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GROWING UP IS NOT AN OPTION

The era in which I grew up had one simple rule: “Just do as I say, not as I do, and everything will be fine”. Since that time, parenting and children have gone through a major metamorphosis. Instead of a dogmatic approach, parenting tended to become an “art form” in which there was much more liberality introduced into the methods that previously would allow little room for change. The former was the manner in which a sense of responsibility was taught. It was a relatively universal method that most parents employed in raising their children and in that sense there was a more commonly acceptable approach. However, this column is not about the merits of either approach nor will it weigh the effectiveness of each. Actually, today’s column is about choices, consequences, responsibility and obligation.

We did not have choices as children because of the expected conformity. By-and-large, teaching children about choices was unheard of. There was no sense of having a choice when you acted responsibly and heaven help you if you didn’t. As children from that era grew into adulthood, many of them either did not realize that they had choices or they did not believe that they could make them. They continued to act very similarly to how they were expected to act as children. I am not sure that the lack of training in making choices is only reserved for those of my generation since my work with today’s parents would suggest that similar patterns are being practiced as well.

My perception of this process is simply this; responsibility involves choices whereas obligation does not. The sense of “responsibility” that was practiced in my judgment was really more of a sense of “obligation” driven by guilt. As those children grew into adulthood without being taught about choices, many made the wrong ones which would be understandable since someone cannot do something they weren’t taught to do. That sense of what I now term to be obligatory behavior and the guilt which drove it really didn’t work very well. Everything was perceived in a “forever” context and, of course, there is no “forever” in this life. Life is about constant change and so without knowing how to make choices real dilemma results creating some real problems. Let me be clear.

You can practice making choices, and still be accountable for the consequences of those choices without practicing rigid, dogmatic patterns.

Since life is also about making responsible choices, having a healthy and happy lifestyle involves making good choices that will benefit us. If you realize that life presents many turns in the road requiring making a choice as to which direction we go, making right choices is a very important and necessary part of being an adult. And because much of the learning that children experience is derived from watching parents deal with their lives, the process is handed down from generation to generation. Not to say that making mistakes and learning from them is not a part of living life but I am referring to a consistent pattern of making wrong choices that creates a great deal of turmoil and misery from those caught up in that pattern. However, it is never too late to learn to make good, solid, healthy choices in life but the first step is to realize that there are choices that can be made.

Let me leave you with some questions whose answers might prove helpful to your life and the lives of your children.

- How much guilt do you experience instead of feeling free to make choices in your life?
- Do you teach your children how to make choices based on their own experiences or do you criticize them when they make mistakes?
- Do you recognize that your pattern of making choices is probably going to become your children's pattern as well?
- How accountable are you for your choices and what are you teaching your children about accountability?

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.

He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is “seeking alternative methods to happiness” and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: “enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.