[Building a Culture in Your Family](#)

Note: Not a day goes by that I don't think about our friend and colleague Tim Driver who passed away a few years ago at age 45. Tim had the gift of wisdom and humor. I continually run across things that Tim wrote in my files. In this article he addressed the Proactive Coaching approach to building a culture within a family:

Tim Driver – Proactive Coaching LLC

"Today I am happy to discuss culture and the complexities that can surround it. My desire is to try and simplify the concept, making it a skill to be used in your coping toolbox! Let's dig in!

Culture in a sentence: "This is the way things are done here (in this family, in this company, etc.)" Creating a culture from scratch: Starting a new family, organization etc. is exciting and scary! All too often we wait until things are not going well before we realize…."We should have thought about that back when we started." (Guilty, your honor)

So within this culture building model, the process is to "Define, Model, Shape, and Reinforce". Regardless of whether you are starting from scratch or drastically trying to change course. The best way to initiate a culture is to agree upon a set of "core values" and DEFINE them. Core values should be broad in nature, so that they cover multiple situations and limit the number of "rules" that are necessary. For instance, if "Integrity" is one of the core values you want your family to stand for, then there is no need to have "honesty" as another, because honesty is part of having integrity. When a situation comes up involving telling the truth, it can be dealt with this way: "Because this family is about integrity, we are always honest, even when it doesn't serve our best interest."

In doing so, a reminder is given of the core values, and a connection is made that gives a child the "why" where honesty is concerned. We don't have to have rules for every situation. When a cashier gives us too much money back, we don't have to consult the rulebook to Category 4, subsection 4.23.33 paragraph 11. Instead, we simply say, taking money that isn't ours lacks integrity. Keep the definitions brief and understandable, but sturdy.

The next step in the process is to MODEL these core values. Live them. Wow, that was easy. Be aware that those who you are installing the culture FOR, will be MORE than willing to point out when YOU do not live up to the core values yourself. NOTHING kills a culture faster, giving everyone the right to make excuses or exceptions, than leaders who don't follow their own rules. By the same token, NOTHING gives more STRENGTH to these life skills, than watching the leaders hold themselves accountable to them, and to all those who have committed to the same guiding pillars.

I was a horrible art student. Stick people were a challenge. In pottery, specifically clay…ashtrays were a pinnacle for me. I was more the "I can roll a snake" kind of student. But when it comes to people, correction/evaluation should take the mentality of SHAPING. Correction is a process. Situations are used to trim a little here, pinch a little there, and sculpt a bit on the back end perhaps. Regardless of your discipline philosophy, it should be used to

"change behavior". One way to keep correction positive is to state what you want rather than harping on the negative. Rather than saying, "You complain a lot, and you have a bad attitude", it is more effective in reinforcing the culture to say, "We are about joy in this family, and I need your actions to reflect that." Be careful however…that very phrase will be spit back at you the next time you're in a foul mood. Obviously there are times where we have to identify what the negative behaviors are, so that a connection can be made, but spend more time stating what the standard is, rather than how it wasn't met. You'll be amazed at how those "bad attitudes" happen less often.

REINFORCING is the last piece of culture creation. By reinforcing, you motivate others to continue the positive things they are doing, and allow for further training, modeling, shaping, etc. The biggest thing to consider when reinforcing is NOT to wait for perfection before encouraging. ANYTHING closer to the desired outcome should be recognized. You don't have to throw a parade and bring in a petting zoo, but even a "that's better than last time" will quash discouragement. The second most important thing with regards to reinforcing is "reward effort". If you only praise and scold based on "results", your culture will struggle or at best, be erratic. Sometimes kids get results without putting forth the effort they should. This breeds lazy intellectuals. Other times, people work extremely hard, only to find the results less than satisfying. For example, you tell a child to clean the yard. They work for 3 hours, but leave little swaths unmowed, and weeds here and there. If you point out, "you missed these spots"… what they will hear is, "It doesn't matter how hard I try". You will get less EFFORT next time. Instead, if you say, "I know you put a ton of time in and worked really hard on this yard, let me help you finish some of these spots"… what they will hear is, "EFFORT MATTERS, my technique just needs to be shaped a little." Always reward effort and you will get more effort.

Hopefully this gives a little start to installing or recreating a culture. There are more things to consider, such as how to defend your culture against outside attacks…what to do when members refuse to live by the core values…and other fun items for party discussion.

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