

Summer Thoughts

By Rebbetzin Faigie Horowitz

It seemed like the usual litany of complaints you would read about in an article about millennials. Their spoken English is faulty. They are missing soft skills. They come to the job only to leave at the first opportunity. They lack a work ethic. It was my friend who was sharing with me her need to fill three positions at the end of the school year. She is a veteran principal who strives for excellence and works with teachers to not only meet the students' needs but aims to grow them in skills and character.

This was not a venting session. The conversation morphed into a discussion about work values among our own children who are now in their thirties and forties.

Chedva expressed appreciation that our own children work hard for their respective employers. "They give them their due," she observed. I tried to confirm the value of this moment for this mom of many. I knew that one of her professional daughters was valued not only by the executive management at her company but also by the team that works under her. I reminded her that this is a rarity.

It's that time of year again when the grandchildren are in camp. The parents vacation if they can, and the grandparents are free to enjoy their leisure. If you are a midlife professional enough to live in the Five Towns, you probably take only one trip all summer. It's the loveliest time of year to enjoy the amenities of our homes and Long Island's many parks and green spaces.

As my peers relax at a slower pace, pick up some prepared food, plan boardwalk activities, and pen cards to send to camping grandchildren, I find a reason to pause. I'm at home this summer recovering from ankle surgery and have ample time to think.

What am I doing to help my grandchildren develop a positive work ethic, I wondered all Shabbos after that Friday afternoon conversation.

"It's not your job," said a Shabbos afternoon visitor who is a few short years behind me. "Our children must raise them in their job," she pointed out.

"But we can influence them, can't we?" I



argued. "Aren't grandparents influencers?"

Rivka is smart and challenged me. "Do your kids have a strong work ethic?" "Yes."

"Mine do too. The grandchildren see their parents working hard. They see my son getting up early to head into the office and daven early in the city to use his time properly. They see him fitting in learning, family responsibilities, calling his own grandmother, and more. We raised our kids to be responsible and to meet their commitments. That was our job. Now our kids are doing their jobs and modeling these healthy adult values. We need to be grandparents, and that job is different."

I didn't argue further. I am well aware of the research of sociologists Samuel P. Oliner and Amitai Etzioni on the altruistic and values influence of close but not immediate family members like grandparents. I thought further. Maybe I could influence my grandchildren's work ethic. I know that one of my grandmothers influenced mine. She was the one who raised her hands and told concerned community members when she was suddenly left a widow with several children in the sixties: I will not go on welfare. These hands can work and will work.

I found a Harvard Business Review study that supported Rivka's argument. It looked closely at how the work habits of

parents affected the work habits of children when they joined the work force. There are basically four categories of adult workers. Those that willingly adopt their parents' model of work-life balance. Those that unintentionally adopt the parental model. Those that consciously and willingly reject their parents' model. And those that unintentionally reject their parents' model.

Rivka was right. Our early upbringing by our parents is so influential in our personal development as achieving adults who work. Our own work ethic is a direct reflection of our parents and our reaction to their work values.

I want my grandchildren to be reliable and dependable. I hope they will take ownership, exercise initiative, and take direction from others so that they learn and improve. Being part of a team and working toward the group's goals I hope will become an overarching value of theirs. Supporting others is so important now and later in their lives. Developing self-mastery will be so critical to their meeting their commitments to others and to themselves. These skills can be learned when they are young, and I want to reinforce them.

So, what can I do as a grandparent? They don't live in my house and assignment of regular chores is not my role. But I can tell them my expectations about cleaning

up after big yom tov meals and keeping the house rules when they come. They join me in doing some of the chores that are part of the running of the household. Asking them to help without the expectation of a reward is an effective way to instill pride and a work ethic.

Doing a good job at schoolwork and learning as a value can also be reinforced through the language we use. After all, schoolwork is a child's first job. We can say: I am proud of the choice you made to study now for your test. The intrinsic value of effort can be bolstered so that they don't view schoolwork as another job to be finished as soon as possible. Commenting positively on the growth of good study habits is what should work, too.

Praise for a job well done is an obvious tool. But what if they didn't set the table properly and some settings are missing the cutlery? What if the job we asked them to do is half done? This is a situation I frequently find myself in. It takes careful thinking and communication to frame a response that doesn't point to what they forgot. Saying, "Let's look this over before we go forward" might work. "You work on this; what can be done to improve it" is another useful comment.

Involving our grandchildren in our volunteering can also demonstrate the value of another form of work. Just because it is chesed doesn't mean we don't give it our best effort. Even if we cannot take the lead along to the board meeting, telling them why we are leaving an event early for a meeting and explaining what the large purpose of the organization tells them about commitment, values, and the effect that leads to accomplishment.

Teaching by example is, of course, one of the best means to instill a healthy work ethic.

I'm open to suggestions on how to improve my game. Got ideas for this grandma? ✍

JWOW! is a community for midlife Jewish women which can be accessed at www.jewishwomanofwisdom.org for conversation, articles, Zoom events, and more.