

Live- and Communicate- your Values

March 19, 2021

By Peter Germann
Germann Consulting Group

We all need to know what is really important. Years ago, I belonged to a group called *The Masters' Forum* - which hosted leadership-related seminars in the Twin Cities. I remember a speaker who left a distinct impression. He talked about how we need to teach the same values we want for our children inside of our organizations. At times our organizations and families are rudderless because we aren't intentional about what we're trying to teach.

His premise was that if we assume people can just watch and pick up what we believe, there is going to be a lot of misunderstanding. Not only do our actions need to demonstrate what we want people to learn, we actually have to verbalize our values and expectations and let them know.



He illustrated this with a two-part challenge: "Go home and ask your children whether they think that you would like them to be smart, successful or good. And, which one is more important: to be the smartest person in the class or the person who did the right thing?" Most of us, when we're attempting to teach values to our kids, would say we want our kids to be good and to do the right thing. If they are smart and successful, that's great, but we would like them to know that doing the right thing is most important. However, they don't always pick that up, so we all needed to go home and ask.

I went home and walked into the house on one of those perfect days when they were all in the living room and I had their full attention. At the time, I had a fourth-grader, a third-grader, and a kindergartner. I asked them what they thought I wanted from them, to be successful, to be smart or to do the right thing.

My fourth-grader turned to me said I wanted him to be smart and do well in school. I turned to Julia, who was in third grade, and she said that I wanted her to be successful and to do the right thing. The kindergartner, Laurel, was just jumping out of her seat, she couldn't believe that her brother and sister got this one wrong. She said that I wanted them to be good and do the right thing. That's the most important thing.

That experience reminded me that somewhere between kindergarten and fourth grade, this value I had taught about how important it was to do the right thing had somehow gotten lost. I tried to impress that's what I wanted, but I didn't repeat it often enough. As my children got older, I think they were paying attention to where everyone's emotional energy was concentrated. As they progressed in school, we talked more about classroom work on a daily basis than we did about the values that were important in our family.

The lesson for me that day was to not only know what I believe and what I want to teach my kids, in addition to living my life as an example, I need to be able to articulate my values in a way that they understand and **talk on a regular basis about what is most important to me without assuming that they know.**

It's the same thing inside of organizations. If there is something that is really important about how you want employees to live and work, you have to live your life as an example and especially keep repeating those values with words, so the expectations are clear and consistent. Don't assume that just because you act in a particular way most of the time that they pick up on what's important to you.

Exercise:

What do you value?

How does your life reflect what you believe about being a "good person"?

When does what you say reflect your values?