

With Your Daughters, Think Backward, Dads

If you've ever played sports (which I assume includes all of you in one way or another), you know that every single time you step onto the field or court, you always know where the goal is. Always.

The goal has everything to do with the direction you run, the points you make (or miss), and whether you win or lose.

The energy you expend is always oriented toward the goal because that's where the points are. That's what counts.

Without a clear goal, you can't play the game. Without a clear goal, you can't win the game.

With your daughter, it's the same way.

As you think about "the game you're playing" (I'm using game as a metaphor to capture the essence of the interpersonal dynamic between the two of you, not as something fake in your relationship), are you clear about the goal you have in your relationship with her?

I can't think of too many dads I've met who are clear about the goal or outcome they are shooting for with their daughter. Maybe a general idea, but not a specific goal.

And for a goal to work, it has to be clear, specific, measurable and achievable.

Dad, I ask you this: Have you taken the time to honestly and directly state for yourself your goals as a father with your daughter?

Using the sports analogy above, it may help to think of it like this: If your end goal is to launch your daughter at the

age of 18 as a healthy, confident, authentic, clear-minded and vibrant young woman who is ready to take on the world, what are you currently doing to help her get there? Or let's break it down further, what is your "halftime assessment plan" if she is 9 years old and you're about halfway there?

I'm going to add one more layer to this concept of goal setting with your daughter. I call it thinking backward.

This time I recommend that you think about not just the here and now, but also about the future. It can be a new way of looking at the present by imagining the end of your life and thinking backward from then to now. I'm not trying to be morbid. Just stating a reality that we all have to face.

We all leave a legacy. One way or another, we leave an imprint.

So I invite you to ask yourself a tough question, one that will allow you to be brutally honest with yourself while sitting in the reality that you are leaving a legacy for good or bad, whether you want to or not.

For real, what do you want your legacy to look like?

You will literally change the course of history through your active engagement with your daughter at the heart level. She will carry you with her after you leave this earth. Your legacy will live on through her in proportion to your heart investment in her.

Though you won't be around forever physically, you will be around forever in the deposit you leave in your daughter's life. A theory in the field of psychology claims that some adults have an internalized parent who lives on inside them. Long after that parent is gone, the adult child may still seek to please the parent who is no longer around to see the performance. So again I ask you: What are you doing now to make sure your daughter hears your encouraging, supportive,

loving, grace-filled, validating, inspiring and motivating voice in her head forever?

Carefully consider the following statement, and then finish the sentence in your own words by writing it down.

“At the end of my life, if my daughter had only one thing to say about me, I want it to be:”

Looking at the response you just wrote, is it a *head response* or a *heart response*? I know you wrote a heart response. How do I know that? Because every dad I’ve ever invited to finish this sentence has written a heart response.

Here are some of the things I’ve heard dads say they hope their daughters would say about them at the end of their lives:

- *“There isn’t anything he wouldn’t do or give for me, even at a cost to himself.”*
- *“I never doubted his love for me.”*
- *“I knew he adored me.”*
- *“He loved the Lord with all his heart and soul, and he loved me in the same way.”*

Dad, if I could take one more minute of your time I want to encourage you to take what you wrote in the box above and break it down into three action steps. (Remember that action heroes have to take action in order to be a hero.)

For example, if you wrote that you want your daughter to know you love her, write HOW your love will look. Be specific. You might write something like this:

1. I will drive her to school every Friday while stopping at Starbucks on the way so we have a tradition that is ours and ours alone.
2. I will take her on a dad-daughter date once a month as a way to let her know by my actions that she is worth my time,

money and energy.

3. I will write her a letter every year on her birthday to tell her the exact ways I've seen her grow in that year while making sure she hears why she is special to me.

Do you see how the concept of love grew legs by the action plan that accompanied it?

I trust that this exercise of thinking backwards will be one that now guides your action steps in the present. I'm cheering you on from here. Go Dad!

Dr. Michelle Watson has a clinical counseling practice in Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a 9-month group forum that is designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to dial in with more intention and consistency, and has recently released her first book entitled, *Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart*. She invites you to visit for more information and to sign up for her weekly Dad-Daughter Friday blogs, where she provides practical tools so that every dad in America can become the action hero they want to be and their daughters need them to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.

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