

ColonyCapital

Dads

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On the eve of a momentary victory lap for Dads when we should be focused on the lessons and enduring memories garnered from either receiving or passing the baton of fatherly wisdom, we instead find ourselves distracted by the ominous clouds of volatility in the world and what it means to our prospects of wealth creation or perhaps even survival. Global apocalyptic events, blended with economic uncertainty and dissatisfaction with the political status quo, are surpassed by disappointment in the efficacy and quality of leadership. We continue to find that beneath the beautiful foam of the political and financial cappuccinos there is no espresso, simply air.

We all know that the last chapter to this book will be ugly. It is impossible to continue to print money, increase national, state and municipal debt, further entitle the entitled through broadened populist programs, and more fervently tax the already taxed while producing and consuming less. Federal Stimulus is disguised debt, and the taxpayer is the ultimate subsidizer for zero interest rates. It is simply more debt on debt!

We are all searching for strength, courage and some edge to the myriad of quandaries that present themselves to us each day. Complexity, confusion and chaos have captured our minds and unfulfilled expectations have deadened our souls. We are all hopeful yet unsure, optimistic yet cautious, and singularly focused on “what will be” and not “what is.” We share an unquenchable thirst for faster, better information. We herald the arrival of any new iGadget, yet the plight of disaster, famine and disease gets bumped to the back of the real agenda. No one will “own it”... it is all someone else’s dilemma. We live in a world where information is simply a commodity and compassion is a relic from Jurassic Park. Compassion with appropriate action on any front is as rare as a vinyl record. What are the tools that we need today? What is the magic elixir? How can we better manage our helm? Who should set the sails?

There was only one place for me to go as I myself drown in this pool of global mediocrity: My go-to man, my Pop!!

I am going to wax a bit philosophical, however, I promise you I have not been on sabbatical to a medical marijuana farm. It simply seems to me that Father’s Day is a time to reflect upon things that are important and not all the noise that seems to blur the moment. We need leadership, not more disinformation, and my Dad was my first place to look.

A Snapshot of Dad

My Dad is about to turn 95 and is simply one of the strongest, brightest and most honorable men I have ever known. He started work at the age of 12 as the oldest son of a Lebanese immigrant family blessed by the gift of America. He bought his first grocery store in his late teens and supported his parents, siblings and 18-year-old wife single handedly. He is a bull of a man with no lace edges or frills. He is a man’s man and has an amazing charismatic reach. His word is his bond and he has no truck with whining or complaining or bitching. He is about integrity, commitment and trust.

When I was a kid my Dad worked at his store on National Boulevard seven days a week, 5:00 a.m. to midnight, coming home only for dinner and then going right back to work. It was at this palace of street education that I learned my most valuable lessons from him. It wasn’t what he said as much as what he did. I never heard him complain. His view of life was that every moment is a gift, and to handle anything that was thrown at him with integrity and commitment. As a young man, if I came home dejected after a game or a poor grade and attempted to blame it on someone else he would simply say, “Welcome to life. Now own it, feel it and get rid of it. There will be good days and bad days. That determination is yours and yours only. You are responsible for it all!”

He never bothered fussing about the little things but when he laid down the law it was in stone and I buckled under immediately. I still do! In the midst of the daily struggle and striving to give his family the blessing of an education and opportunities that he never had, he maintained incredible peace of mind and self-confidence that I still today find awesome.

Fathers Are Guided by Mothers

Whenever I think of my father I automatically think of my mother. Her life was her husband and her kids. She was the product of ancient Lebanese culture and believed that “a man’s life is life and a woman’s life is her man”. There was no concept of mediocrity or normalcy with my Mom. There was only one speed and that was flat to the floor driven by a belief that those who are given much, much must be given. While most kids were raised with a notion of nothing to excess and everything in moderation, my Mom’s motto was everything to excess and nothing in moderation. Her belief is that if you stuck to a “menu” it was a sure fire guarantee for mediocrity and that happiness and peace of mind were found in extending yourself and extending yourself and then extending yourself one more time. It was all about becoming a “man for others” while blazing your own path and not following the worn but safer path of others.

My Mom did not have a formal education. She was raised with ten brothers and sisters in a one-bedroom farmhouse by immigrant parents, all clinging to each other and to the hope of the American Dream. The foundation she laid out for us was simple, consistent and relentless and had been adapted from the Phoenician scent of a hundred decades of civilization: Discipline, manners, compassion, generosity, kindness, selflessness, enthusiasm and humility. Calculus, physics and chemistry came easy to me, it was my Mom’s hard-core curriculum that has been a lifelong challenge. She taught me “what a man is” but I learned “how to be a man” by watching my Dad. I want to share with you a few of those lessons I learned as a box boy that I still find today to be the most important tools whether on Main Street or Wall Street.

Dad’s Tool Kit

1) The Art of Conversation

One of my Dad’s favorite expressions was that “to be a great conversationalist you need to learn how to shut your mouth and listen”. His point was that everyone has a deep and burning desire to tell their own story. They would like to do so unhampered, uninterrupted and with the full and devoted attention of their conversational partner. Unfortunately, most of us feel that a conversation is a few sets of “ego tennis” and that each story or fact demands a volley of an even better story or fact. Even more frustrating the symmetry of simple soliloquy is most times interrupted by a comment, criticism or query. His insistence was to let others perfect their skills as an “orator” and you perfect your skills as a “listener.” He used to say, “Let them talk and you say nothing and they will walk away thinking how brilliant you are.” It made no sense to me then but makes so much sense now!

The highest compliment we can pay to each other is to actually “be in the moment” during a conversation. The generosity of total attention and unobstructed focus is a lost art. We very seldom experience it with anyone in day-to-day conversation. The premium today is instead placed on multi-tasking. In the midst of any social or business conversation we are simultaneously on Blackberries, iPhones, or Googling a fact so that we can be faster, quicker and more multitasked. The “art of conversation” is in the intensive care ward and the highest form of rudeness is to be on a blackberry while someone is speaking to us.

The ability to make your conversational partner feel that they are the only star in your universe at that moment is more powerful than 10,000 gigabytes of information. The competitive advantage today is not more multi-tasking or faster information, but more focus and patient listening.

My Dad was a fanatic on shaking hands. It was all about looking deep into the other person’s eyes, staying focused with them and grasping a firm and solid handshake. He always believed that a handshake is the preview of your character. If you are distracted, insincere or wimpy it will be hard to change that first impression regardless what you do later.

Secondly, when you then say goodbye you assert the same handshake but remember your new introducees first name. As a kid, I thought this was ridiculous. How could I remember each customer’s first name?? Why? No one would really care!!! He would answer that our oranges

were a few cents more expensive but the smile and courtesy were free!! He was right! That was the distinguishing difference and still is. The simple act of being in the moment and remembering a new introducees name is unique and irreplaceable. The simple act of letting someone know that you were actually paying attention to “only” them.

2) *Agenda-less Elegance*

Dad knew little details about all his customers: Their kids, their kids’ schools, their sicknesses, their birthdays. If someone was in trouble he gave them credit until they could pay. If a supplier was in trouble he would advance money for them until they re-tooled. He was kind and considerate to everyone from the deliverymen to the waitress at the deli. He gave them all the greatest gift that he could give them: His uninterrupted time and attention. As a result, people became devoted to him. He would say you build a business in strenuous inches and you can loose it in miles. It is casting long lines with no expectation of immediate reward.

Relationships really do matter and building a lifeline of “long line” relationships is one of the most important keys to success. He drilled into me that these relationships however, work primarily when you don’t need them, when you are nurturing a relationship without even thinking of a payoff or reward in return.

This agenda-less extension of yourself to others is the mortar to building a powerhouse of long-line relationships, which will harvest themselves across the pangs of a lifetime. The keyword, however, is “agenda-less.”

3) *Upsets*

Dad’s view was simple! All upsets arise from two basic things: 1) unfulfilled expectations and 2) miscommunicated communications. Eliminate these two circumstances and you will eliminate most of the gnawing numbing feeling of upset and aggravation, which paralyzes most of the planet.

Unfulfilled expectations are best eliminated by simply choosing it to be as it is. By accepting where we are at the moment and not hoping that this moment will become something other than it is curative. We all find ourselves unable to find satisfaction in the now because we are captured by the anxiety of the future and the anguish of the past. Dad’s lesson was simple: Get over it -- It is what it is, stop crying about what didn’t happen and stop worrying about what it will be. One foot after the other, inhale and breathe the moment that you are in and pay attention to the atmosphere around you.

Miscommunicated communications, he said, was the easiest to remedy. “You give simple straight answers to questions with no bending.” Yes or No - not maybe!!! Lay it out the way that it is with no coating and no smoothing. It is better to deal with someone’s discontent upfront and early than to defer - it will only fester over time and create confusion. Bottom line: Be straight, be concise and don’t hide the ball.

He maintained flat lined expectations. Life had its ups and downs and when you were up he would say, “Know one thing- you will soon be going down”. Likewise when you were down things would quickly turn up. His store was in an area of Los Angeles that was subject to nighttime break-in robberies. This was a common occurrence to have an alarm go off in the middle of the night and I would often times go with him to meet the police as they arrived in the middle of the night. I was always amazed to see his immovable confidence without regard to what the damage or loss had been. We lived paycheck to paycheck and in those days there were no insured losses. He never blinked.

Every night he and my Uncle would go to the back room, count the money trays, crack open a pint of Early Times whiskey and pour two drinks into Dixie cups. They would discuss what went well that day and what didn’t, but either way they enjoyed the Dixie cup of whiskey and a slice of cheddar cheese. He never registered disappointment, panic or dismay. If it was a bad day he would simply say “I will fix it tomorrow” or “We did something wrong but we will get better.”

He is all about not lingering in the past and hoping for the future. Momentum begets momentum and speed is the only remedy to gravity. If we are stuck worrying about the past and hoping about the future, the downward force of gravity will simply outweigh and crush us. As long as we are moving – somewhere, anywhere – we can beat the force of gravity and the key to this is “choosing it to be as it is.” Getting rid of the “I wish and I want and I could have or I should have” is a colonic for the soul and a steroid for self-esteem and self-confidence.

4) Show Up!

Dad and I share a love for cowboy heroes. There is something magnetic about a person who has no fluff, who doesn't waiver, who stands straight and tall in the middle of controversy, who just lays it out the way that it is. A leader!!!! There are good guys and bad guys! Where have they gone? Overtime we have all been lured into the shadow of “paralysis by analysis” in every aspect of our life. As a result, we spend more time reading about the science of making a touchdown than we do running pass patterns. The simple fact is that if you spend your days and nights running pass patterns your body will automatically find the goal line. You won't need to analyze it you will simply do it. If, however, you run computer programs on how the perfect pass pattern should be run but never set on the field as prepared and ferocious competitor you remain a spectator. You need to get beat up, knocked silly, undercut at the knees, clotheslined at the neck, and drop the ball by looking at the goal line instead of the ball... and then you will be ready to score.

5) Don't look at the scoreboard!

The key to success is focusing on the game not the score. When I was in high school our football games were on Friday nights. My Dad of course worked on Friday nights so by the time I was a junior, he had never been to one of my games. Finally, he engineered some time off and came to our CIF finals game. I was so excited and so nervous. He would finally be in the stands. It was the fourth quarter and I was playing tight end. Two minutes left in the game and we were down one touch down. Mike Bergdahl our QB called a simple flair in pattern for me and my stomach dropped to my feet. This was *the* moment.... Dad in the stands, we are on the 30-yard line, I could catch the tying pass! I ran the pattern perfectly and Mike laid the ball at my fingertips. Rather than looking and catching the ball and taking the beating but having a second down on the 10 – I looked quickly to the goal line to see where I would have to run. The rest is a nightmare I have had for 40 years. The ball hit my fingers and started to slowly roll out of my grasp. As I returned my eyes to the ball it was too late, bounce, bounce, bounce...incomplete pass. My whole life passed in front of me. My one moment of glory with my Dad in the stands and I blew it. Later, when I crawled out of the locker room my Dad was there to meet me. All he said was “concentrate on catching the ball first ... then worry about where you will run.” I never forgot it.

6) Pushing through Comfort Barriers

We all become quite complacent when we nestle under our security blanket of knowing where we are and what we are doing. The fear of failure weighs heavy in our minds and the drumbeat of “risk” drives most of us to the “status quo.” However, satisfaction and peace of mind are found when we push through our own comfort barriers and obliterate the fear of failure. I have found most of the quantum leaps in my career are from my failures rather than my successes. At the time I certainly did not feel that way, but each failure or disappointment led me to a new place that shattered the shackles of comfort and mediocrity and pushed me to be better. What kept me going is that from a young age my Dad never criticized or ridiculed me for failure. The fact that I could drop the ball was ok; the fact that I would lay down and not get up was not ok. His philosophy was take your licks and keep on kicking.

7) Take the Consequences Like a Man

When I was nine years old we lived right next to the Ballona Creek, a flood drainage easement that flowed to Playa Del Rey beach. My Mom was freaked out about this flood basin and forbade me to go near it. The problem was, it was the most direct route to a “toes over” surf spot and I was just crazy about surfing. One day my friend Tommy Sltaky said a storm was coming and the waves would be great and he twisted my arm to go with him. Of course, knowing Mom would

never let me do it, I told her I was going to baseball practice. We grabbed the boards from Tommy's house, went to the creek, turned them fin up and floated 3 miles to the sea. Little did I realize that the creek would soon be flooded due to a torrential rain. Afterward, I went back to Tommy's house, changed clothes, picked up my baseball glove and went home. When I walked in the door my Mom knew something was up. When she asked where I had been, of course I lied. She went ballistic. "Wait until your father comes home," a phrase that can still make me quake. When Dad came home for dinner with the second half of his day still ahead of him, not needing this for sure, he said "you have one shot at telling me the truth...give it to me straight and the aftermath will be much better." I knew not to mess with him and so I immediately spilled my guts. When I had finished he said "come with me to the bedroom." He loomed over me, slowly removed the belt and told me to bend over. When he was done as I stood there (I couldn't sit) blistered and humiliated and I asked, "you told me the aftermath would be better - why did you spank me?" He said, "Consequences are simply consequences. The spanking was the consequence, the aftermath *will* be better, let's go get an ice cream cone."

Bottom line: Give the bad news first, take it like a man and move on with life. Honesty and integrity will limit the aftermath but the consequences to stupidity always remain the same.

8) *Take care of your team and your family and the universe will take care of you.*

My Dad's favorite saying was that until you have lied restless on a Thursday night not knowing how to make payroll on Friday morning you have learned nothing of business. He always put his own interests last and his employees and customers interest first. Keeping a smile on his employees face was the insurance policy for keeping a smile on his customers face and that was his primary focus. Stewardship, leadership, selflessness and mentorship translated into good business. Take care of others and the universe will take care of you!!!

Conclusion

My personal view is that the economic situation in the world is going to get much worse before it gets better. Eventually, inflation will return and real estate will become dear. When will this chaos conclude? I have no idea. Nor do we have any control over their determinants. However, what I am sure of is that concentrating on the basics of what we all learned from our dads – integrity, commitment, long line relationships, gratitude and basic kindness and manners – is a sanctuary from tumultuousness. Additionally, we can actually control these things! Now is a moment to concentrate on relationships not information. There is only disinformation and disinformation stimulates fear and trepidation. We will not be disappointed if we reset our expectations to adjust with reality. This is a time for us to work harder for less and return to earning a living from what we do, not what we invest in. Kindness and courtesy generates generosity of heart, which in turn becomes the magical elixir for the spirit.

Dad's formula for never being disappointed was simple "Have no expectations of others' conduct as a condition to your own and you will never be disappointed." Simply do the right thing!!

Happy Father's Day!!!