around the lake—only to realize that we're miserable. It's so simple, it's a cliché: when Mom's not happy, no one's happy. You set the tone. You are the role model. You are the leader. If you feel like the resident butler, let it be a clue to you that you're not doing anyone a favor—not you, not your partner, and not your kids. When you're forward-looking, you recognize that how you live your life will influence how your kids live their lives.

Micromanaging

Closely related to self-sacrifice is micromanaging. Great leaders step back and let their followers assume responsibility. They delegate. They set an example. They motivate. They empower.

EIGHT REASONS WHY YOU DON'T DELEGATE

1. It takes too much time to explain the task; it's easier and faster to do it yourself.
2. Only you can do the task properly.
3. You enjoy being in control.
4. You enjoy feeling needed and important.
5. You worry that your children are too busy.
6. You want to be nice and shoulder the burdens yourself.
7. You enjoy your martyrdom.
8. You are unwilling to let others make mistakes.

As a manager, I delegated like crazy. Why do it myself when someone else could gain valuable experience from doing it? But at home, it's a different story. Why? Through some potent mixture of guilt, worry, self-importance, and need for control, I feel compelled to do it all. I brushed my daughter Anna's hair until she was twelve because I could do it better and she needed me. I bus the table when Leah whines that she has to get to her homework. I suggest 101 things my kids can do when they're bored before I catch myself and say, wait, you need to figure out how to amuse yourselves without my help. I fix snacks, pack lunches, search out lost library books. I am Supermom. I am Superwife while my husband lounges in front of the TV watching soccer matches. OK—he actually does a lot, especially when I back off—but micromanaging brings on a bitter martyr complex that distorts my view of my husband in unflattering ways. Intellectually I know that the more I do things for Anna and Leah that they can do for themselves, the more dependent they become and the more they feel *entitled* to a mom who runs around serving them. When I take it all on myself, when I insist that I need to take the kids clothes shopping, for example, and that my husband couldn't possibly navigate the preteen clothes department, I'm leaving Burke in the dark about Leah's taste for stretchy waistlines and Anna's desire for well-fitting jeans. All it takes is one shopping trip, and he's up to speed. So why don't I relinquish that chore? My actions are in direct conflict with my long-term parenting goal to raise responsible, self-reliant children and to model collaboration—look kids: mommies and daddies share the domestic load.

Resisting the temptations of micromanagement yields amazing results: employees and children who feel respected, assume responsibility, and take initiative; who demonstrate willingness to engage in trial-and-error learning; and who experience the self-confidence to think independently. When you've hit a wall of exhaustion and you decide that delegation

DELEGATION QUIZ

Take the following quiz to determine how well you delegate at home and at work. Circle yes or no.

1. Do you take back the task you've delegated at the first sign of mistakes? Yes No
2. Do you find yourself working in your office long after others have gone home? Yes No
3. Do you think things will fall apart when you're not there? Yes No
4. Do you do tasks others are perfectly capable of doing? Yes No
5. Do people do the tasks you've assigned only after you've nagged them? Yes No

If you circled yes for two or more questions, it's time to take a hard look at improving your delegation skills. Look at delegation as an opportunity to build trust, gain time, and foster responsibility.

is your way to liberation and a happier family life, here are the steps you can take:

Decide to whom you will delegate. Balance the level of challenge and the types of tasks with the person's interests and skills. The best leaders focus not just on getting the job done but also on how to create motivating conditions; this means finding the right level of challenge, providing needed training, and giving recognition so that people feel appreciated.

Decide what to delay. Learn to let go, say no, and do it only when it's a “must-do” and aligned with your big-picture goals.

Assign the task. Specify what is involved, when the task needs to be done, and what challenges the person might encounter. Put the task in context—how will the task contribute to the household or organization? Who will be helped when the task is done (or hurt if the task isn't completed)?

Follow up. Ask for progress reports, check in to see how it's going, offer support, allow for setbacks, say thank you, and recognize success.

DEVELOPING FAMILY CORE VALUES

In every healthy workplace I've ever worked, employees know what the core values are—customer service, quality, innovation, cost-effectiveness, and so on. These core values are important because they guide behavior—they help people make choices about how to spend their time and money, and clarify what behavior gets praised, condoned, or penalized. Why not achieve clarity and buy-in on the core values of your family?

Here are some interactive steps you can take to establish your family's core values. Your family may resist at first, but soon will find this to be a fun, powerful tool to help create the family you want.

1. Get a big sheet of paper, ideally the size of a flipchart. Tape it on the wall. Draw a big circle on the paper.
2. Decide who will be the scribe. Then get kids, spouse, and other family members engaged right off the bat by asking everyone to call out what they know about Disneyland, a culture and organization that nearly everyone admires and enjoys. Give some examples to start them off: fun rides, crowded, clean, friendly customer service. Once you

have all filled the page with ideas, share the four official core Disneyland values: (1) courtesy, (2) safety, (3) show (characters, rides, building, all the things that contribute to the Disney “magic”), and (4) efficiency.

3. Next, draw a circle on a fresh sheet of paper. Now it’s time to describe your family as you really see it. Again provide a few examples: we eat dinner together, do lots of chores, volunteer on clean-up days at the local creek. Then ask everyone to share his or her thoughts.
4. Ask for ideas that may not describe your family now, but that you’d like to see in the future, such as travel to foreign countries or lots of time playing games.
5. Keep in mind that every idea is valid. Don’t evaluate, even if your child says, “Watch TV all day.” Remember, this is a fun activity.
6. Ask everyone to look over the list and come up with your three or four core family values—for example, fun, outdoorsy, hard working.
7. Now talk about how you could make your core values come alive; for example, how do you treat each other, and how do you spend your time?

Post the sheet on a wall so that you can go back to it, talk about it, and modify it as the mood hits. Carve out time during dinner to come up with ideas to make each core value come to life.

CREATING A PARENTING MISSION STATEMENT

A powerful tool to promote your commitment to big-picture parenting is to craft a parenting mission statement. If you co-parent, talk together about what kinds of qualities you want your children to have when they’re grown.

When my husband and I began to talk about our parenting principles, we started with three big-picture goals: to instill joy

in learning, to build a strong family connection, and to promote a focus on the greater good. Little by little, we came up with ideas to fulfill these goals. For example:

- We chose books to read together and made the effort to get to bed earlier to make plenty of time for reading.
- I started a mother-daughter book group with some friends.
- When we went on trips, we read books about our destinations.
- We talked about the current community, national, and world events at the dinner table.
- We decided on community service activities we could do as a family—for example, cleaning up local creeks and participating in walkathons to raise money for causes we care about.

To create a parenting mission statement, begin by imagining that your children are grown. Reflect on the following questions in terms of your *ideal* vision:

1. What do your children say about their relationship with you?
2. What do they most admire about you? What parental and nonparental accomplishments or qualities do they admire in you?
3. What do they say about their family's strongest values?
4. What do your children value most?
5. What memorable family experiences do they recount?

Now ask yourself, What do we need to *do* to make our ideal vision a reality?

Another helpful exercise in crafting a parenting mission statement is to consider the qualities you hope your children will demonstrate throughout their lives. As you gaze ahead into the future ten to twenty years, what are your hopes for your

children? What do you admire most about them? Decide which five qualities you think would be the most important. For example: Our children are

- Successful, yet considerate of others
- Passionate about their dreams, yet not self-absorbed
- Connected to family, yet they contribute to the greater good
- Always ready to stand up for what's right, yet respect differences
- Able to take risks, yet do not feel defeated by failures

Talk with family members about creative ways to make your mission statement come alive instead of having it end up just sitting on the bedside table underneath your pile of books. Some parents post mission statements on the kitchen wall and use them as springboards for family discussions. One parent couple reviews their mission statement the first Sunday of each month and assesses whether their actions and the way they spend their time reinforce or undermine their mission statement. The process of developing a mission statement is beneficial in and of itself, but can be even more transforming if you regularly monitor and discuss the mission.



Being a mother brings endless chores and head-spinning logistics. When we are deluged with countless menial tasks, whiny requests, and several daily servings of frustration, it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. Let's face reality: someone has to do the laundry. Revisiting your goals can ease the daily frustrations. Write down your goals and keep them on your bedside table or in your wallet. Glance at them from time to time and let them guide your actions. When you've aligned your core values with your daily choices and actions, life at home, for both you and your family, will improve drastically. What you *do*—how

you promote a growth mindset, stay self-aware and accountable, pursue your dreams, and keep your priorities straight—keeps you on the big-picture parenting path.

In the next chapter, you'll learn how you express your big-picture goals through your personal leadership style. You'll take a self-assessment to gain insight about your "Mom Mode." When you play to your strengths and values, you get better results and feel more satisfied as a parent. Understanding your Mom Mode will also shed light on why you and your partner sometimes can't see eye to eye.