

STOP HOVERING! 10 Rules for Effective Elevator Parenting



Dear Reader,

As a workplace consultant and professional career coach, I work regularly with students and young professionals helping them find a career direction, and more importantly, a motivation for work. I decided to write this book as a result of the overwhelming response I've received from managers, parents, and educators who have listened to my presentations on this greatly misunderstood, underappreciated, and troubled generation's challenges in the workplace. Yes, you read it right: **misunderstood**, **underappreciated**, and **troubled**!

Here's the simple truth: young people today are struggling both personally and professionally, and some of this can be attributed to their well-intentioned but misguided parents – helicopter parents to be exact. Granted, society's expectations of greatness, coupled with consumerism, are two main contributors to the problem, but as individuals, we can't directly control that. Therefore, we must look at what we can control – ourselves. Helicopter parents have unknowingly utilized an approach that has had some negative effects on the development of their children. And, while helicopter parents shouldn't be blamed for wanting to be 'involved' and 'protective' guardians, they must now realize and accept that it's time for a change. As we all know, too much of anything isn't good – including hovering over our kids.

Yet, identifying the problem is only half the battle. We still need to make changes that will improve the situation. In fact, "What should I do differently?" has been the question posed to me by every helicopter parent I have met to date. So, in addition to sharing with you why we need to stop helicopter parenting, I also offer within these pages a new way to parent. I have observed "elevator parents" and their professionally independent offspring. What's the key difference? Elevator parents know when to stop and open the doors so their child can step out on their own. They are happy to guide them to the right floor, but then expect and encourage their sons and daughters to go out and figure out the final destination solo. Thus, in this e-book, I have chosen to outline what elevator parents *do right*.

I hope you enjoy this book and I welcome your comments, questions and feedback. I believe the professional satisfaction and personal well-being of an entire generation is at stake. But, I also believe this situation can be turned around, one helicopter parent at a time.

Warmest Regards,

J.T. O'Donnell

Glossary of Terms

Generation NEXT (a.k.a. Generation Y, Generation Why?, Millenials): Currently between the ages of 9 and 29, this generation totals 70M+ in the US and will be the largest generation to enter the workforce. Their challenge? While more than 70% of them intend to earn a college degree, they are currently known as the least prepared generation to enter the workforce in American history.

THEY: The people in your life who you observed and subsequently learned from. Parents, teachers, extended family, friends, TV personalities, etc., anyone who was significantly older than yourself that commanded respect because they were 'grown up' usually became part of your "THEY." Also known as 'society,' this collective group shaped your thoughts and opinions, likes and dislikes, perceptions and realities. "THEY" were your teachers in life, BUT, what they taught you may not have necessarily been right or good for you personally. Often, we recognize that the "THEY" in our life didn't provide an education that was in alignment with our true definition of success.

College Degree: The equivalent to a high school diploma 30 years ago. Today, a bachelor's degree only makes you eligible to stand at the professional starting line.

Boomerang Kids: Children who leave home for college but return after graduation to live with their parents. The cost-of-living has outpaced starting salaries for college grads to the point that many can't afford to live on their own. Children of helicopter parents are more likely to move home because of the protective, giving nature of the parents and the ability for the young person to live a comfortable life, regardless of their inability to support themselves. (Also known as KIPPERS – Kids In Parents Pockets, Eating Retirement Savings.)

Helicopter Parent: A parent who hovers over their child in all aspects of their life. Paved with well-intentions, the helicopter parent wants their child to feel safe from a world gone mad and proceeds to shelter them from experiences that are actually vital to becoming an independent adult.

Pop-behaviorism: A term coined by author, Alfie Kohn, which explains the over-embrace of the theory of behaviorism in American society. Using the 'do this and you'll get that' approach to encouraging proper behavior, pop-behaviorism represents the act of conditioning a human to need bribes (a.k.a. external motivators) in order to take action. The result is an inability to develop an internal motivation for work.

Elevator Parent: Recognizing the need to protect children from an increasingly dangerous world, but simultaneously seeing the value in having a child learn how to master personal independence, elevator parents direct children to a certain point, but stop and let the child proceed the remainder of the journey on their own, in order to provide an experience from which their child can both learn and grow.

Who is Generation NEXT?

If you are reading this book, then you most likely have been in recent, direct contact with a member of this generation. And, my guess is the experience left you confused, frustrated, concerned, or all of the above. As I travel the country discussing this fascinating group of young people, I am conscious of the terms that I hear most used to describe them. If I had a nickel for every time I've heard a Generation NEXT employer, student or child described as 'lazy' or 'entitled,' I'd be rich! But working with this generation as closely as I have over the last several years, I know that these words are completely off-base, and in fact, represent just how misunderstood they really are.

To see Generation NEXT properly is to understand how they've been misguided. So, let's look at the past so we can understand how the future leaders of America got in such a tough spot.

To start, Generation NEXT was raised in an on-demand, instant-gratification era that has literally thrown the concept of 'patience' out the window. How can anyone learn to wait when the mantra of their world is, "better, faster, cheaper – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." This generation knows a pace of life that no previous generation could handle. They have been experiencing a sensorial assault since infancy, and the effects are a generation that needs constant stimulation to keep their attention.

Of course, we must discuss their helicopter parents. As their primary teachers, responsible for Generation NEXT's formative years, helicopter parents have generously sang the 'your perfect, wonderful, and wanted by everyone' song to their attention-craving offspring from day one. At least, when they had the opportunity to tell their children. Many from Gen NEXT were raised in either one-parent households, or two-parent households where both parents worked. And thus, parents, racked with guilt over not being able to spend enough quality time with their children, compensated with activities, gifts and praise, hoping to make every moment with their children, nothing but happy ones. And if you are thinking, "well that's not me, I was a stay-at-home mom/dad," don't think you are off the hook. Studies show that many of today's helicopter parents are also individuals who took staying home to raise a child pretty seriously – waiting on their children hand and foot, keeping them highly-stimulated and involved in multiple activities. If you lived to be a rock star parent, there's a huge chance you were super-hoverer!

But here's the real problem when it comes to the negatives of helicopter parenting: to make growing up as pleasant as possible, well-intentioned helicopter parents have passionately protected their children from the 3C's – conflict, criticism and causing disappointment. Opting for the 'everyone wins' and 'you are important' schools of thought, these parents strived to be their child's best friend, not their most effective mentor.

Hmm, but that's still doesn't explain why this generation expects so much for doing so little, right? Let's not lose sight that senior managers all over the country today use the term 'entitled' to describe the young people working at their firms. That's where pop-behaviorism

comes into play. Alfie Kohn wrote the book, *Punished by Rewards: The Problem with Gold Stars, A's, Praise and Other Bribes*. In it, he explains how behaviorism, the theory made famous by psychologist B.F. Skinner, has been over-embraced in American society. The concept of, 'do this and you'll get that' suggests that to get a human to follow a desired behavior, you simply need to provide them with an incentive, a.k.a. a bribe. And yes, in the short-term, this theory works brilliantly. But what happens when a young person is conditioned to receive an incentive to do, well...everything, even things that are expected of them. Suddenly, you have a human who requires external motivators to function. Moreover, you have an individual whose life has been devoid of experiences that would enable them to develop internal motivation (i.e. personal drive). The result is a person who consciously focuses on rewards, only to feel more and more unsatisfied inside. If you don't believe me, head down to your local grocery store and observe several moms with children. I guarantee you'll hear at least one say, "Be good in the store and you can have a treat." We are creating a society that feels the need to be rewarded to do what should be a matter of courtesy. How do you blame a young person for acting 'entitled' when he or she has been conditioned to act that way?

So, are you starting to feel some compassion for Generation NEXT? Good, but let's keep going, because there's lots more to consider.

It's time to fast-forward to high school, where almost every Generation NEXT student is planning to go to college. But the big question to ask is, "Why?" Ask a college-bound high school senior why they are going to college today and most likely, you will hear, "Because I'm supposed to." The number one reason a young person goes to college today (usually spending thousands of dollars of their parent's savings in the process) is because society and their parents expect them to. This is very different reasoning than 40+ years ago. Let's look at the differences between attending college now versus then:

College in 1967...	College in 2007...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A privilege: Very few people got accepted or went to college. Most people went to work straight out of high school. Going to college was the exception, not the norm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An expectation: Every parent feels pressure to be able to say their kid is going to college. Every parent still believes a college degree will give their child a leg up in life. In reality, a parent's biggest fear is that other parents might think, "If your child couldn't get into school, you must not be a good parent."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused: You went with a set degree/trade in mind (i.e. doctor, engineer, accountant, etc.). Your aptitude for the field was identified while you were in high school and you were accepted to a particular school based on your 'gift' for a particular type of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended: Parents encourage kids to 'explore their options' but fail to help them identify suitable career paths while they are in high school or even college. Lack of required internships and courses in practical professional skills result in college degrees that saddle students and their parents with post-graduation debt, while failing to prepare them for the workforce.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed Return On Investment (ROI): Long-term employment, pensions, retirement parties...if you went to college, and you were guaranteed a better life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor Rate of Return: The rate of change in business has created an unstable job market and disintegrated the trust between employee and employer. The average college grad will have as many as 9 careers in their lifetime, with an average of 3 jobs in each one. The first decade of their professional lives will see them have as many as 10 jobs in 10 years. And none of this guarantees a better life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Coaching: Mentoring was part of the college-grad package years ago. Back in the days when you were actually able to stay at one job for 20+ years, you were bound to be given career coaching and opportunities to move up the professional ladder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Mentoring: In today's labor market a constant need to job-hop to get ahead leaves no opportunity to develop mentors on-the-job. Career guidance is non-existent. Even if it is offered by a company's management team or HR department, most young people won't opt to have heart-to-heart conversations with their employers because they believe they only have the company's interests in mind. (Remember Enron? Generation NEXT does!)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Quality of Life: A better lifestyle was a foregone conclusion if you attended college. The prestige of having a degree opened doors and offered opportunities that non-degreed people would never see. A college degree was seen as a one-way ticket to a better life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only Keeps You Above Poverty Line: It is what they will do in the workforce over time that determines if they will get ahead. In fact, more than 50% of the individuals who seek secondary or advanced degrees (MS, PhD) will not see a financial return on their investment in the degree. And over 40% of individuals who get secondary degrees end up being over-schooled for their current positions.

As we can see, a college degree today isn't worth what it used to be, but it costs three times more! Yet this is not the pinnacle of the problem, it's what follows after college degree that is hurting Generation NEXT the most.

Want to know what's worse than not being able to say, "My child is going to college." How about having to admit, "My child went to college, I paid for it, and now they don't have any motivation to work and build a career." The number of kids moving back home, bouncing from job to job, and not having any kind of professional path is at an all time high. And, while helicopter parents always welcome their offspring home with loving arms, the anxiety they begin to harbor inside with respect their child's dependency on them increases.

This is when helicopter parenting begins to implode. The parent assumes that with the child under their roof again, they'll just direct them on how to fix the situation. Advice and assistance in finding a good job are dispensed in large doses, BUT, unlike the years before college, the child isn't as willing to do what mommy and daddy suggest. Resentment builds on both sides.

Parents start to see their children as the English do, KIPPERS (Kids In Parents' Pockets Eating Retirement Savings). While the young professional at home secretly becomes resolute not to follow in their parents footsteps. "I don't want to be like my mom or dad, but I if I say so, they'll cut me off from the life I've grown accustomed to" is one of the statements I hear from my young private coaching clients.

Several years after college pass and one of three paths are taken by our young professionals. Either they:

- A) Stay at home, feeling as if they are being held financial hostage and that their parents hold a special power of them, eventually seeking whatever means possible to get out of the house (go back to school, go on a road trip, volunteer, relocate with their current job, etc.). Yet, once they leave, they call regularly for money because they can't afford to be out on their own.
- B) Become overwhelmed and helpless, assuming they've blown their opportunity to be professionally successful and independent, and continue to live at home, becoming more confused and in some cases, clinically depressed.
- C) Resign happily to being taken care of and decide to stay as long as, "mom and dad don't catch on, er, I mean, will have me."

Now, here's what all three paths have in common, they all eventually lead to resentment towards the helicopter parent that raised them. No matter what route a young person goes, at some point, they will be upset with their parent for the hardship they are feeling as an adult. Whether they resent the continued dependency on their parent for money and advice, or when the parent eventually decides to implement a 'tough love' strategy, it is human nature to want to blame others for our tough times, young people are no different. However, whether or not they can work through the difficulty they face and subsequently come out stronger and more independent hinges on two things:

- 1) How the parent handles their interaction with their young adult from this point forward.
- 2) How the young adult perceives and adapts to their new reality.

The first one can be controlled by the parent – they simply need to, as the title of this book says - "stop hovering." The second can not be controlled by the parent. HOWEVER, a parent can assume that consistency in their actions will help the young professional see their situation as one they can take control of successfully. You must believe your child can succeed without you, and act accordingly.

Okay, so we now understand the history of helicopter parenting and the affect it has had on Generation NEXT. So, what can we do about it? In my experience, there is no point going back and discussing point-by-point what has failed helicopter parents in their parenting styles. Instead, I think the answer lies in modeling the behavior of parents who are succeeding in raising independent, happy, and healthy young professionals. I have seen these parents and have given them a name: elevator parents. Similar to helicopter parents, elevator parents like

to protect their children from harm and guide them in the right direction. But the difference lies in the fact that an elevator parent knows when to stop and let their child go on alone. Think of an elevator: it guides you to the appropriate floor, but then you are required to get out and make it yourself to your final destination. Should you get out on the wrong floor, you can always go back to the elevator and use it to get to the right one, but it will never take you to the right doorstep. This is what an Elevator Parent does. They help their children focus and then step back and let them finish the job. They are there for the child if they make a mistake, but still encourage them to go back and do it themselves. Just think of the contrasting visuals between these two types of parents. Would you rather be hovering over your child, forcing them to brace themselves against the powerful burst of air pushing down on them, and lacking any ability to see what's around them? Or, would you like to elevate your child to new heights, letting them out safely to navigate their way, knowing you are there if they need to go back and start over? Elevator parents balance help with empowerment.

Ten Rules to Succeeding as an Elevator Parent

By now, I hope you are ready to put your helicopter parenting days behind you and to start to understand what it takes to be effective at elevator parenting. The remaining chapters of this book highlight the 10 things that elevator parents do well with respect to raising children. It is never too late to learn these techniques and apply them. So, let's take a look at elevator parenting.

Rule 1: It's not "WHAT" do you want to be when you grow up? But rather, "WHO" do you want to be when you grow up?

No other society in the world puts as much emphasis on career as a way to create a personal identity than America. From a very early age, we focus on discussions with our children around the kinds of careers they might want to pursue some day. Children come home proudly from school announcing a new career every other week. "I'm going to be a fireman." Or, "I'm going to be a ballerina." Unfortunately, what many parents don't realize is that their reaction to their child's statement can have a profound impact on the child's perception of the worthiness of a career. Keeping in mind that 93% of communication is non-verbal, even if you are able to respond with a, "that's great honey," the reality is that if you don't truly believe it is great, your child will know it. It's time to get honest with ourselves. As adults, we often assess the level of respect we have for someone by the profession they are in, especially if we don't know much else about them. Yet, is that truly the way we should evaluate a person? Have you ever met someone who is extremely successful in their job, but a complete jerk? I have! Or, have you met someone who is very successful in a prestigious job, but the rest of their life is in turmoil? I have! So, we know that 'what you do' is not as important in life as 'who you are.'

Elevator parents let their children explore all career options. They understand that a career is only one aspect of a person's life. And, while a career does directly affect a person's income, it is not money that should determine what their child should do for work. A passion and sincere interest for a job is what drives someone to be successful. With success on the job, the income

will follow. Besides, when a person likes what they do, the money usually doesn't matter. If it does, they generally find a way to make ends meet so they can continue to do what they love in order to feel satisfied.

For those of you that are saying, "This is crazy, I'm not going to let my child pursue some silly career dream where they won't have any chance to earn a decent paycheck and make a good living." Then I ask you, "How do you know what will make them happy? What evidence do you have that says their definition of a 'decent paycheck' and a 'good living' will be just like yours?" And most importantly, "How do you feel when an opinion is forced on you?" You're hovering my friend, time to land and start thinking AND acting like an elevator parent. Which leads us to Rule #2.

Rule 2: Always remember, you are their "THEY" (see definition in the Glossary of Terms at the front of this book.)

As a positive role-model, we as parents know that a successful life is more important than a successful career. I personally remember when I first understood the concept of "THEY." My daughter was just a couple months old. I had been on maternity leave and was scheduled to go back to work shortly. I had been reflecting a lot on my job, how I was going to juggle it all, and I wasn't very excited. I had realized that the life I had led prior to her birth was one that I wasn't very proud of. While I had a large degree of professional success, I had let my personal life suffer to get there. I suddenly realized that I was my daughter's "THEY." By that, I meant she would be looking at my life from that point forward, taking her cues on how to be a grown-up from me. So here I was, unhappy with the way I had been acting as an adult and about to return to it! The decision to quit wasn't easy, but for me, necessary. And while I never recommend quitting to my career coaching clients, I do recommend giving yourself a 'personal makeover' to ensure you are proud of the image you convey.

Rule 3: Don't say, "You can be ANYTHING you want to be."

It's not that your child isn't capable of setting their mind to a goal and achieving it, but rather, when you open up the floodgates of possibilities with a general statement like that one, you actually overwhelm your child with choices.

Imagine walking into a mega grocery store with 20 aisles of food choices. Picture standing your child in front of the aisles and saying, "Okay, pick a food. Any food. You can't read the labels or taste it in advance. But you need to pick wisely because whatever you choose you'll need to eat daily for at least a few years." That's exactly what you are doing to your child when you suggest they can be anything in America today. There are far too many career options to choose from, and the average college grad has next to no knowledge as to what careers might fit their unique combination of professional strengths and interests. It's no wonder that Gen NEXT is currently jumping jobs as many as ten times (yes, ten times!) in the first ten years of their careers. They are making course corrections as a result of their lack of career knowledge.

Elevator parents take the time to help their young person become self-aware and gain access to resources while still in school that can help them determine career paths they can succeed at AND be satisfied doing. Those young people are able to target a career path and get more out of their college education as a result. They are also more likely to have an easier time determining a career direction and landing a good entry-level job after college because their parents helped them put some focus (a.k.a. professional blinders) on their direction before they entered the workforce. In short, start early (high school) and work with your child to help them explore career possibilities while in school.

Rule 4: Teach Your Children to Cope with the 3Cs: Conflict, Criticism and Causing Disappointment.

Gen NEXT has not only been raised in the instant gratification era, but they've also been told they are perfect, with a conscious effort being made towards ensuring they don't feel failure or disappointment. 'Everyone gets a sticker,' and 'We don't keep score,' are common mantras during their formative years. But this approach has come at a cost. Gen NEXT has limited experience with dealing with what I call the 3Cs: conflict, criticism, and causing disappointment. Given that these 3Cs are common within the workplace, you can imagine how hard it is for them to cope.

Many managers today tell me that Gen NEXT employees often look like a 'deer in headlights' or 'as if they've been shot' when the manager gives the slightest bit of critical feedback. And why wouldn't they? If this is the first time someone has told you bluntly you failed, you'd take it personally too! Elevator parents understand that their children are human. They also remind them of that fact so that their children can embrace their mistakes and cope successfully with the 3Cs. And here's something else to consider: with text messaging and e-mail currently taking over as the younger generation's main way to communicate, we must recognize that the speed of technology comes with a price.

FACT: 93% of effective communication is non-verbal.

So, each time young folks hide behind a cell phone or computer to communicate, they aren't learning to read body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. The result is a group of individuals who lack the skills necessary to communicate face-to-face effectively. And, studies show that Social Disconnection (a feeling of loneliness due to lack of direct interaction) is also rising in the younger generations, causing an increase in depression and of course the use of anti-depressants to cope. Elevator parents know that 'face time' with their children helps them learn to interact with people in a way that can help them gain confidence as well as an appreciation for the value of in-person communication. While learning to use text messaging and e-mail can help a parent initially connect with their child, elevator parents know that more emphasis must be made in human connection in order to give their child the skills necessary to succeed independently.

Rule 5: Don't Bribe – Create Personal Drive.

Thanks to B.F. Skinner's over-embraced theory of Behaviorism, we now have a society that has gone overboard with praise, rewards and incentives. Parenting, education and corporate America have all fallen prey to the 'do this and you'll get that' approach to getting people to do what they want. The problem with this is simple: it's a bribe. Which means, when the bribe is no longer attractive, the process breaks down. As a culture, we have been bribed for decades, with the youngest generations being raised since infancy on bribes. Why have we become so dependant on using bribes? Because we think it saves time. And time is something Americans, especially parents, claims not to have enough of.

The problem is that bribing teaches a young person to focus on external motivators, instead of internal ones. Internal motivation, a.k.a. personal drive, comes from an interest in doing something for the sake of what it will teach us. We feel satisfied in the completion of the action, without any need to be bribed to do it. This concept is virtually non-existent to today's youth. So, when they graduate from college (again after being bribed to go because they were told you have to have a degree to have a successful life) they are shocked to learn that real career satisfaction comes from finding passion in your work, not in the paycheck. There's a reason more than two-thirds of Americans today hate their jobs – they feel held hostage by the money and don't know how to create a career that makes them feel satisfied. Elevator parents understand that intrinsic motivation must drive their child to find satisfaction in life. They don't bribe their children to get good grades or do good deeds. Instead, they coach them on the personal satisfaction derived from these efforts and allow the child to find their own personal drive to do work for its own reward. Elevator parents also don't project their definitions of success onto their children. While they can advise on what they see as important, they leave it to their children to determine on their own what 'success' is and how to achieve it. Again, like an elevator that brings the child to the right floor, elevator parents know when to let their child find their way to the right destination independently.

Rule 6: Play to Strengths & Teach the Value of Them in Others

The focus on improving our weaknesses has been a long-standing tradition in America. Our emphasis on perfection has driven more than a few folks to extreme attempts of self-improvement. Yet little gets discussed with respect to leveraging our strengths. Elevator parents understand that strengths create weaknesses. Therefore, their child's strengths will make them less perfect at other things. What makes an elevator parent effective is that they show their child the benefit of focusing on improving the strengths so that the weaknesses are minimized. If the child is good at a sport and enjoys the sport, the parent allows the child to excel in this area as opposed to forcing them to improve their ability in something they are not good at. But this is only part of the equation.

Where elevator parents really separate themselves is in their ability to teach their child how to value and appreciate strengths in others. They show the child that their own success in a particular area is dependant on others, whose strengths enable them to leverage their own.

Elevator parents teach their children humility and a desire to work with, not against others. They encourage their children to be their best, not the best, and to recognize and respect how their ability to do so is dependant on those involved.

Children raised by elevator parents tend to be better collaborators and know how to motivate and inspire team members to greatness. One example, (forgive me Yankee fans), of this concept is the recent success of the Boston Red Sox. The teammates were keenly aware of the strengths they brought to the team, but were always focused on giving credit to their teammates instead of taking it for themselves. Fostering of this attitude led to a shared sense of commitment and responsibility. Better still, it eliminated blaming and internal competition that sabotages many other teams. You might say the coach of the Red Sox's was an elevator parent to the team!

Rule 7: Define and Promote the Value of Being a “Subject-Matter Expert.”

When I think of the impact helicopter parenting has had on Generation NEXT with respect to developing their skills, the phrase, “jack of all trades, master of none” comes to mind. Many parents encourage, even push their children to be exposed to as many different things as possible during childhood. However, the emphasis on doing ‘many things well’ only serves to diminish the ability to be an expert. Elevator parents limit the amount of activities their children are involved in, having the child choose those pursuits that they feel passionate about and want to pursue more deeply. Elevator parents recognize that in allowing their children to become their best in a few areas, the child learns how to dig deep and take their skills to a higher level. These experiences train their children on how to become an expert on new subjects of interest in the future. (i.e. a new job) Additionally, children of elevator parents learn patience and the need to apply themselves consistently in order to become an expert – two skills that gain respect and open doors to new opportunities in the working world.

Rule 8: Let Them Scrape Their Knees, Without Breaking Their Legs

The term ‘helicopter parent’ stems from the idea that some parents ‘hover’ over their children too much, stepping in and taking care of challenges on their behalf. I can't stress enough that I think helicopter parenting is paved with well intentions. In a world gone crazy, we need to protect our kids from the increased exposure to what can only be called: evil people and things. Yet, as mentioned earlier, overprotecting our children holds them back from making mistakes and feeling failure – the kinds of experiences that provide valuable life lessons. The fundamental equation to personal development is:

$$\text{EXPERIENCE} = \text{LEARN} = \text{GROW}$$

Helicopter parents often scrub out valuable opportunities for this equation to take place in their children's lives, resulting in kids that are highly dependant upon their parents for everything. It's no wonder the average college kid today calls home 9+ times/week. All too often, they struggle to make a move without first consulting their parents. I still recall one

client telling me about an experience he had on a golf course with his boss: The father's, college-age daughter called him on his cell four times in twenty minutes to get advice on what to title her term paper. Who's to blame? I'd say the father who took all four calls! I don't argue that feeling connected to our children is important, but elevator parents know when to push back and have their child do their own work.

The biggest difference between an elevator parent and a helicopter parent here is that the elevator parent recognizes their child must make mistakes to grow. They are not embarrassed or feel like they are not a good parent when their child fails. Instead, they recognize that they are helping their child by allowing them to experience life's pitfalls, and are happy to help them learn from the experience. Let's face it: for many, the real root cause of a helicopter parent's drive to step in for their child is fear of being seen as a failure if their child isn't perfect. Society puts a lot of pressure on parents today – it's no wonder helicopter parenting has become so popular. Yet, if we want our children to become truly independent, satisfied adults, then we must give them the opportunity to develop the tools that will enable them to take care of themselves.

Rule 9: In Growth Opportunities - Ask, Don't Tell

When children make mistakes today, the natural instinct of most helicopter parents is to outline exactly what the child did wrong and explain in detail what they need to do next time to avoid failure. The problem is that this often falls on deaf ears. Eventually, the child becomes tired of hearing the 'blah, blah, blah – you were wrong' mantra of the parent, knowing in that true helicopter parent fashion, the parent will step in and fix things for the child the next time too. Suddenly, the child sees no point in paying attention to what the parent has to say because it most likely doesn't matter.

Elevator parents recognize the secret to facilitating growth opportunities for their children lays in asking questions, not making statements. For example, a child gets in trouble at school. The helicopter parent will immediately dive into an explanation of why the child cannot repeat this behavior and what the punishment will be (a negative form of bribery) if they don't do what they say. Then, depending on how bad the punishment is to the child, they may or may not do as the parent demanded. Elevator parents take a different approach. They calmly inquire as to why the child chose to act that way. They further inquire as to whether or not the child sees value in this behavior. They then go on to ask how the child feels about the consequences of their actions and whether they understand how their behavior will impact how they are perceived by others. In short, they continue to pose questions that helps the child navigate to the conclusion on their own that changing their behavior would be wise. This is the secret to true coaching of performance. Elevator parents understand that the extra time they spend coaching their child to find the right solution on their own, the more likely they are to retain and embrace it. Once again, this goes back to the need for time and patience, something that many helicopter parents feel they don't have enough of. But I would stress, can we afford not to take the time? The inability for many young folks today to make smart choices would argue that bribery has failed and that coaching is sorely needed.

Rule 10: Less is More: Choose Your Words Carefully

The final rule of the elevator parent is to simply hold back from saying too much. Helicopter parents feel a sense of obligation to tell their children everything and to make sure they are fully informed. But elevator parents recognize that the best learning is done on one's own, and that information, especially from a parent, is never taken 100% at its word. Young people want to blaze their own trails, its part of gaining their independence. So, when a parent opts to project endlessly on their children their opinion on everything, it stands to reason that the child will find the word less meaningful.

Elevator parents choose their words carefully. They hold their tongue and allow their children to draw their own conclusions. Elevator parents are known for waiting until their advice is solicited so that it will be appreciated. With the exception of holding a child back from serious harm, helicopter parents need to learn to bite their tongues and look the other way when they see their children going down a path that could lead to a simple mistake or small set back. Once again, the advice will be taken more seriously when the child feels they are in need of it. Which leads to the thing that elevator parents do best: they never say 'I told you so.'

Elevator parents recognize the value in letting their child find their way, remembering that they, too, have made plenty of mistakes along the way. Elevator parents share the closest relationship with their children because it is based on mutual respect and understanding that both parties are only human.

In Summary...

I hope the ten rules of elevator parents have helped you to think about your own approach to working with Generation NEXT. Please feel free to contact us directly with your comments, questions and feedback at www.jtodonnell.com. I wish you well in your journey to becoming an effective elevator parent. And, if you'd like to learn more about my proven career coaching methodology which has helped hundreds of students and young professionals, please check out my book, **CAREEREALISM: The Smart Approach to A Satisfying Career**. The perfect guide/gift for the young professional in your life – the steps in this book make taking control of your career easy and exciting.



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