

Life Lessons

Proactive techniques to grow ethics, values, and motivation in children and young adults



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Dedication

This is dedicated to Dune, my best friend, business partner and wife, who puts up with me and my many faults. I love you with all of my heart. Thank you for sharing your life with me. I would be nothing without you.

This is also dedicated to Sarah, Kendall, Kate and two additional grandchildren (names removed at their parent's request) who have been, and continue to be, my primary subjects for the techniques presented in this document. Sarah is our "adopted niece" (actually a daughter of close friends). The rest are our grandchildren. (Kids, I love you all and wish you the best of everything . . .)



221 North LaSalle ▪ Chicago, Illinois 60601 ▪ (312) 857-2200 ▪ Fax: (312) 857-7806
www.LfeLessonNetwork.org ▪ Comments@LifeLessonNetwork.org

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Foreword

My background

Allow me to begin by saying I am neither a psychologist nor a teacher. My professional background is in business. A little over twenty years ago I founded a software/consulting firm. We traditionally hire new college graduates as we grow our consulting staff. This has given me several years experience in leading young, impressionable employees to high ethics and morals. To answer this challenge, we developed techniques that define and reinforce specific qualities that are expected. We also require each person to encourage others to high ethics and values.

My connection with children

So how does this apply to children? All of my life I have had a special affinity for children. Children seem to gravitate to me, and vice versa. I have a strong "child" within me and seem to be able to relate to children at several levels.

While most of my time with children has been spent in the pursuit of fun and excitement, over the years I have attempted to use my special bond with children to help guide them through some of the issues of life - hence "Life Lessons".

Life Lessons evolved as a natural combination of applying my work with our young employees to my relationship with children. (If I can create a process that leads college graduates to high ethics and values, why can't I do the same for younger children?) I have been using the Life Lesson techniques with children now for over nine years and feel I have achieved a level of success.

Premier International Foundation, NFP and Life Lesson Network

Seeing some success with the Life Lesson process led me to found Premier International Foundation, NFP, a non-profit organization dedicated to communicating the value of Life Lessons. Premier International Foundation has created a free web site www.LifeLessonNetwork.org, offering over 200 example Life Lessons and a code of ethics for children, all of which may be downloaded for free.

Perfection is not required to teach ethics and values

Please do not take this document or the Life Lesson process as my claim to perfection. I have many faults and I am anything but perfect. Fortunately, perfection is not a prerequisite to teach ethics and values. If perfection was required, no one would qualify.

The reality is that we are all human - me, you, and the children that we motivate. We all do things that we would do differently, if we were given a second chance.

But aren't we all better off if we set high goals and then do our best to live up to them? We are all destined to occasionally falter, but aren't we better served by at least setting high goals?

That is the objective of Life Lessons.

The ethics prayer

I recently saw a prayer that articulates the "human" side of the issue. I found it in a booklet called "*Ethics 4 Everyone*" by Eric Harvey and Scott Airitam - a great source of advice on growing business ethics.

The Ethics Prayer

So far today, God, I've done ok. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or overindulgent. But in a few minutes I'm going to get out of bed and I'm probably going to need a lot more help.

Author unknown

My hope

I truly hope that the Life Lesson techniques presented here do some good for someone, somewhere. If one child improves one element of their behavior as a result of Life Lessons, then the process has been successful. If each of us presents Life Lessons to just one child, together we might make a big difference.

Any profits from this or any related works will be donated to charity.

Jim Hempleman - 2006

1 - Lessons Learned from Two Year Old Children

We are not born with ethics

I believe that we are not born with ethics and values, but rather ethics and values must be learned (and thus they must be taught).

As proof, consider the example of two children, both two years old, playing together. They are playing with a toy that is owned by one of them. It would not be surprising that the second child grabs the toy and says "mine". If it were left to the child, they would take the toy home to keep.

I submit that ethics and values are not innate in humans. In fact, I believe just the opposite is true. I believe that we need to be taught ethics and values starting at a very young age.

Being a good role model is not enough

Being a good role model is an essential element for teaching ethics and values. But I believe being a role model is not nearly enough alone. Again, consider the example of the two children. The parents of the child taking the toy may be ethical and honest in everything they do, but that alone will have no impact on a two-year old. The child must be taught ethics and values. I suggest that this is true throughout the child's formative years, not just at age two.

Correcting learned behavior can be difficult

Many parents wait until they see their child exhibit undesirable behavior before they begin the process of trying to correct the behavior. Unfortunately, this assumes that the parent will be present when the undesirable behavior first occurs - which is not always possible - and it becomes less likely as the child gets older. This gives the child the opportunity to practice the undesirable behavior multiple times before it is finally seen and addressed. Changing learned behavior can be challenging, especially as the child reaches the teen years.

My objective

So how might we do a better job of proactively teaching ethics and values to children? That is the purpose of this work. And while we are taking the time to discuss ethics and values with children, it seems natural to also motivate and inspire – thus you will also see these topics addressed.

2 - Lessons Learned from My Parents

My parent's biggest challenge . . . me

I was fortunate to have parents that did their best to steer me to solid ethics and values. Now don't get me wrong. By most accounts I was a major headache for my parents and put them through many parenting challenges.

But my parents did instill in me a strong sense of responsibility and honesty. My failings were my fault, not theirs. Throughout my life they did their best to steer me in the right direction. When I strayed, they did their best to immediately push me back on the path. When I resisted, they insisted.

Don't expect to be paid for cutting off your leg

A particularly defining moment occurred when I was sixteen. I had just started my first real job – working at a hardware store. It was my second day on the job. The hardware store owner asked me if I knew how to operate a power saw. He asked me to cut a large piece of wood in half for a customer. Now keep in mind I was sixteen, an arrogant teenager, invincible . . . or so I thought. I went to the rear of the store, picked up the first Skillsaw I had ever seen, and proceeded to almost cut my right leg off just above the knee.

I spent the next several weeks in a wheelchair and on crutches. In the end, the doctors worked a miracle. I healed completely and I have no problems with the leg today whatsoever.

So where is the lesson? A week or two after the incident, I received a letter saying I was eligible for worker's compensation with a check enclosed from the hardware store. I thought, "Wow, this is great". I would be able to receive a part of my wages from the job even though I was not working.

My father had other ideas. He told me I had absolutely no right to the money. He said it was my arrogance that caused the problem and I had no right to keep the money. He made me send the check back with a letter saying I did not have a right to the money.

This was one of many important lessons taught to me by my parents. I believe they did a great job – or at least they did the best they could with the material that they had (i.e., me).

3 - Lessons Learned from Being a Parent

My grade as a parent on my first try . . . C+

I have two children from a prior marriage (Holly and Jim Jr.). I rate myself a C+ as a parent.

I was a very young parent (only twenty years older than my oldest child). As a divorced father, I only saw the children every other weekend. It was probably these two factors that caused me to gravitate to more of the role of friend, rather than becoming a strong parent figure.

The thoughts presented here were conceived long after both of my children were grown. They both found their way to strong ethics and values without any help from the Life Lesson process presented here. Both have great marriages, both have built successful careers, both are very active in their church and community, both have two wonderful children, and both are great parents. I am very, very proud of both of them and their families.

My second chance

I have always said that if I can do something once, I can do it better the next time. My wife Dune and I do not have children of our own, but we have the next best thing. What began in 1989 as a babysitter role for an infant has evolved over the years into a very special relationship. Close friends of ours, Dan and Nanette, have a daughter, Sarah. At this writing Sarah is seventeen. Our involvement started when Sarah was six weeks old. My wife, Dune, became Sarah's baby sitter. Almost immediately Dune and I fell into a role of Sarah's "second set of parents".

We have participated in almost all of the key events in Sarah's life. We take her on multiple vacations each year. She includes us in her personal life. It is a very unusual and very fulfilling relationship.

Sarah's parents are very special people. They are so secure in Sarah's love for them; they can encourage her to love us. From the beginning Sarah has given us Father's Day and Mother's Day cards and presents. This began when Sarah was an infant (which was of course sponsored by her parents) and continues today (which is Sarah's work herself). We are very blessed to have the relationship with both Sarah and her parents.

Sarah was my opportunity to do a better job of being a parent. So I set out to be the best influence I could be.

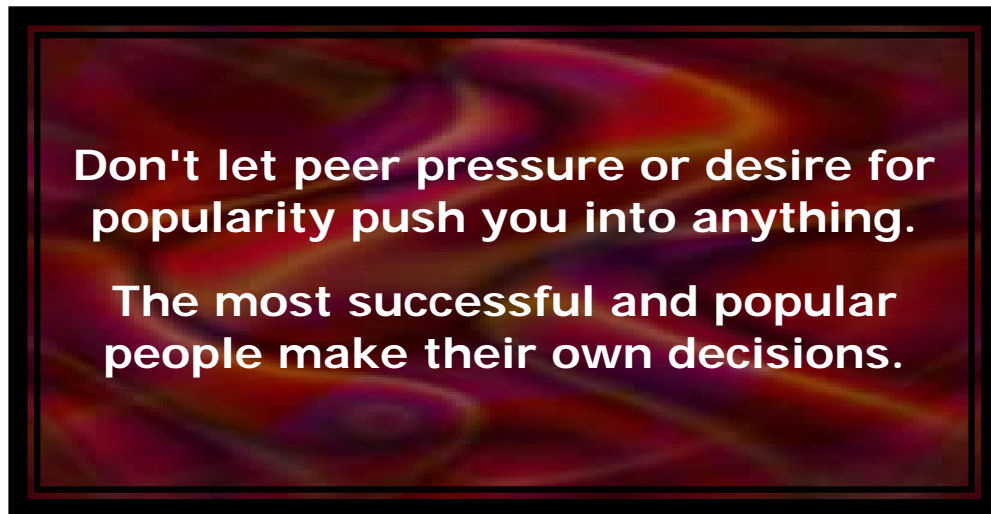
4 - "Life Lessons"

My second try at parenting

As Sarah grew, I looked for ways that I might be a positive influence on her life. This eventually led to a process of periodically offering specific advice.

As I mentioned previously, we take Sarah with us on vacations, usually more than one each year. When we go on vacation together, Dune and I make cards offering specific advice. Sarah calls them "Life Lessons". Each Life Lesson card contains a different message – advice we consider valuable to her at the time. Some involve ethics and values, some are focused on motivation, and some are designed to help her through a specific situation.

Most of the Life Lessons that we have used were created by us. Some are quotes that we found that are thought provoking. In each case the messages are delivered considering specific issues in her life at that moment. Each is written with her best interest in mind. An example is shown below (although most of the Life Lessons we presented to Sarah were not nearly as colorful as those included here).



Example Life Lesson "Card"

Sarah traditionally has a role in selecting the Life Lesson cards for each day we are on vacation. We hold the cards out face down, and she draws the cards for the day.

A forum for discussion

The most important step is to use the process to provoke thought and discussion. We talk about the advice provided on the card. We ask Sarah what she thinks it means and why it is important in her life. We ask her if she has ever experienced the issue and how she dealt with the situation. We ask her if she thinks it is an area in which she can improve. We ask her if she knows others who have faced the issue. We discuss our thoughts regarding the lesson and we explain how making the right choice can positively affect her life.

One or two Life Lessons each day

We started with one Life Lesson each vacation day when Sarah was young. After a few years we increased to two per day on most vacations. On occasion we have tried three or four. I think too many messages may confuse and not get through.

Only 10 to 15 minutes

The process is not a major time commitment. We usually spend about 10 to 15 minutes each day while we are on vacation. We have been doing this for Sarah for nine years (age 7 to 16) and we believe it has been very successful.

Grandchildren too

Ten years ago our first grandchild was born – more opportunity for us! As each child has grown, we have used the same technique to encourage ethics and values. We feel this has also been very successful, and there are many years and many lessons to come . . .

Why vacation?

Vacation has been the ideal time for us to deliver the Life Lessons to Sarah and our grandchildren. It is our best opportunity for extended quality time.

We suggest that vacation may also be a desirable time for other families to present Life Lessons. Both the adult and the child are removed from their day-to-day routine. The family typically spends more time together on vacation so it is usually easier to schedule the time. And there is less likelihood of an interruption.

In addition, there is value in associating Life Lessons with vacation - a positive, fun time. Life Lessons can become a part of the vacation experience: you go on vacation - you get Life Lessons.

Further, vacations are a limited duration. If the child is uncomfortable with the process, they can see the end - next week when the vacation is over.

Beyond vacation

There are many other times that Life Lessons can be presented. For example, how about every Sunday throughout the summer? Or the first Sunday of each month throughout the year? There are many alternatives . . .

Many other ways to communicate Life Lessons

Life Lesson "cards" are not the only way that the advice can be provided. For example, we have also used a calendar showing all of the days we will be on vacation with a different Life Lesson on the calendar for each day (although Sarah says she didn't like this method as much since she was able to see all of the lessons on the first day of the vacation).

There are undoubtedly many other ways the Life Lessons could be communicated. For example, the message could be written on a white board somewhere in your home. Or it might be given to the child in a box as a wrapped gift? Again, there are many alternatives . . .

5 – Example Life Lessons

Example Life Lessons

The pages that follow provide many examples of the Life Lessons we have presented to Sarah and our grandchildren over the past nine years. In addition to those that we have presented, we have also added many additional lessons that might be useful.

Examples may be printed from our web site

Our web site www.LifeLessonNetwork.org includes the ability to download example Life Lessons for free. The examples may be downloaded in both PDF and Word format and are suitable for immediate printing. If you choose to download the lessons in Word format, you can easily make changes and create new lessons.

Repeating messages helps communicate Repeating messages helps communicate

In the examples below you will see that some messages are repeated from one age group to another. We have done this because some advice is so fundamental it cannot be said enough times. It is also because the messages have been delivered to multiple children, and each child needs different advice at different ages. In addition, it may be desirable to repeat certain lessons to reinforce specific areas where the child may not be quick to change their behavior.

The topic of sex has been intentionally omitted

We have intentionally omitted the topic of sex from these examples. While we feel that it is imperative that sex is discussed early and often with all children, it is a very sensitive and controversial topic and we have decided not to include the issues in this document and on the web site. We encourage you to openly approach the topic at an early age.

Religious Life Lessons? You decide . . .

I personally believe in God and therefore I have included a few lessons involving religion in the examples that follow. If you do not share that belief, please ignore those lessons. Please do not reject the entire process just because a few of the examples do not correspond with your beliefs.

These are just examples – Tailor each Life Lesson to the child's current growth needs

The examples below are just that – examples. It is important that each message is tailored to the child's situation and growth needs at the current time. There is nothing here that is absolute - just a process you might find valuable . . .

The example Life Lessons

Kindergarten & before

- Never tell a lie.
- Never take anything that doesn't belong to you.
- When someone does something for you, always say "thank you".
- Help other people whenever you can.
- Never say bad things about people.
- Keep your room neat and clean.
- If you make a mess, clean it up.
- Use words to say what you want. Never whine!
- If you are mad, say "I'm mad because _____". Never say you "hate" something and never hit or hurt anyone or anything.
- Always obey your parents and teachers.
- Remember to always share. Share your toys, games, snacks . . . everything.
- When you ask for something, always say "please".
- Never take more than your share.
- Always take turns. Never cut in line or take someone else's turn.
- It is important to be kind to sisters and brothers.
- Always know we are very proud of you and we love you very much.
- Remember to say your prayers every day.

Ages 6 & 7

- Be honest in everything you do. Never lie, cheat or steal.
- Always respect others, even if you disagree with them.
- Help others whenever you can. If you see someone who needs assistance, offer to help.
- Respect authority. Obey your parents, teachers and those who set rules.
- Don't be afraid to try new things. They may be fun and exciting.
- Never hit or hurt anyone or anything.

- Never say you "hate" anything.
- When someone does something for you, no matter how small it is, always thank them.
- If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.
- If you disagree with someone, say "but I feel _____", or "but I want _____". Never yell or be rude.
- Never litter. Always put trash in the proper place.
- When you ask for something, always say "please".
- If you lose a game, congratulate the winner. Never be a bad sport.
- Follow the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- When you visit a new place, be sure to leave it a better place because you were there.
- Always do your best at everything you do. Anything worth doing is worth your best effort.
- Always know your family loves you. We all are very proud of you and we all love you very much.
- Thank God for your many blessings. Ask Him to guide you. He is always there to help.

Ages 8 & 9

- Be honest in everything you do. Never lie, cheat, steal, or take advantage of others.
- Always do your best at everything you do. Anything you do deserves your best effort.
- The world is full of surprises. Don't be afraid to try new things.
- Always respect your mother and father, even if you disagree.
- Approach every situation with the attitude "How can I help?"
- Have the courage to do the right thing, even if others encourage you to do something wrong.
- Have confidence in yourself. Always know you are capable of accomplishing anything.
- If you get angry, wait at least a minute before you react.
- If someone is bullying you, ignore them. No one can make you feel bad unless you let them. If they continue, tell them to back off. If they still continue, tell an adult.
- Learn to jump over the minor problems of life without getting frustrated or angry.

- Never say you "hate" anything. If you don't like something, say "I don't care for _____" or "I would prefer _____" or "I would like it better if _____".
- Gossip is saying something about someone that you wouldn't say if they were listening. Never gossip. (Would you want someone to gossip about you?)
- When someone does something for you, thank them. Do you thank your mom & dad for cooking dinner, driving you to soccer, taking you to school, taking you on vacation?
- Always be reliable and dependable. Honor your commitments.
- It's great to be able to do things well, but never show off.
- Learn to listen to your conscience. It's the silent voice that tells you what is right and what is wrong.
- Don't say things that hurt people's feelings.
- Always know that we are very proud of you and we love you unconditionally. No matter what, and above all, you are loved.
- God is watching over you every moment of every day. Ask Him to guide you. Thank Him for your many blessings.

Ages 10 & 11

- Never tell a lie. Be honest in everything you do.
- Never mislead anyone. Always be honest and forthright.
- If you find something that someone has lost, do your very best to find the owner. If you lost something would you want your property returned?
- Cliques are groups of people who feel they are better than others and who don't socialize with people outside the clique. Avoid cliques.
- Do your best at everything you do. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well.
- See the potential good in everything. Keep a positive outlook.
- Don't brag. Let your accomplishments stand for themselves.
- Find friends that share your values.
- Things in life are privileges. No one owes you anything.
- Be confident in yourself. You are wonderful and unique. Never let other people's opinion of you change your feelings about yourself.
- A common mistake in life is to continually fear you will make a mistake. Don't be afraid to try new things.

- Respect your mother and father, even if you disagree and you feel you are right.
- The world is full of surprises. Don't be afraid to experience new things.
- Make your own decisions. Don't give in to peer pressure.
- You can be anything you want to be. Dream big!
- "Keep true. Never be ashamed of doing right. Decide on what you think is right and stick to it." - *George Eliot*
- Learn from your mistakes. Use each mistake as a way to avoid mistakes in the future.
- Gossip is saying something about someone that you wouldn't say if they were listening. Never gossip. Would you want someone to gossip about you?
- Exercise good judgment. And take responsibility for your choices.
- Be confident in our love for you. No matter what happens throughout your life, always know we love you and are very proud of you.
- Live every moment of your life as if God is watching. P.S. He is!

Ages 12 & 13

- Never think its ok to lie. Not even if a friend asks you to lie to keep them out of trouble. Not even to get yourself out of trouble. Never lie!
- It is never ok to steal. Not even if you need it. Not even if the person has more than you. Not even if it is from a big profitable company. Not even if it won't be missed. Never steal!
- Successful people aren't people without problems. They are people who have learned to solve their problems.
- Have confidence in yourself. Never allow others to make you believe you are inferior in any way.
- "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." *Einstein*
- Just say "no" to drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.
- The harder you work, the luckier you get.
- "Show me who you hang out with and I'll tell you who you are" - Spanish proverb
- Praise loudly. Blame softly.
- Life won't always go exactly as you want. Learn to forgive others for letting you down. Minimize disappointments by quickly moving on to the next phase of your life.

- Never judge others. Would you want them to judge you?
- "Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anyone expects of you. Never excuse yourself." *Henry Ward Beecher*
- Lead wisely and others will follow.
- "To know what is right and not do it is the worst cowardice." - *Confucius*
- Never allow a person's race or religion affect your relationship with the person or your opinion of them.
- Never believe that because someone has more than you have, they owe you something.
- Never get angry at someone when they offer help or advice and you don't think you need the help or advice.
- When you borrow something from someone, make sure it is returned promptly and in good condition.
- Have the courage to think for yourself. Don't ever feel you are required to follow other's lead.
- Never believe others are inferior because they don't know something that you know or they don't have something you have.
- Don't procrastinate. Never leave projects for the last minute.
- "Learn to accept minor aggravations in silence." *Sir William Osler*
- The greatest remedy for anger is delay.
- Pain is inevitable. Misery is optional.
- "Nothing would be done at all if we waited until we could do it so well no one could find fault in it." *Cardinal Newman*
- Always count on our love for you. We love you no matter what happens in your life. You are loved unconditionally.
- Always know that God loves you. Always know you can ask Him to guide you. Thank Him for your many blessings.

Ages 14 & 15

- Never lie. Even a "white lie" compromises your integrity.
- Never mislead, manipulate or take advantage of anyone.
- Never ridicule or intentionally hurt others.

- Don't procrastinate! Set a date before a project is due. Commit to getting the project done by your due date. Then use the extra time to refine and improve the project. You will be more successful, less apprehensive, and get better results.
- Take responsibility for your education. Go to school every day even if you can get away with skipping. Commit to doing your best in high school and getting into the college that is best for you.
- Don't let desire for popularity or peer pressure push you into anything. The most successful and popular people make their own decisions.
- Smoking is addictive. Once you start you are the victim of the cigarette companies. They add ingredients that make it very difficult to stop. And it kills. Don't smoke!
- Have confidence in everything you do. Believe you can do anything. You can!
- "Modesty is a virtue. Bashfulness is a vice." *Benjamin Franklin*
- "In the long run we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The choices we make are our responsibility." *Eleanor Roosevelt*
- Alcohol causes people to have bad judgment but makes them think they can't do wrong. Alcohol frequently results in situations where a person makes bad choices or someone can take advantage of them. Don't drink!
- Say "thank you" sincerely and often to the many people who do so much for you. Verbalize your appreciation for those who care for you. Never take your blessings for granted.
- "While life occasionally makes it appear otherwise, no one has control over your life . . . but you. Make decisions with care, because in the end, you have only yourself to blame for the outcome." *Mercedes Browning*
- Don't be naïve. Be careful not to let people take advantage of you.
- Just say "No" to drugs. Even one time can hurt you, make you addicted, or even kill you.
- Be responsible to your employers. When you commit to a job, make sure you follow it through. Always try to exceed your employer's expectations.
- If you do something better than others, be humble. Never believe it makes you better than others.
- Things you say about someone else are more a reflection of you than the person you are talking about.
- "Be bold about your actions. All life is an experiment." - *Author unknown*
- "If you don't stand up for something, you will fall for anything." - *Author unknown*
- Congratulations on a great year in school! Now, commit yourself to even better grades next year. Learn from your mistakes. What would you do different if you had the chance? Be committed to improving.
- Never judge others. Accept people for who they are.

- More is not always better.
- Treat problems as opportunities. Look at problems as the next challenge in your life.
- Approach every situation with the "How can I help" attitude. Look for ways to help others.
- Know that we love you unconditionally. No matter what happens in your life we love you.
- Get comfortable with a dialog with God. Pray regularly. Ask God to guide and protect you. Thank God for your many blessings.

Ages 16 & 17

- It is never ok to lie, cheat, or steal. Never.
- Never take advantage of others.
- If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't true.
- "Under promise. Over deliver." *Rudi Giuliani*
- "If there is no wind, row." *Latin Proverb*
- Seek leadership opportunities. Lead with confidence. And always lead in the "right" direction. Take responsibility for your leadership.
- Don't procrastinate.
- Be a good citizen. Find ways to serve your community.
- "It is not who is right, but what is right, that is of importance." - *Tomas Huxley*
- Develop the instinct to immediately know if someone you meet will be a good or bad influence on you. Trust your instinct. Then do your best to avoid those who are negative and pursue relationships with those who are positive.
- Have the courage to stand up for what you believe is right. Never let other's morals or ethics alter yours.
- It's great to be beautiful. But never let beauty be the objective of your life. Use your beauty to help you reach your real objectives.
- "Every noble work is at first impossible." *Thomas Carlyle*
- Assume that every photograph and every video of you will end up on the internet. Never allow yourself to be compromised.
- Never allow yourself to believe you are better than others. Be confident in yourself, but always respect the differences that make each of us unique.

- If you see a friend making poor decisions, have the courage to offer advice. Explain it is in their best interest.
- Never get into a car if the driver has had even the smallest amount of alcohol. Have the courage to say "no".
- When life gives you lemons, learn to make lemonade.
- "Great people are those who make others feel that they too can become great." *Mark Twain*
- Organize! Find a place for everything and keep everything in its place.
- Take responsibility for your education. Decide what you want to study in college and do your best to get into the school that is best for you.
- Be confident in our love for you. We love you unconditionally. No matter what happens in your life, we will always love you.
- Be comfortable with a regular dialog with God. Pray regularly. Ask God to guide and protect you. Thank God for your many blessings.

Age 18 through college

At the time of writing this in 2006, Sarah is 16 and our oldest grandchild is 9, so we have not yet delivered any messages to children in this age group. I expect that the messages might include some of the following topics (a few of which of which are repeated from prior years). Undoubtedly others will evolve as we watch the children grow.

- Your integrity shapes who you are. You either have integrity or you don't. You are either honest or you aren't. There is no middle ground.
- Take responsibility for your college education. Commit to doing your best and preparing yourself for your career.
- College moves much faster than high school and it is nearly impossible to catch up if you get behind. Get your homework done before you play.
- Let your teachers know you are dedicated to the best grades. Then follow through with your commitment.
- Be strong in your leadership. Offer counsel to those who will benefit from your advice. And always lead in the "right" direction.
- Seek counsel from those who have knowledge and experience that will benefit you. Consider this: If someone asks you for advice, it is likely that you will feel complemented because they value your opinion. Compliment others by asking for their advice.
- Never allow yourself to believe you are better than others. Be confident in yourself, but always respect the differences that make each of us unique.
- "Leap, and the net will appear." - *Les Brown*

- Never "burn your bridges". You never know when you will need a friend or a recommendation.
- Have the courage to stand up for what you believe is right. Never let other's morals and ethics alter yours.
- Lead with courage and conviction. Be confident you have the power to change the world.
- Learn from your mistakes. Use each mistake in your life as a learning experience.
- "Be the change you want to see in the world." *Mahatma Gandhi*
- Be confident of our love for you. No matter what happens in your life always know that we love you unconditionally.
- Continue your regular dialog with God. Understand the depth of your religious views. Share your thoughts with others of different faiths. Develop an understanding and an appreciation for other's beliefs.

Early career

Although Sarah and our grandchildren are not yet ready for these lessons, we do have substantial experience in motivating young impressionable employees in their first career roles. Many of the following examples draw on our corporate experience. Many additional examples are provided that offer Life Lesson advice in more personal areas of growth.

- Your integrity defines who you are. You either have integrity or you don't. You are either honest or you aren't. There is no middle ground.
- Your first job sets the tone for your entire career. Dedicate yourself to success. Don't accept anything else.
- Set higher goals for yourself than others expect of you. Try to exceed your employer's expectations.
- Be loyal to your employer and those who direct your work. Never say disparaging remarks about them. Work in their best interest.
- Take responsibility for your mistakes. Openly accept responsibility without becoming defensive or shifting blame to others.
- Approach problems as opportunities. Maintain a positive outlook.
- Take ownership for the quality of everything you do. Even small issues can affect your reputation.
- Be the best, yet remain humble. Never arrogant. Never "above" others.
- Establish and maintain positive professional relationships. Respect your co-workers, even when you don't share their opinion.

- Everyone likes some elements of their job more than others. Approach all of your assigned tasks with responsibility and a sense of urgency, not just those tasks that you enjoy most.
- Maintain an organized and clean work environment.
- Dedicate yourself to your career growth. Continually strive to improve your skills.
- Learning comes easiest and fastest when you admit to yourself you don't know everything. You will continue learning new things your entire career. Dedicate yourself to always learning.
- Strive to minimize your employer's costs and work to increase the value/effectiveness of the organization.
- Be patient when dealing with those who have less knowledge.
- Dedicate yourself to the highest ethics, and success will find you.
- Be proactive in finding mentors to guide and accelerate your career. Develop the instinct to find the "right" mentors who will be a positive influence. Ask them specific questions. Learn as much as you can from them.
- Be responsive to suggestions for work improvement. Expect your superiors to give you guidance. Listen carefully to what they say. Do your best to accommodate their suggestions. Don't become defensive. Never believe you don't need to improve.
- Keep yourself fit. Take responsibility for your physical condition and health. Commit to a regular exercise program for the rest of your life.
- Be charitable. Share with others who will benefit most.
- Be thrifty. Strive to save at least 10% of every dollar that you earn.
- Develop a sense of community service. Adopt a project that improves the community. Devote time to making the world a better place.
- Be confident of our love. No matter what happens in your life know that we love you unconditionally.
- Continue your regular dialog with God. Take an active role in leading others in spiritual issues.

Example Life Lessons can be printed from our web site

Again, our web site www.LifeLessonNetwork.org includes the ability to download all example lessons for free. The examples may be downloaded in both PDF and Word format and are suitable for immediate printing. If you choose to download the lessons in Word format, you can easily make changes and create new lessons.

6 – Making the Child a Leader

Ask the child to give Life Lessons to other children

When Sarah was twelve, we started giving her Life Lesson "assignments". We asked Sarah to prepare and deliver Life Lessons for another child. She did a great job. Sarah has now done this for other children at least five or six times. We are not involved. Sarah writes the Life lessons and delivers them to the child on her own. This has helped give Sarah a sense of leadership and responsibility. We would like to think it also helps the other children grow.

At what age?

When should you begin this? We started Sarah when she was twelve. Other children will be earlier or later depending on their maturity.

It will be most effective after the child has been given several Life Lessons so they will understand the process. It is also important for the child to be mature enough to take the responsibility of the "mentor" position seriously.

Select younger children

This technique will most likely be more effective if the recipient child is somewhat younger than your child. (The primary child Sarah has mentored is about three years younger.)

In some families it may work for younger siblings (although we have no experience with that). It can also be very effective for younger cousins and other younger close friends. It will be most successful if the younger child considers the older child a role model.

An increased sense of responsibility

The process of giving Life Lessons to others has a very beneficial side effect. In most cases it causes the child giving the lessons to become very aware of their role model status; and as a result is likely to solidify the child's own ethics and values.

Passing the Life Lesson technique to future generations

We have now suggested that Sarah ask her primary "student" to develop Life Lessons for other children. Although this has not yet occurred as of this writing, we have high hopes it will happen soon.

What if each child who is given Life Lessons does this for two or three other children? The possibility of this growing on its own is a very heartwarming thought . . .

7 – A Personal Code of Ethics

The child's expectations of themselves

A few years after getting the ideas for Life Lessons, we had an additional thought. How about a Code of Ethics for children?

We gave this to Sarah when she was fourteen. We asked her to feel free to make any changes that she thought were appropriate. She decided to keep the version we provided for her. We are proud to say that Sarah put a copy of this on the wall in her bedroom. It is still there today, years later.

My Personal Code of Ethics

- **Integrity** – I will be honest in everything I do – always forthright – always sincere – always reliable – always dependable
- **Caring** – I will care about others – always considerate – always fair – always willing to help those in need – never ridicule or intentionally hurt others
- **Excellence** – I will do the best at everything I do – always strive for excellence – never accept mediocrity – never procrastinate
- **Attitude** – I will maintain a positive attitude – always respectful – always loyal – always humble – never arrogant
- **Courage** – I will stand up for what is right – never give in to negative peer pressure – never allow fear of failure to prevent trying

We are also very proud to say that when Sarah was fourteen she put a sign on the door to her bedroom with absolutely no input from us. It is a very powerful quote that illustrates the depth of her self-responsibility. It is still on her door as I write this . . .

While life occasionally makes it appear otherwise, no one has control over your life . . . but you. Make decisions with care, because in the end, you have only yourself to blame for the outcome.

Mercedes Browning, Cofounder ~ Glass Slipper, Inc.

Not the usual thing you see on the bedroom door of a fourteen year-old . . . We love the quote and included it in the example lessons above.

8 – Specific Advice for Special Occasions

Special lessons

In addition to the Life Lessons we have provided to the children on vacation, we have also written more lengthy advice at special times. The next two pages provide examples. The first was written for Sarah when she graduated from junior high school (8th grade). The second was written for my nephew Ryan upon his senior high school graduation. (Both were given with a copy of the code of ethics shown on the prior page.)

These are intended as examples for motivating children in the right direction at key decision points in their lives. We are suggesting that the value is in the idea, not the exact words. It is important that each message is tailored to the child's exact needs at the time it is presented. We also believe it is important to take time to fully explain the importance of the message and to gauge the child's reaction.

Junior High School Graduation Thoughts for Sarah

Your graduation this month is a time to reflect on your outstanding growth and congratulate yourself for your many accomplishments. It is also a time to think about the next phase of your life and to re-dedicate yourself to being the best you can be.

You are a natural leader. You inspire others with your boundless energy, strong determination, compelling charm, wonderful wit, and warm smile. People naturally gravitate to you. Many seek your leadership. More will do so in the future.

Leadership is strongest when it is firmly grounded in principles and goals. Strong principles and goals give leadership purpose. Everyone benefits when leaders have strong principles and goals.

Take the time to establish a formal set of principles and goals - your own "personal code of ethics". Your code of ethics should define what you expect of yourself. It should be a plan for the person you want to become - and the influence you offer for those following your lead.

Then as you lead others, lead in ways that are consistent with your code of ethics. Think through the consequences of your leadership on others. Make sure each element of your leadership is consistent with your code of ethics. A strong code of ethics will strengthen your ability to lead, and increasing numbers will naturally seek your leadership.

Life is never all leadership for anyone. Even the strongest leader follows others from time-to-time. When you follow others, make sure that they are leading you on paths that are consistent with your code of ethics. Don't allow yourself to be "swept up" by the crowd. Be sure of yourself and your principles. Be strong in resisting others' leadership that may be inconsistent with your values.

As you go through life, whenever and wherever you see the opportunity, encourage others to adopt their own personal code of ethics. Lead others to define their own principles and goals, and help them strengthen their own personal values.

Never underestimate what you can accomplish. Lead with courage and conviction. Be confident that you have the power to change the world.

Transitions

Graduation Thoughts for Ryan

Transitions are the events in life that move us from one environment to another. Transitions offer us a time to reflect upon a period of our lives that is closing, and a time to imagine the future in a new and different way.

We all experience many transitions over the course of our lives. Your graduation this month is the first major transition you will experience. We transition each time we graduate, change schools, change jobs, move the place we call home from one location to another, and in general make any major change in our lives.

Transitions can be bittersweet. Transitions can give us sadness for an ending and can make us apprehensive of the unknown. Transitions can also give us the excitement of a new beginning. Most important, transitions can offer the opportunity to steer our lives in significant ways.

It is at the time of each transition that we have the most control over the course of our lives. In everyday life we usually can only make minor adjustments to small elements of our lives. At times of transition we have the opportunity to completely re-create ourselves. Transitions are a time when we can shed the things we like the least in ourselves. Transitions are also a time we can adopt changes that will steer us to a better future. To a very large extent, the choices we make at transitions will shape the person we become.

Use each transition in your life wisely. At each transition, re-dedicate yourself to your principles and goals. And at each transition, make sure that you understand the many alternatives put before you. The impact of some alternatives will be more obvious than others. Obvious alternatives might include what classes you take in school and the amount of effort and dedication you give to each class. But in addition to the obvious alternatives, each transition offers many subtle alternatives that will have a significant influence on your future. These include alternatives for making new friends, joining groups, relating to others, spending leisure time, and altering many other aspects of your life.

At each transition, think through the implications of each alternative put before you. Consider each alternative carefully. Think about the impact each alternative might have on your future. Use your wisdom to make the choices. Then commit yourself to the course you select. Only you can steer your life to your future. Steer wisely!

9 – Success

Positive impact

We have used the Life Lesson techniques for over nine years and we would like to believe they have had a positive impact on Sarah's life. We also have early experience with four grandchildren, all of whom seem to accept the process. We suggest these techniques can be valuable for any child.

I wish I thought of this many years ago

As I said earlier, my grade as a parent is C+. I could and should have been a much better parent, proactively leading my children to strong values.

I wish I had thought of these techniques when my children were young. I firmly believe that Life Lessons would have been a significant positive influence in their lives. Holly and Jim, I'm very sorry for not thinking of it sooner . . .

In the child's best interest

It is imperative that each Life lesson is structured in the child's best interest. If the child perceives that the Life Lessons are in your interest, the process is not likely to work. In other words, we suggest that Life Lessons should not be used for "wash the dishes every night" and "mow the grass every Saturday", etc.

Start as young as you can

We suggest that starting early in a child's life will make the process much easier. We have started children from age four to age seven. We suggest starting as early as the child can understand the messages.

Reinforce the concept of self-responsibility

For the Life Lesson process to be effective, the child must accept the guidance. The best way of getting the child to participate is to help them understand that in the end they are responsible for every decision they make – and their decisions will shape the person they will become.

We encourage you to reaffirm the importance of the process each time that you present Life Lessons. Here are a few thoughts you might want to communicate when you present Life Lessons (this is written in terms of the **adult speaking to the child**):

- ▶ **You are growing an adult** - Have you ever thought about the fact that you are growing an adult in yourself? At the end of your childhood you will be an adult. It is very important for you to grow into the adult you want to become.
- ▶ **Your decisions will determine the adult you will become** - In the coming years you will face many difficult situations. The way you react in those situations will determine the kind of person you are - honest/dishonest - caring/selfish - kind/mean – it really is up to you. You are responsible for the decisions you make. And in the end those decisions will shape the adult you will become.
- ▶ **We won't be there when the difficult situations arise** - We will give you guidance when we are with you and see you making a mistake. But we won't be with you when many of these

situations occur. You might be at school, playing or visiting friends when difficult situations arise.

- ▶ **Life Lessons are our opportunity to help you grow** - The Life Lesson process is an opportunity for us to give you advice that will help you make the right decisions at the right time. It is our hope that Life Lessons will help you grow into the adult you want to become.

Be ready for resistance from older children

If your child is already over the age of twelve or thirteen when you start Life Lessons, you may get some amount of resistance from the child. There are at least two alternative ways to approach this:

The first (and the one we recommend) is the "ask for the child's permission" technique - Ask the child their permission to present Life Lessons. Explain the process is in their best interest. Explain that they have much to gain from the process. Explain it is initially likely to be somewhat uncomfortable for both you and the child. Ask them to give it a try.

The second technique is the "tell the child how it is going to be" method. In this case using vacations as the delivery time is very beneficial. You can let the child know that Life Lessons will be a part of all future vacations. If they want to join the family on vacations, they will listen to the Life Lessons and they will discuss the topics openly.

Either way it may take time for the child to accept the advice and truly listen. Be persistent.

Separate delivery for brothers and sisters?

Sarah has no siblings so we didn't have an issue here with her. On the other hand, my daughter Holly has two daughters, and my son Jim Jr. has a daughter and a son, so grandchildren on vacation usually come in pairs. This gave us the decision as to whether or not we would give Life Lessons separately or together.

Delivering the Life Lessons together means that all children get the same message. Giving them separately enables you to present different lessons to each child. In our case, since both sets of grandchildren are only about 2 ½ years apart, we have chosen the "one set of Life Lessons together" mode. In general this has worked well for us. If children are substantially different ages, the message delivery will probably need to be separated. There are no doubt many other good reasons for separating the children for the Life Lessons.

Perfection is not required - But practice what you preach

As I mentioned previously, perfection is not required to teach values to children. If perfection was required, no one would qualify because all of us are human and by definition, imperfect.

However, it is imperative that you are a good role model and "practice what you preach". If you are not willing to adopt a specific Life Lesson yourself, our advice is to not present it and select other lessons for the child. If you present Life Lessons to the child but are not willing to adopt them yourself, the value of the entire process will be diminished.

Thoughts on our schools

I believe that schools should have a much stronger role in teaching ethics and values. Our schools train people on many important things, but I have believed for many years that most schools miss some of the most important elements of education. I suggest that our schools should have required

classes for ethics, values, citizenship, leadership and parenting (yes, parenting!). I believe that over the years this would help our society immensely.

Everyone can help

While the primary advice for most children will and should come from parents, remember that Dune and I do not have children. Sarah is the child of close friends. Our other primary "subjects" are grandchildren. Anyone in a position of authority/leadership can use these techniques to help shape young lives.

Is there a child in your life? Can they use your advice?

10 – The Original Idea for Life Lessons

Our corporate experience

In the Foreword contained in this document I alluded to the fact that the initial ideas for Life Lessons and the code of ethics came from our corporate experience. A little over twenty years ago, Dune and I founded a company. After a few years it faltered. I believe that one of the major reasons was poor ethics of our employees. I blame myself for not proactively leading the staff to high ethics. It was my fault. I take full responsibility.

We kept the company alive, but just barely. After we resuscitated the company, we created a formal corporate Code of Ethics. If we were to grow a company, we wanted it to be something that would make us proud. And we certainly wanted to avoid the problems we had in the past.

"Life Lessons" to grow careers

We of course realized that just having a Code of Ethics was not enough to keep the staff focused on ethics. We needed a way to get everyone involved and make sure they were upholding high ethics and values, even when we were not present.

To address this we created a 40-page document to communicate our career growth process. We call the document our "Career Development Plan". It outlines the skills and qualities that we expect at each step up the career path. Many of the topics involve technical abilities and knowledge. Many others give the staff guidance in ethics, values and motivation (not unlike the objective of the Life Lessons). Some of these can be seen in the Life Lesson examples above in the section titled "Early Career".

Being a role model is never enough

Most of the people we have hired since 1990 came to us directly after obtaining their college degree – young and impressionable. As in parenting, being a good corporate role model is not nearly enough to ensure that those who work for you will be ethical and focused on high values.

So how do you ensure that employees will react ethically when you are not present? We established a process to help address this issue. Every employee who manages the work of others is responsible for growing the younger employees in specific ethics and values issues - in other words, Life Lessons. We feel it has been very successful.

Our inspiration for Life Lessons

As our relationship with Sarah grew, we made the connection. If we can create a successful process that improves ethics, values and motivation in our young employees, why can't we do that for Sarah? This ultimately led to the idea of Life Lessons, which we started presenting to Sarah in 1997.

A few years later we made the second connection – How about asking Sarah to give Life Lessons to other children? - Hoping it would add to her sense of leadership and responsibility and also benefit others.

And shortly after that we made the third connection - why not a code of ethics for children? This led to the code of ethics we have given to Sarah as well as other children.

11 – Postscript

About the author

Jim Hempleman is the founder and CEO of Premier International Enterprises, Inc., a Chicago-based software and consulting firm, and Premier International Associates, LLC, an organization dealing in technology for the management and distribution of music and other media. Jim lives in downtown Chicago with his wife of twenty-two years, Dune. Dune handles the accounting for the businesses.

Both Jim and Dune are both passionate skiers and spend as much of the winter/spring in Colorado as possible. Sarah, Jim's two children, their spouses, and all four of the grandchildren are all excellent skiers. Ski vacations have been a frequent forum for presenting the Life Lessons.

Premier International Foundation

Jim and Dune also founded Premier International Foundation, NFP, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting ethics, values, motivation and inspiration. Premier International Foundation has created and operates www.LifeLessonNetwork.org, a web site dedicated to helping parents and other adults communicate Life Lessons to our youth.

The web site provides the ability to download example Life Lessons and the Code of Ethics for free. The examples may be downloaded in both PDF and Word format and are suitable for immediate printing. Downloading the examples in Word format makes it easy to modify the lessons and create new lessons.

Premier International Foundation is internally funded and does not accept contributions.

Please send your comments and suggestions to Comments@LifeLessonNetwork.org.



221 North LaSalle ▪ Chicago, Illinois 60601 ▪ (312) 857-2200 ▪ Fax: (312) 857-7806
www.LifeLessonNetwork.org ▪ Comments@LifeLessonNetwork.org

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