

#5

Authority-Based Parenting comes from a position of strength and confidence and establishes leadership with democracy while Power-Based Parenting lacks confidence, operates from a position of weakness while establishing autocratic rule over their kids.

If we were to look back over time at the world's most influential people, we would likely find a wide variety of characteristic differences that make up the personalities of those leaders. In particular, a comparison between those who have shaped us most through the use of democratic leadership, and those who have used autocratic rule, would no doubt lead to some especially interesting distinctions, not only in style, but in the outcome and effects of their efforts.

It is likely that most historians who make it their business to study such things would agree that those leaders who ruled with a stern and overpowering autocratic style of leadership, did so at least in part, because they were afraid, lacked self-confidence, and could see no other way of accomplishing their goals, but to dictate. "If people are given the choice to follow me", so the reasoning might be, "why would they choose on their own accord to trust, respect, and follow me?"

Those who have been the victim of such autocratic rule, must have followed not because they respected and loved their leader, but because they were afraid, and could see no alternative but to do so. It is likely that if compliance were indeed, accomplished, it was most likely not because they freely chose to follow, but because they saw no safe alternative. And in most cases, I suspect that those who have been ruled with an autocratic iron fist would have escaped if ever given the chance.

It could likewise be assumed that those of us who have been fortunate enough to live in a democratic society (in spite of all of the shortcomings that come along with such a system), are willing to

follow our leaders because we trust them, respect them, and believe that, for the most part, they have our best interests in mind. We may not always like or agree with their decisions, but we continue to listen to them and to follow their lead because, in spite of any shortcomings they might have, we have some degree of trust in them or, at least, the democratic system we are a part of.

Authority-based parenting

It is not far fetched to apply the above ideas to the process of parenting. When parents have confidence in themselves, their decisions, and in their relationship with their kids, feel a greater freedom to apply with confidence the authority that is theirs. And because of their confidence, "pulling rank" with ineffective power plays is unnecessary. This does not mean that everyone necessarily has an equal vote, but rather, that the thoughts, ideas and desires of their kids are appropriately taken into consideration. Even though at times there is a place for, "because I said so", or, "because I'm your parent", giving reasons for the position taken takes priority over arbitrary and unilateral decision-making.

Here are just a few examples of authority-based parenting that might help:

"It's that time of year again when we need to decide where we are going to go on vacation. We have some limitations because of money, and your mom and I have some preferences. But we want to know from you what you would like to do. What would be the most fun and relaxing for you? Do you have any ideas?"

"I am going to need quite a lot of help from you in the yard this week-end but I want you to have some time for yourself too. We need to put our heads together to decide when I can count on you to be around. What are your plans for the week-end?"

"It's obvious from the way things have been going around here lately that our family has some things we need to work out. You don't seem

to be happy with how things are going either, so I want to meet to discuss some problems that I think have gotten our family off track. I want you to feel free to address any issues you think need looking at. When would be a good time for you to meet?"

"Some time in the next hour, I want you to take out the garbage and sweep the patio. Do you want to do that now so it's out of the way, or do you want to wait until after your T.V. program is over? You decide, but both chores must be completed before noon"

Obvious signs of authority are present in each of the above examples. It is quite clear who is in charge and who has the authority. But also present is some room for choice and decision making on the part of the one who is expected to comply. Authority-based parents have the confidence in themselves, as well as in their relationship, to rely on their authority to lead. Power plays that do not take into account the needs, feelings, and opinions of their kids are not usually necessary. Granted, sometimes they are, but only when all else seems to fail.

The probable outcome of such effort-and it does take effort-are kids who grow up believing that they matter (for more on the importance of this, refer to question #16 in PARENTING WITH AN ATTITUDE). And when they really feel that they do, then their self-esteem is nurtured and it will be reflected in their behavior and attitudes. In short, authority-based parents improve the odds of raising truly great kids-kids who like and value themselves, and who feel the same way toward others.

Power-based parenting

Power-based parenting looks remarkably different, both in execution, as well as in outcome. Consider the following examples:

"Your dad and I have decided we are going on vacation sometime this summer, but aren't sure when. So don't get involved in anything you can't break away from. And this year, please don't bug us about going to Disneyland. We took you there five years ago, and that was plenty for us".

"I expect a lot of help from you this week-end, so don't make any plans to be away from the house".

"I haven't appreciated how things have been going around here lately. We will have a family meeting first thing Saturday morning. I have no idea how long the meeting will last so don't make any plans".

"I want you to take out the garbage now. I don't care if you are in the middle of a program. I want the garbage out of here, so do it now".

Just as in the examples given earlier of authority-based parenting, it is also easy here to tell who is in charge. Clearly the parent in both situations is. But in the examples above, power is the obvious choice of parenting tools. In both authority-based parenting and power-based parenting, the parent is in charge and the desired task is likely to get accomplished. But the long term affect and impact on the kids involved will be dramatically different.

What's a parent to do?

Kids who grow up under the direction of authority-based parents are much more likely to develop a healthy respect for authority. They may question it, they may feel they deserve an opinion, but they will work and live within that authority, and will appreciate the importance and need for it in their lives.

Power-based parenting tends to turn out a different "product". Kids who have been consistently raised under the direction of power that is the result of parental insecurity and weakness, are more likely to either comply blindly to any authority that may come their way, or, they may over react in the opposite direction, refusing to let any one or any thing

have authority over them. Clearly, either possible outcome does not enhance the prospects of raising truly great kids.

Discussion questions

As a kid growing up, did you live with authority-based parents or were your parents more power-based in their parenting style?

In either case, what was your parents' style like for you?

Does their style when you were growing up continue to have an affect on you today?

In your family today, would you describe your parenting style as authority-based or power-based?

How is your style of parenting working? What affect does it seem to be having on your kids?

Are there ways in which you need to make changes in this area of your parenting efforts that might make a positive difference in your family?