

For Fathers, Being a Role Model is a 24/7/365 Job

Several dads I admire have gone out of their way to help other people.

For example, one dad took an eleven-day trip halfway across the world as part of an outreach project for his church. I learned that another dad spends a couple hours on many Friday evenings transporting supplies for a local soup kitchen. Maybe you do similar things.

They aren't doing these things for recognition from me or anyone else, but it struck me that they were modeling for their children even though in these cases they *didn't* take their kids along.

Don't get me wrong. Volunteering and helping others are important things to do *with our children*. Those hands-on experiences as a family can be powerful.

And I know that a family character-building experience or lesson isn't the only goal or even the best reason to do those things. I hope we try to make a difference in our world and our communities because it's important to us; it's part of our character; it's the right thing to do.

If we can model altruistic values for our kids in the process, that's a great side-benefit, and it's one way *we can give our children a bigger vision of who we are*.

It goes hand-in-hand with one truth that all dads need to really grasp and live with every day: *we're always modeling*. Our children are constantly watching us and taking mental notes. They notice what we do, and it affects them big time. Our character is always "on stage," and that means we should be purposeful about what we do—and what we don't do.

So this is a reminder of something I'm coming back to more and more as the years pass: *your legacy is also made up of who you are when you're not with your kids*. They may not see everything you do, but they can learn a lot from hearing about what you do—from yourself and from others, and maybe even years after you're gone. All the things you do help to make up your character.

This applies to how you conduct yourself at work. Your integrity there is part of your legacy. Like with the two dads I mentioned, your efforts to make sacrifices to try and help others are also part of the picture. If you're a non-custodial dad or in another situation that doesn't allow you to be with your children as much as you'd like, I believe that keeping your poise and doing what's right when you're apart will still influence your children in some way. It's part of who you are.

Dad, I would challenge you to get involved in helping other people—and that can include mentoring a younger dad, investing in a child who needs a father figure, visiting someone who needs a friend, or something that we more commonly associate with “volunteering.”

Do include your children in these efforts when you can. But know that even when you don't, you're still modeling for them and creating a fuller picture of what a man and father can and should be.

You'll be showing your children that *some of the important things in life are bigger than you and your family*. You'll help take the focus off of your family's issues and desires, and make them more sensitive to other people's situations. With that bigger vision, your children will be more likely to get involved in serving others more. And when difficulties do come their way, your children will likely handle them with poise and confidence.

Dad, how have you seen your character—or your mistakes—copied

by your children? And what effect did that have on you? Share your insights with other dads below.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- As we start a new school year, help your child look for opportunities to help people or be part of a program that makes a positive difference. Rachel's Challenge is one good example.
- Are there areas where you need to recommit yourself to integrity? Maybe related to your job or money, or specific relationships? Make it a priority to really address those. (It all makes a difference in your fathering.)
- Take one or more of your children along when you run errands. They'll get plenty of chances to watch you and learn from how you interact in different situations.
- Here are five virtues to focus on, where your modeling has extraordinary power: honesty, respect for others, humility, self-control, and being willing to admit you're wrong.
- What are you modeling at your child's sports events and other performances? Is winning or doing well more important than affirming high character?

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers who to make the Championship Fathering Commitment.

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