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What Do Leaders Look Like? *Becoming a mentor*

Teach without Teaching

Very few people develop their expertise to a point that they become a household name. However, Bruce Lee did this. Not only was he recognized for his martial arts movies, but he also is one of the most respected fighters that has ever lived. He was voted as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century by *Time* magazine.ⁱ

Bruce Lee's fighting style was unique at the time because he believed you should never go against nature and the natural motion of things. His famous words were "Be like water." Water always follows nature; it shapes to whatever it encounters. Usually, if someone threw a punch at you, your natural reaction would be to try to block it—to resist. Bruce Lee realized instead of resisting the force, it's better to allow the punch to take its **course**. Without the resistance, the attacker will **lose** balance and fall over. In other words, your opponent's force will destroy themselves. Instead of trying to resist people, you must adjust yourself to move with them. In *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee identifies this as how he "hits without hitting."

To go against people or resist nature requires more work and effort. In many cases, it also causes more pain. If you have ever tried to force or get a child to do something they didn't want to do, you already understand what I mean. Unfortunately, the majority of teaching practices are focused on resistance or going against people, instead of moving with them. Bruce Lee found a truth that all leaders must find: You cannot lead by resisting who people are; you must learn to accept and utilize people's natural talents to improve.

This chapter will explain how we can adjust how we teach and parent, so we can "teach without teaching." Develop without developing. This is the future model of raising children. Believe it or not, children no longer need people that "teach" them; with the worldwide internet, they have access to this in the palm of their hands. However, what a smartphone can never give them is love, true support, and specialized attention.

Teachers and Parents Must Take a Smaller Role

When looking at a teacher-student or parent-child relationship, traditional leadership models are based on influence. They identify that the teacher/parent should do most of the talking because their job is to teach. Based on this model, the more involved they are, the better the student/child will be taught.

In this chapter, I would like to introduce you to a non-traditional leadership model, which is not as popular or widely used, called No-Influence Mentoring. No-Influence Mentoring identifies the opposite: the less a teacher/parent does, the better the student/child will be taught. In fact, the teacher and parent must become “invisible” to provide the best education and development for the child.

Having been a professor I know the difficulty many people have with this model. At the university, the current model puts a professor at the top—even, in some cases, next to God! This model requires the students to adjust, go out of their way for, and praise the professor. The one person you should always “see” is the professor. You can imagine how much the other professors liked being told that they should be serving the students instead of the students serving them. This chapter will explore the logic of both the current and the future No-Influence Mentoring leadership models in greater detail.

Traditional leadership paradigm

The traditional leadership model believes that since children are young, inexperienced, and ignorant, they must be taught what to do. If left on their own, they will do the “wrong” thing—or in other words, they won’t develop properly. This is not to mean they will do something “bad”; it only means they won’t do what’s best or most efficient.

With this paradigm, you must make some assumptions:

1. Teachers/parents know “all” important information (or everything that’s best for the child).
2. The student/child will listen to the parent.
3. The student/child will be able to understand the parent.

At first, this seems like a logical paradigm. Teachers/Parents have more information and they should be able to explain to students/children. However, many people cannot see the long-term impact of this kind of model.

The impact is actually very simple. The more adults talk, the less often children do things on their own. The less the children do, the less capable they are. The less capable they are, the more mistakes they will make. The more mistakes they make, the more insecure the child will be.

This is why when the child grows up, they will need to be told what to do—it makes them feel more secure since that is how they were raised—they then are not capable of doing things on their own, making them a reactive person or a follower.

Let’s put this model in a different perspective. Figure 3.1 shows a child and the course they would take if no one tried to “teach” them or change them.



Figure 3.1: A child's natural path

When an adult comes in to “teach” the child, then you now have a different path for the child (see Figure 3.2).

There is a gap between the path the parent/teacher gives the child and the path the child will naturally go down. This gap is what the business professionals call “risk,” which is anything that strays away from the plan.

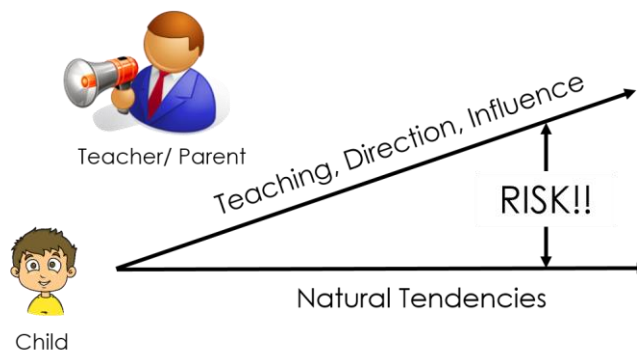


Figure 3.2: Adults trying to change natural tendencies

Anything that differs from a child's natural tendencies will cause the child to:

1. Feel less comfortable since it is not normal to the child.
2. Feel insecure. Since it is not natural, the child will not be the best at it and is more likely to feel inadequate.
3. Fear failure. The child will believe that they are not supposed to make mistakes in life. The new path is the “perfect” path in their life, devised by adults with more experience and understanding. Thus, every time they deviate from that path, they are making a mistake and will no longer have the “perfect” life.
4. Become reactive. Since the child doesn't want to make mistakes and the new path is one they don't understand, they will not do anything unless they are told.

The farther the gap is between the child's natural tendencies, the more “risk” the child will have or the more they will be uncomfortable, feel like a failure, fear making a mistake, and not do anything unless they are told.

The following characteristics go along with a traditional teaching environment:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. More teaching | 10. Worry / Insecurity |
| 2. More noise | 11. Less productive |
| 3. Complexity | 12. More emotional |
| 4. Expectations | 13. Less capable |
| 5. Punishment | 14. More fear |
| 6. Resistance | 15. Reactive |
| 7. Decision making | 16. More resources |
| 8. Risk | 17. More mistakes |
| 9. Stress | 18. Less efficient |

The impact of this model develops characteristics in a child that are not conducive to their success and happiness. Would you hire someone with these characteristics?

No-Influence mentoring

No-Influence mentoring is the opposite of the traditional leadership paradigm. It proposes that the child is perfect just the way they are, they will be okay without being told what to do, and the parent/teacher is only needed to love the child, support them, and be there for them when the child decides they need help.

This paradigm comes with some assumptions as well:

1. The adult does *not* know everything. They could be wrong.
2. The child might not be capable of understanding what the adult knows (i.e. might be best for the child to learn on their own).
3. The role of the adult is to just support and love the child.

Contrary to the traditional leadership model, this one is counterintuitive. However, when you look at the impact it will have on a child, the benefits are undeniable. With this model, the adult permits the child to do more. The more a child does, the more capable they will be. The more capable they are, the fewer mistakes they will make, and the more they will understand. Now that the child doesn't receive as much direction, they will be more secure taking the lead on things in their life.

People don't realize that confidence and capability only come with practice. A child will never feel comfortable with who they are unless they are allowed to practice being themselves. This is the danger of expectations, which attempt to control a child, forcing the child to try to be something different, which doesn't allow them to practice being themselves.

In one of my lessons, I show students a list of famous people who are very unique. In fact, these are the kind of famous people that make you think, "Who would like this person? Why does anyone like them?" Many famous people are what we call "weird," but because they have practiced being themselves for so long, they are so good at their "weirdness" that it is actually enjoyable watching them. They are funny, entertaining, or unique (Janis Joplin, Mitch Hedberg, Andy Kaufman, Ben Stein, Marilyn Manson, etc.).

Amazingly, letting a child take the path they are naturally inclined to take, enables the child to progress and develop leadership characteristics quicker than trying to get the child to take another path. This path teaches the child the following lessons:

1. The less we resist our natural tendencies, the easier life is. Their natural path is the easiest path.
2. Life is enjoyable. The path they naturally are good at will always be the most enjoyable.
3. It is okay to be different. They just need time to practice being themselves. The more they practice being themselves, the more others will see their value.
4. It is okay to make “mistakes” in life. Their natural path will lead them to make mistakes, but they will make them when they are young and the impact on their life will be minimal. In fact, because they are following their path, they will realize that there really are no “mistakes.”
5. It’s good to practice responsibility over one’s own life at a young age because it will teach children how to minimize risk in their lives.
6. Someone who does something that comes naturally to them enjoys it, has no fear, minimizes risk, and produces more than someone who has the opposite characteristics.

When a parent/teacher minimizes their involvement and lets the child be who they naturally are, the impact is amazing. It is how leaders are developed. Many studies have shown this. One blogger cites a few different articles in her post, “*What Do Rich Parents Do That Poor Parents Don’t.*”ⁱⁱ She identified the main thing rich parents do is let their children be who they are. They are less involved. They are less worried about school and more worried that the child has the resources to do what they want. These parents:

1. Are less concerned about online safety
2. Don’t focus on well-roundedness
3. Don’t focus on academics in the summer but do give them more access to resources.
4. Don’t focus on homework.
5. Don’t run their lives around school calendars.

The article identified that “The more money a parent has, the less intense they are” (New York Magazine School Consultant).

ⁱ TIME, *TIME 100 Persons of The Century*, (TIME Magazine, 1999).

ⁱⁱ Trunk, P. (2013). “What Rich Parents Do That Poor Parents Don’t”. [...PT...].

<https://education.penelopetrunk.com/2013/12/02/what-do-rich-parents-do-that-poor-parents-dont/>