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Turns out dad may have been right all along…

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Like everyone else, I owe a lot to my parents for how I turned out. In my case, I got some things from my mother (empathy, long-suffering, unconditional love, OCD, penny pinching, fashion sense, etc.).

But as far as my attitude toward life in general - and work in particular - goes, well, those things came more from my dad.

And since there is a word limit on these opinion pieces, I'm going to focus more or less exclusively on my paternal influence this time. Mom will no doubt get her own column at some point.

When I say my dad was supportive of me, I don't mean it in the traditional sense. The lessons he taught me came more through the experiences he made me endure. Dad was not one to step in and take care of things. His idea of teaching someone how to swim would be to throw them into the deep end of the pool with an admonition to figure it out.

Some of my dad's favorite phrases were "deal with it," "get over it," grin and bear it," "suck it up," and "what are you going to do about it?"

To be completely honest, at the time I wasn't a huge fan of this approach. As an adolescent, dad often came across – at least to me - as harsh and dismissive. Why couldn't he just help me out? Or at least be on my side?

Today, however, I have an entirely different take on those formative encounters. Moreover, I can see how many in subsequent generations might have benefitted from his methods.

Looking back, I don't think he was ever intentional in his thinking - about virtually anything. If there was ever anyone who truly made it up as he went, it was undoubtedly my dad. Like me, he was no doubt heavily influenced by his father (my grandfather). From what I saw, grandad was even more hands off when it came to parenting.

I remember hearing my grandfather say once that "when you turn 18, you need to move out – go to college, get a job, live on the street, whatever; you shouldn't live at home anymore." I know, I know. Different era. Different world.

But is it really? I hear all the time how today's world is so much more dangerous than the one we grew up in. I used to buy into that characterization, now I'm not so sure. In a lot of respects, things were a lot more hazardous back in the day. Remember lawn darts and easy bake ovens?

Growing up, we seemed a lot more self-reliant than kids do today. Maybe because most of us had fathers like mine who seemed to all share the same background and disposition. Maybe having parents who came of age during the Great Depression had something to do with it.

Oh, and does this sound familiar? When I got in trouble at school, I always found myself in more trouble when I got home. Dad - and mom for that matter - always supported my teachers. Nowadays, when youngsters get in hot water at school, their parents are much more likely to run down there and lambast the educators.

So ultimately I've come to the conclusion that dad's approach was probably superior to the one many parents have apparently bought into these days.

Don’t get me wrong. If my son is experiencing anything truly distressing or genuinely disturbing, I am all for rushing to his defense. But if it’s something he can handle on his own, then he should be ‘empowered’ to do so.

I am reminded of the movie “Heartbreak Ridge,” which admittedly received mixed reviews due to both its acting and historical accuracy. There is a line the Clint Eastwood character uses repeatedly as he tries to motivate the men under his command to take personal responsibility for their actions. “Improvise, adapt, overcome.”

I think we’d being doing the next generation – as well as society - a real favor if we promoted this mindset as a blueprint for decision-making and problem-solving.

Maybe dad was right after all.



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