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*Scripts from the
Working**Together** Learning Project*

Teaching Children Success

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Working Together to Teach Children Success

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. There’s a lot of romanticism about childhood these days. Many well-to-do parents believe their parental mission in life is to give their children the happiest childhood possible. Well, why not?

On the other hand, as far as large mammals in nature are concerned, childhood has to be ENDURED by parents because kids aren’t born fully grown and self-sufficient. In fact, our studies indicate that one of the primary drives in large mammals is to get the kids up to self-sufficiency in the shortest time possible. It’s tough enough feeding yourself, let alone having to feed offspring. It’s tough enough defending yourself against predators, let alone watching out for offspring at the same time. The sooner most large mammals can get the kid out of the house, so to speak, the better it is for parent and child alike.

Well, your kids are only young once, and you want to enjoy those years with them. That’s a very good thing. However, if you don’t want your kids living with you in your basement into THEIR 30s and 40s, you might also want to teach them some effective life management skills along the way. And it’s never too early to start. They can be taught how to manage money long before they learn arithmetic. And when they learn to add and subtract you can show them how to run a checking account and credit card statement. You can teach them how to make and keep commitments. You can also teach them how to identify people who aren’t so good at keeping commitments, and to avoid them.

As parents we all need to understand that childhood is the only chance we have for giving our kids the tools for lifetime success. While some school systems may teach certain skills, they rarely teach kids how to aim those skills into successful PATTERNS of adult behavior. That’s where we as parents come in. We are the child’s launching pad for a lifetime of success and fulfillment. If we misfire, the child won’t be able to go very far.

We’re setting up this subunit to deliver a few specially targeted ideas about getting kids ready for life. The idea is to work with a few naturally selected, preset features in the relationships between parents and children. By taking advantages of some of the natural wiring already at work in this system, we hope (but don’t promise) to make some aspects of child rearing a little easier on the parent, and more successful for the child.

If a happy childhood is a parent’s primary aim for their children, this can involve quality time where parents interact with their children to build lifestyle habits leading to success. In addition to playing together, include working together. Instead of hiding the finances from the kids, have them sit down for short periods with you while you pay a bill or two. Show them how to write a check, and make sure they can’t get to the checkbook after you do. Tell them WHY you do the things you do. Above all, answer all of their questions with good, grownup answers. Even if they don’t understand NOW, the words and ideas will stick, and they will begin to make sense as the children grow into the world of adults.

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Working Together to Start a Child’s Path I

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. Up until as recently as the last fifty or a hundred years, in Western Civilization anyway, a child’s first collaborative relationship was with his or her parents. The objective of this collaboration, in pre-historic times, was to teach the child the locally appropriate skills for survival by the time he or she was 3 to 5 years old. As humans started to make use of specialized divisions of labor, children collaborated with their parents to obtain the needed job skills leading to self-sufficiency by the time they were 10 to 12 years old.

Well, now that parents, quote, “Go to work,” end quote, kids in America most often get NO exposure to the skills it takes to make a living around here. In other words, children in the US rarely have a pattern to copy when it comes to obtaining functional survival skills. And this is particularly bad because the system produced by evolution assumes the availability of a good pattern in order to assure the survival of the next generation. When it’s NOT there, the chances that offspring will learn to SURVIVE ON THEIR OWN go down. Have you ever heard of 35-year old people living in their parents’ basements?

This means that kids have a different kind of survival pressure placed on them than the children of the PREVIOUS many millennia. Today, kids actually have to figure out WHAT they want to do to survive. Then they have the chore of finding the RIGHT grown-up mentors who can provide the PATTERN of success that maps CORRECTLY to what they want to do. This is vastly different than the natural strategy now in place to prepare human children for survival in a cruel world.

Since this natural pattern for picking up survival skills is short-circuited by modern lifestyles, what needs to be done to get kids pointed in a constructive direction? There are two things to take advantage of. First, children as a rule bring an optimistic perspective to life. Second, they have strong instincts for copying behaviors from trusted adults. With these two advantages in mind, parents need to construct what you might as well call rituals that they rehearse with their kids over and over. These rituals should install a sense of joy and empowerment based on two related ideas. Children should develop a strong sense that they have a RIGHT to determine FOR THEMSELVES how they want to manage their lives, and that they have a RESPONSIBILITY to pull a good life plan together. In short, the family rituals should be providing children patterns of self-reliance.

Successfully installing forms of self-reliance in kids makes them more open to exploring their aptitudes and interests. It takes very deeply engaged parents to build self-reliance in their children, as well as to assist their children in exploring their options. But because the NATURAL pattern of skill inheritance has been disrupted by modern lifestyles, parents must explicitly collaborate with a child as he or she searches for HIS OR HER OWN survival skills. This also teaches how self-reliant people work within groups.

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Working Together to Start a Child’s Path II

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of [EvolvingSuccess](#). In the first short program on getting a child started on a good path, we touched on the idea that parents need to replace a lost natural pattern that used to help children obtain survival skills. We suggested that parents devote a lot of time creating rituals with their children that take advantage of children’s optimistic outlook and their willingness to copy the behaviors of trusted grown-ups. We further suggested two targets for these rituals. One, use the rituals to install a strong sense of self-reliance in the child. Two, use the rituals to help the child explore his or her aptitudes to find their best survival skills for modern living.

In this program we’re going to look at the environment through which the young child’s path must go. This is the environment of human interactions. The dangers within this environment are potentially lethal. The opportunities for long life and happiness aren’t too bad. Outrageous success is always possible, but also always requires extreme dedication and hard work that goes beyond the achievement of long life and happiness.

Remember, first, that we presume four things about people in general. People are prone to be violent, prone to be paranoid, prone to be lazy, and in addition to THOSE interesting attributes, they have the ability to THINK if they choose to use it. The human environment a child experiences at any given point in time is the result of the interplay of these four characteristics among all the people close at hand. This remains true for all of us all of our lives.

So, how does a child navigate this? Let’s look at some pairs of opposite ideas to get started. People can respond to things emotionally, or by thinking them through. There are competitive behaviors, and there are collaborative behaviors. There are people who can be dangerous or difficult, and there are people who can be helpful at various levels. And there are people who slide along that entire spectrum from dangerous to helpful.

This means that a child needs some rules for predicting who will act in certain ways under certain conditions. The way most societies have chosen to supply this need is through the use of traditions, customs, rules, and laws. With the use of traditions and laws and so forth you no longer have to figure out how to predict what people will do. Instead, the group of people you relate to have ALREADY agreed that they will behave certain ways under certain conditions. This helps everybody spend less time on personal security and more time on group projects that pay off better than operating alone. Further, if an individual believes that the rules don’t apply to them and they start to threaten the security of people in society, they will either be punished in an attempt to get them to conform, or they will be removed from society in order to restore local security.

Since this is a big topic, we’ll continue this on the next MP3 program.

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Working Together to Start a Child’s Path III

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. In the MP3 program “Working Together to Start a Child’s Path Part Two,” we started looking for ways to help children navigate the complexities of human-filled environments. That brought us to a group of social conventions, which we identified as traditions, customs, rules, and laws. These social conventions are meant to create a little predictability from an otherwise unruly crowd of human beings.

Let me digress to a bit of recent history. One of my closest friends, Rich Arquilla, and I were discussing the transmission of values from parents to children, and from long-term US citizens to new immigrants. The target of our discussion was to find ways of preserving the strengths of our society that allow us to create a high standard of living while at the same time eliminating or reducing the impact of its flaws. You know where we ended up? We ended up talking about the old hippies.

Within this group of people called hippies you had some reasonably well educated, independent thinking young people who were trying to figure out how to structure their lives. Conformity to their PARENTS’ rules and expectations for life was often thought of in a negative way. “Don’t get hung up by the rules, man,” was a proverb that guided a lot of their approach to life.

Now, our hippie friends in those days really WERE trying to figure things out. But, if they’d have thought a little more deeply about their parents’ rules, they would have understood that those rules are what made their freedom to question things possible. If there were no rules in operation, all of those hippies, along with their parents, would still be in the woods hunting and gathering, often hungry, often sick, and sure to die before they turned the dreaded thirty years old.

So what’s the point about getting children started on the right foot today? The point is that traditions, customs, rules, and laws make it possible to create a standard of living that is vastly better than we could have if we were constantly defending ourselves against each other. Rules about respecting each other’s property free us from having to sit at home with a gun to shoot robbers. Rules about harming each other or killing each other when we make each other angry help us to remain in close quarters to work together in teams. The ability to work in teams helps us create easier ways for surviving each day. The rules create time for us that we otherwise couldn’t use on better pursuits. The rules create security, which in turn creates freedom to pursue new ways of making life work. Often times, life works better if you have a team you can collaborate with.

The kids need to be taught rules for living together and working together. We’ll make some suggestions in Part 4. If you don’t have it yet, get to the **EvolvingSuccess WorkingTogether** page and get it now.

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Working Together to Start a Child’s Path IV

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. In a society crowded with hundred of millions of people, you simply can’t have people running around as if their actions have no impact on anybody else. Even worse, you can’t have hundreds of millions of people taking matters into their own hands every time they get a little upset about something.

Here’s the deal: When some people make arbitrary rules about the jobs you can or can’t take, that’s just plain wrong. When people say that unless you make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year you aren’t a success, that’s also just plain wrong. We all ought to be free to pursue our legal ambitions, whatever they happen to be. It’s those ILLEGAL ambitions that get us into trouble, and usually, rightfully so.

We’ll take the minimalist approach on this and assert that our society is based on law for two reasons. First, it saves us time because we don’t have to spend most of our day physically defending ourselves and our goods. Second, a society based on law makes large-scale teamwork possible (which of course creates other issues we won’t consider here).

Crudely speaking, there are two approaches to making life work within a legal framework created by millions of people. You can compete against it, usually in the criminal sense, or you can collaborate with it. Let’s assume that your hopes for your children do NOT include extensive jail time. What’s your job as a parent, then?

Well, remember those rituals we talked about in earlier programs in this series, where you ritualize notions of self-reliance and the search for life management skills? Now you’re going to need rituals that teach your kids about the realities of citizenship. The minimal part of this is to train them in the basics of lawful behavior. These basics include not killing, not stealing, not creating situations that lead to murderous anger in someone else, and so forth. But on the more positive side, you want to work out rituals with your kids that show them the power of preserving and improving the system within which they live. Without a civilized context, we would all be reduced to hunting and gathering, usually being hungry, often being sick, and with little promise of living past 30 years old.

Yes, this implies a level of conformity that the hippies might not have believed in. Yes, this implies that most of the time challenging authority isn’t going to be productive. But it also implies that we can engage authority in productive or constructive ways. We and our children can, firstly, obey laws. Second, we and our children can become part of the political process when we are clear about the changes that need to be made. This means that we can collaborate with millions of people to improve on the faults of a system that otherwise delivers so many survival benefits that we literally wouldn’t know where to begin to count them.

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Working Together with Kids on Commitments I

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. If one had to identify the biggest barrier to a society filled with healthy communities, building stronger economies and increasingly happy, healthy, and fulfilled citizens, it is arguably the breaking of commitments. These could be broken promises, broken verbal agreements, broken written contracts, or any form of agreement that goes unfulfilled and leads to the growth of mistrust among people. Almost everything people attempt to do in life entails risks. Asking for help and getting commitments from people to provide help should reduce risk. When people fail to keep their commitments it raises risk instead. Societies where trust is lacking among citizens, or even worse, between citizens and their government, increase the risks against managing life successfully.

Commitments are at the core of working together. Life without commitments is pretty tough to manage. Worse, people who don't keep the commitments they make create additional problems for those who were counting on them. You can't work with people you can't count on. You can't work together with people who are unreliable about keeping the commitments they make.

So, as a parent, are you keeping your promises and other commitments to your kids? You see, this is the first example they get to determine for themselves the value of commitments made to them. If you make commitments to your kids and break them, then they will perceive little value in them. They will also take your working example forward and make commitments they don't intend to keep. For instance, they will often make promises to YOU that they have no intention of keeping, either. They'll tell you what ever will get you out of their faces in the shortest time with the least amount of pain or conflict. After all, that's what you've taught them by example if you are inconsistent about keeping your promises and commitments to them. That means through a lack of commitment on your part, you have created a very weak family structure. You will NOT have established a basis of mutual trust and respect with your kids, and therefore, no basis for legitimate parental control in your family.

Pretty serious, huh? Now, imagine that most of the families in America are operating out of histories of many broken commitments. All of those young adults are being dumped into American society with no intention of keeping commitments they make. Worse, they probably hold deep seated anti-values about commitments. In their families they were screwed over when they kept their part of the agreement, but the parent didn't keep theirs. Why shouldn't they expect similar behavior from total strangers? Sadly, they probably should expect most people around them to break their commitments. How should they manage all of those untrustworthy people as they make their way in life?

Well, we've only had time to open up the problem. Let's take some time in the next MP3 to work out simple solutions for us and our children.

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Working Together with Kids on Commitments II

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. Why is commitment breaking so common? We’ve attempted to keep a few basic human characteristics in mind as we’ve developed this WorkingTOGETHER Learning Project, so let’s look at them quickly. People are prone to be violent, paranoid and lazy. People can also think out better ways to live despite these tendencies. When it comes to breaking commitments, what is our most likely cause? Most of the time, I bet laziness has a big part in this.

There are probably two sides to laziness that leads to the breaking of commitments. First is the laziness that makes dealing with people in the first place a difficulty. So you tell them what they want to hear so that they’ll go away. Then, of course, you actually had no intention of delivery on the commitment, which is the second side of laziness that makes commitments meaningless. What does this mean at the practical level?

It means that your laziness (or, tendency number three above) is covering for your paranoid fear (tendency number two above) of the potential violence (tendency number one above) that you may experience by dealing with another person at an honest level. Telling people “No” often makes them angry, and well, who knows what they’ll do when they get angry. For instance, telling your children “No” to things might often lead to fights, tantrums, and all kinds of other unpleasantness. Who wants that?

On the other hand, if you keep your commitments with your children, then your “Yes” actually means something. Trust has a chance to grow between you and your kids. “Yes” means “yes,” “No” means “no,” and your kids at least understand where they stand most of the time.

So let’s assume that you’ve learned to keep your commitments to your kids, and they’ve learned how to make and keep commitments based on the family culture. So what happens the first time they’re out on their own, and they presume a culture of trust and kept commitments in the outside world? Well, that could be ugly.

We’ve spoken of rituals to train kids at home in basic values and behaviors. Here’s a point where some rituals might be handy. Let’s think back on the Golden Rule and tit-for-tat relationship strategies. Let’s also remember the four basic characteristics of people, their tendencies to be violent, paranoid, lazy, and their ability to use thinking to overcome problems those three tendencies create. The child can be taught to start out relationships, and the commitments that they often entail, on the basis of the Golden Rule. They start out presuming that the other person will keep their commitments. Then, the tit-for-tat approach says that the relationship is worth maintaining as long as the other person reciprocates in keeping their parts of commitments and agreements. But if the other person drops the ball, the child or young adult should consider simply walking away. Why should they tolerate sub-standard behavior from anyone?

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Working Together with Kids on Manners

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. I suspect that the main reason manners in children are so poor these days is because the manners of their parents are poor. I’m not talking about high tea with the queen here. I’m talking about the needed social greases that keep people from irritating each other.

Let’s cut to the chase. The most under-rated principle for civilized living is the simple Golden Rule. While it gets a certain amount of good press, its general applicability for deciding what to do in virtually any social setting is rarely exploited. Yet, anyone can start to apply it RIGHT NOW, like you listening to this program.

The short form of the Golden Rule is, “Treat people like you want them to treat you.” How do you apply it? Well, in any situation you can always ask, “How do I want people to respond to me right now?” Or you could ask, “If I were the people facing me right now, how would they want me to behave in the next few minutes?” We’re not talking about being a doormat or a milk toast. We’re simply talking about avoiding accidentally offensive behavior. Look, even if we’re in serious high stakes negotiations we can behave in a civilized manner.

Perhaps you remember a program we produced on “tit-for-tat” collaboration strategies. The opening behavior in tit-for-tat strategies is the application of the Golden Rule, which in this case means starting out with a favor to the other person, and assuming that the other person will return the favor. After that you behave on the basis of the most recent treatment you got from the other person. If that other person also behaves in a way guided by the Golden Rule your collaborative relationship ought to work quite well.

So what about real world applications, say, the behavior of children in public; do you enjoy kids acting up in restaurants or shopping malls? If not, do you let YOURS behave badly in public anyway? Do the examples of what you don’t want to see in public motivate you NOT to behave that way, or do you act somewhat rudely anyway because everyone else does? And when your kids watch you in public, what example to they get?

Now, this gets to a deeper issue, an issue about corporate culture on the world-wide scale. You might call this citizenship. Rudeness and other discourtesies often lead to interpersonal violence. Is it possible to simply live by the Golden Rule whether others live by it or not? Well, the fact of the matter is, we all have to try. When it comes to using the Golden Rule to figure out what social grease to apply, just use it. Just use it whether anyone else is doing it or not. Just drive on the highway as if everyone will use it, whether they’re all driving like maniacs or not. Just let other people go ahead of you in the line whether you’ve waited your proper turn or not. You see, if enough people lead by example on the issue of manners and courtesies, perhaps the rest of the people around us will catch on and start behaving more sociably as well.

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Working Together with Kids on Money

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. For parents to be able to teach their kids about money, they themselves have to know enough about money to be decent teachers. Most people do OK with money, but why not live by a few ideas about money that can help both you and your child enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without worrying about how to pay for it?

Rule number 1: Don't let advertisers and friends dictate how to spend your money. It's your money, so make your own choices. If your friends have better toys than you do, go visit your friends more often. It'll make them feel like big shots, and you'll save thousands of dollars over your lifetime. It's a smart thing to do.

Rule number 2: If you don't have the money to pay for it right there in your hot little hand, don't buy it until you do. In fact, saving for something almost always takes less time than paying something off on credit. This is also a smart thing to do.

Rule number 3: Checks and credit cards aren't real money, so unless you can actually cover all of your checks, or pay off your credit card balance completely in one payment TODAY, see Rule number 2. You be smart about your money, and the kids will be, too.

Are there times when going into debt makes sense? Yes, but I don't think there are many. Getting a loan for a reasonable car, say \$20,000 or less, is usually alright. Buying a reasonable home, which admittedly is hard to define these days, is something that now almost always requires a loan. On the plus side, getting a loan to buy something that will **MAKE** you money is usually very smart, if it's the right investment. This might include rental properties, as long as you do the research you should to understand what you're getting into. Outside of those three situations, paying for everything in cash is the simplest way to stay out of financial trouble.

Most people get into financial trouble because they don't know the state of their finances. They don't understand what checks and credit cards really are, and I don't mean anything dark and sinister here. I mean that they don't understand how money flows through them. Checks and credit cards are like money valves. If you don't know when to turn them off, they do more than drain you dry. They turn your finances into lifestyle deserts.

Paying in cash means you **HAVE** to be aware of your finances all of the time. It trains you to be aware of what kind of money is coming in, and what kind of money is going out. Those who develop a cash basis lifestyle in childhood and teenage years usually retain it, and keep their finances in good shape throughout the rest of their lives. Set your kids up to do the same. If you need to transition out of your credit-based lifestyle and into a cash-based lifestyle for the sake of training your kids properly about money, get started now. Your finances will likely improve, too.

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Working Together with Kids on Retirement

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. As we mentioned in an earlier segment in this subunit, most large mammals view their job as getting the offspring to self-sufficiency in the shortest time possible. If we take this lesson from our beastly cousins still living in the wilds, this doesn't mean letting our children drift about for decades while they “find themselves.” As long as a kid can pay his or her own way, they're free to drift as they like. Until then, they need to learn how to stretch their pennies while they drift.

Let's suppose our kids pretty well know how to handle their money and their commitments in the real world. Well, then, we can pat ourselves on the back for the good job that we did. But we can do our kids one last favor. In addition to getting them ready to fend for themselves in the shortest time possible, we can prepare them to retire in the shortest time possible. Wouldn't it be great to provide our kids the freedom to do as they please while they were still young enough to enjoy it?

It's not that WE as parents have to make it possible. We only have to bring this possibility to our kids' attention, so then they can go out and front load their earning power as quickly as possible. Now, I understand that this isn't going to be for everybody, but for those parents whose kids have the skills and the drives, there's nothing in the books that says we have to drift along until we're 65 to retire. If you can afford to retire at 45 like I did, why not buy back your freedom and enjoy the short life you have to the best of your ability? And for the rest of the kids out there, they all **STILL** have to be coached into saving for retirement, starting **NOW**. That way, even a relatively low level of continuous saving can accrue to a very comfortable nest egg after 40 years. If they have been taught to live on a cash basis, as we **STRONGLY** recommended in the previous short program, they will be able to save larger amounts for longer periods of time, and assure their comfort from ages 65 through 112.

I only have one example of a person who chose to retire early, and that's me. This choice required that I make some pretty big personal and professional changes in my approach to working. On the professional side, I had to learn to compete in business like the rest of the sharks in the tank, even though by nature I'm a collaborative type of person. But I made the choice to become very aggressive, and do a lot of things I didn't naturally like to do, because I also knew that I wouldn't have to work that way forever. Once I had the needed personal endowment to retire in hand I could stop doing things I didn't like to do. On the personal side, I lived as if I were on an austerity budget. I saved **EVERY** penny I could and put it into great investments. I needed to do both of those difficult things: work for a period of time doing things I didn't like to do, and live as if I didn't have any money. But you know what ended up happening? By working hard and saving hard, I was able to complete my 10 year retirement plan in 5 years. And it's been worth every difficult minute, I assure you, because now I am free to do as I please. And I do!

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