

Teach Your Children Well

At some point in your life I'm sure you've said to yourself, "Boy, I wish I knew then what I know now – I bet things would have been different." And, as parents (or other relatives), I'm sure you have wished that you could teach your children everything that they will need to know as they get older, everything that you have learned over your lifetime.

Well you can! You can teach them skills, impart knowledge, develop awareness and worldliness, and have them practice for situations they are sure to encounter as they get older. And I am going to help you do it.

Since I can't be there physically for your children, you will have to be my surrogates. I need you to act as mentors, teachers and guides, not just parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or guardians.

This book is not about the usual parenting stuff like teaching your children manners or how to tie their shoes. It's about preparing them for their future and giving them the training and practice that will open doors and present opportunities. It is your job, as a parent, to prepare them for that future. And my job, by way of this book, is to help you do just that.

My premise is that we have to open children's eyes to all the opportunities and possibilities that are available to them. If they are introduced to an array of certain experiences – what I call the *50 Essential*

Experiences – they will become aware of more and more choices for their possible careers and future lives. And when they have choices they are more likely to have success.

I am not going to tell you how to be parents or raise your children. What I am going to do is suggest *50 Essential Experiences* that will provide your children with those skills and knowledge.

In writing this book my goal is to help you (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or guardians) guide your sons and daughters so that they will become successful. Success, for them, may be an astonishingly incredible career, or it may just be doing something they love to do.

*Find something you love to do
and you'll never have to work a
day in your life.*

– **Harvey MacKay**
**Bestselling author of inspirational
business books**

We all want our sons and daughters to be successful in their adult lives. So what can we do, as parents, to achieve that end?

The problem is that your own parents may not have taught you everything you needed to know. Their error may have been one of omission. Up until now you may have been repeating the same mistake your parents may have made and, perhaps, dooming your children to replicate those errors when they, themselves, become parents.

But, because you are reading this book, you are taking the positive step of breaking that cycle. Use

these *50 Essential Experiences* as a checklist to make sure your children are prepared for their future.

Your children can use these *50 Essential Experiences* to anticipate and prepare for events they will come upon as they get older. With the practice these *50 Essential Experiences* will give them, they will be able to find analogies between the new situations they will meet and the familiar scenarios they have already undertaken. They will be fully prepared for what life has to throw at them.

Unfortunately children don't come with an "Owner's Manual." So here it is. Teach Your Children Well is a kind of reference manual for parents. Like the manual which comes with your car, or your alarm clock, it doesn't have to be read all at once or in sequence. It's okay to browse through it now, put it aside for a while, then take it out later.

They say that life is about the choices we make – so let's give our children as many choices as possible.

How To Use This Book

Think of this book as a checklist (as a matter of fact there is a checklist at the end). As your sons and daughters accomplish each of the *50 Essential Experiences*, you want to be able to check off that activity that they have participated in.

However, this book is not a how-to book, and it is not an instruction manual with step by step directions.

In this book I'm not going to teach you, or your children, anything (well, maybe a few things with a little trivia thrown in). But I am going to strongly recommend *50 Essential Experiences* that your children should undertake and gain knowledge of.

This book is meant for you, the parents. I want you to use it to help guide your children in learning the skills that will help them succeed. You need to be an active mentor and advisor. That being said, I do not want to hear that any parent buys this book and then just hands it to their son or daughter. That will definitely defeat its purpose.

You, the parents, will have to do some work. However I am not asking you to become an expert on every activity in this book. For each topic you will have to do some research to help prepare your children for what they are about to learn. Take time to explain to them what will happen. Then guide them through that learning process. During the experience continue to explain and point things out as they happen. And, most importantly of all: Talk to them about what they have learned after the experience has concluded. Debrief them, answer their questions. Ask them what they thought and re-enforce the skills that they have acquired.

Throughout this book I will occasionally remind you that you have to exert the effort to help your children with the experience. But most of the time I will not. I don't want to be repetitive and list the same admonishment for each topic.

There are *50 Essential Experiences* in this book. They do not have to be accomplished in any particular order. It is okay to start with what you consider to be the easy ones: Topics in which you are already familiar. Then move onto others.

Obviously, or not so obviously, you also want to select age-appropriate experiences for your children.

And your children do not have to do every one of the *50 Essential Experiences*. Originally I thought that 50 activities would be a good number. I even thought of

distilling the list down to 25. But I decided on 50 because I wanted to give parents choices and allow you to be able to pick and choose what you deem appropriate for your sons and daughters.

I also tried to list only activities that were doable. But for whatever reason, some children won't be able to do everything. Let them do what they can.

Most of the activities in this book should be repeated as your children get older, some over and over again. Re-writing their resume and re-working their elevator speech should be a yearly activity. Visiting museums, and going to concerts should be done as often as possible.

There is no rush in accomplishing these *50 Essential Experiences* but it doesn't hurt to start as early as possible. You may think your children have plenty of time (at least years) but kids grow up quickly. I hope that you will be able to use this book for many years to come.

Passion and Awareness

Another of my hopes is that, after your children have these *50 Essential Experiences*, that they will find at least one thing they are passionate about.

The catch is that they can't have a passion for something unless they know it exists. So, as a parent, it is your job to open the world to your children and make them aware of their possibilities.

If you ask a group of children what they want to be when they grow up you will, most likely, get a fairly small set of responses: Policeman, Fireman, Teacher, Doctor, Nurse, Ballet Dancer or Football Player.

Answers you probably won't get are Architect, Musical Conductor, Mechanical Engineer, Art Critic, Map Maker, City Councilwoman or Language Interpreter.

The reason for this small set of responses is that they are not aware that these other possibilities exist. The purpose of this book is to get you, their parents, to expose them to those possibilities, hopefully allow them to discover a natural ability, and find a calling that becomes the passion of their lives.

Why does your child's school have a "Career Day?" The reason is to expose them to the possibilities available to them. Each of the *50 Essential Experiences* is like a mini-Career Day.

The goal of this book, then, is to help you to guide your children to their future happiness by opening their eyes to opportunities and possibilities.

Opportunity and Possibilities

My belief is that, when children acquire knowledge and skills through their life experiences, they will have more opportunities and endless possibilities.

This book is about the opportunities and possibilities that we all want our children to have.

op·por·tu·ni·ty – *noun*

a situation or condition favorable for attainment of a goal.

pos·si·bil·i·ties – *noun (plural)*

future prospects or potentials

For children today, the opportunities are infinite. But to be able to take advantage of those opportunities they must be aware that those opportunities exist. In

order to be what they want to be, they have to know what it is they want, and they must be prepared.

Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.

– Seneca
Ancient Roman philosopher

I will prepare and some day my chance will come.

– Abraham Lincoln
16th President of the United States

When I talk about the opportunities and possibilities for your children, I am talking about the kinds of jobs they will choose and their life-long careers.

About Me, the Author

I was born in the mid-1950's, a very naïve time. We were lower middle class. Looking back, my family really didn't know much about the world. The father's of the children I played with were salesmen, retailers or tradesmen (most of the mothers didn't work) and I don't think there was a college degree amongst them.

I always felt as if I started life with a disadvantage. I thought I had some natural abilities but I didn't know about "things." I learned a lot in school and from books but I never learned about life.

That's why, at the age of 55, I'm still trying to decide what I should be when I grow up.

There is no one to blame. My father died when I was young and my mother and the rest of my immediate family did the best they could. But their life experience was limited. Looking back, they are what I would call parochial. Not in the religious sense but in the definition of “very limited or narrow in scope or outlook.”

This is kind of funny since I grew up in New York City, the financial and cultural capital of the world. (In case you didn't know, us New Yorkers are pretty New York centric.). However, we lived way on the outskirts of New York but still within the political boundaries of the city. We lived in Brooklyn (one of the five boroughs that make up New York City) in a neighborhood called Canarsie. We were about as far away from Manhattan as you could get and still live in New York. (That's probably why I never had a typical New York accent.)

I originally dropped out of college to work in the professional Theater as a stagehand and designer. It wasn't until I started my career as a stagehand, and had the opportunity to travel, that I had some of my own Essential Experiences.

Eventually I returned to school to study computers. For the past 25 years I've been a technical trainer, teaching adults how to use computers. Not quite a teacher, but I do consider myself an educator.

After I married, my wife and I lived on Long Island for a while. Then, seven years ago, she took an early retirement and we decided to move to Las Vegas where I continue my career as a technical trainer.

(By the way, do you know the difference between teaching adults and children? Adults are bigger.)

Technology

Even though I teach people to use computers I did not include a section on technology in this book for three reasons:

- Technology changes way too quickly
- Your children will most likely learn a lot of technology in school: Word Processing, Spreadsheets, Programming, etc.
- The technology they don't learn in school they will probably learn from their friends.

Speaking of which: One of the most important things you can do as a parent is make sure your children have friends. Most of what we know we learn from others.

Meeting People

A major reason to encourage your child to have these *50 Essential Experiences* is that, for many of these activities, they will come into contact with others.

Some will be their own age but others will be older with jobs and lifestyles different from your family members.

Not only is the best way to learn from others, but your children also have to learn to get along with other people: A learning experience unto itself.

Doing is Everything

There may be much your children can learn from reading, watching TV, going to the movies, or even viewing how-to videos on the Internet. But to truly

learn how to do something they must do it! They must have that physical experience.

Remember the first time you did something on your own, like going to a new school, or meeting a new group of people?

It's pretty scary. Your kids feel the same way. "Am I in the right place? Should I say something? What should I say? Am I making a fool of myself? Am I making a mistake? Am I doing this right?"

The more they do something the easier, and better, it gets. Even the second time is easier than the first. The important thing is to do it – for them to try.

The 10,000 Hour Rule

I'm sure you've heard the expression, "Practice makes perfect." But how much practice? Well, the rule is 10,000 hours. How long is that? If you practice something for one hour every day it will take a little over 27 years to become an expert in that field.

That sounds like a lot when you think of it as only one hour a day, but when I started my career as a Technical Trainer I taught 8 hour classes, 4 days a week. It took just over six years (8 hours x 4 days x 50 weeks x 6.25 years = 10,000 hours) before I became the "expert" that I am (or at least think I am).

The idea of the 10,000 hour rule is that it takes roughly 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert in a particular skill. So, obviously, the earlier your child can have an experience the earlier they can decide that that is what they want to do and then do it over and over again, perfecting their skills.

If your son or daughter practices a musical instrument, for instance, for 3 hours every day, it may take them about 9 years to become a virtuoso performer. If they start at 10 years old, they will be ready for the concert stage by 20.

If they participate in a sport, years of practice will allow them to become world class athletes.

It doesn't matter what they do. If they do it long enough, chances are they will get good at doing it. Get them started early.

You can be anything you want to be, do anything you set out to accomplish if you hold to that desire with a singleness of purpose.

– Abraham Lincoln
16th President of the United States

Sense Experience and Empiricism

I have not formally studied psychology but after 25 years of training adults I do believe in ***Sense Experience*** and ***Empiricism***.

Sense Experience is the perception that comes from your senses. Any sights, sounds, tastes, smells and feelings. Any information you get out of personally seeing, smelling, tasting or hearing something. Basically, it is what you learn by your connection to the world around you.

Who we are is the sum total of our experience.

– Author Unknown

Empiricism is the philosophical concept that experience, which is based on observation and experimentation, is the source of knowledge.

All knowledge is derived from human experience.

– **John Locke**
English philosopher

Empiricism a fundamental part of the scientific method.

What this boils down to is that your children can't just be told how to do something. They must actually experience the activity. They must be a participant in these *50 Essential Experiences*.

How This Book Is Structured

Topics – For each of the *50 Essential Experiences* I try to describe why the activity is important and what is the benefit. For some topics I've only written a few short paragraphs. For others I may have gone on a bit.

Quotes – I'm a firm believer in learning from others. I like to hear what others have said. I've tried to match quotes with the topics (or the notoriety of the author) as best I can but in some cases the quotes are generalities about the importance of experience.

Checklists – I've divided each of the *50 Essential Experiences* into five categories which, I believe, are mostly self-explanatory:

- Skills**
- Knowledge**
- Careers**

- Pop. Culture / History**
- Social Interaction**

Skills indicate a manual or intellectual ability that can only be learned through the experience.

Knowledge is an experience that provides information or understanding.

Careers may be experiences that are an integral part of a specific career but, in many cases, it is mostly an awareness that certain careers exist.

Pop. Culture / History refers to both popular culture, which is the shared knowledge of mass media (literature, movies, television and music), and history which includes current events.

Social Interaction refers to the relationship between groups of individuals and the practice of learning how to relate to others.

Most of the *50 Essential Experiences* will fall into more than one of these categories.

Collateral Experiences

Almost all of the *50 Essential Experiences*, in this book, are actually two, three, or more experiences in one. In order to participate in the main activity your children will have to do other things to prepare. I call these secondary experiences, Collateral Experiences.

Much of the knowledge and skills your sons and daughters will acquire from these collateral experiences will be needed in other essential experiences.

In some cases the collateral experiences are almost as important as the essential experience themselves.

Parents as Mentors

For the first part of children's lives, parents teach their children everything:

- Potty training
- How to use a knife and fork
- How to tie a shoe lace

We even send them to special summer camps to learn skills. Or we encourage them to become members of organizations (such as the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts or 4H Club) that will offer them opportunities to participate in educational activities.

Whether you realize it or not you are already their guide and mentor. Now add one more responsibility: Explain to them what people do for a living.

Someone needs to mentor children and encourage them to learn all sorts of stuff. Parents are perfect for that role.

As adults, we often have a certain political view because our parents, or members of our family, have the same view. We like certain types of food because that is the type of food we ate growing up. We may have chosen a profession because that's what our parents do. We are what we learn. And most of what we learn we learn from our parents, family and friends.

What If I Don't Know How To Teach?

I realize that not every parent is going to be a natural born teacher or mentor. Teaching takes work and its own course of training. But just like everything else, it gets easier and better with practice.

For each topic you will have to do some research to help prepare your children for what they are about to learn. Then you should guide them through the learning process. And, when they have finished, discuss with them what they have learned and re-enforce the skills that they have acquired. This is the most important part.

And, by the way, there is nothing that says teaching can't be a group activity. It is okay to get others involved: Your spouse, relatives, friends, neighbors, and even older children. If your neighbors also have sons and daughters, why not do some of the activities together.

The more you practice teaching and mentoring the better you will get. Practice does make perfect.

One more thing I want to mention about teaching, especially the after activity discussion. Remember that every child's experience will be unique. Even when they do an activity with a group of other kids, each child will have a different take on the experience than the other children will have. Everyone learns in their own way.

It's Never Too Late

This book is written to help you help your children. The sooner they start the better.

As presented here the *50 Essential Experiences* are topics that parents should do with their daughters and sons as early as possible so that when the children are faced with life choices they'll be able to make informed decisions because they'll have had exposure to those activities.

But this book can also apply to you, the parents. It's not too late. If you never had the chance to participate in some of the *50 Essential Experiences* there is no reason why you can't do them with your sons and daughters.

Think of these activities and experiences as a bucket list of things for you to do as well as your children to accomplish.

Why You Need To Teach Your Children Well

One day I starting making a list of experiences I've had that have helped me in my life. And then I started thinking about the experiences I didn't have, until I was older, that could have had a profound impact.

If only I had had those experiences earlier. If only I had that knowledge, those skills, that awareness of those opportunities and possibilities. If only I knew then what I know now.

That's when I knew I had to write this book. I knew that I had to share what I have learned with you and help you share that with your children.

In my profession, as a technical trainer, I have always been able to put myself in the shoes of my students. I've always been able to answer the question, "What do my students need to know?"

In this book I am putting myself in your shoes as a parent: What do you need to teach your children?

We expect that our children will learn more than we did. You may not be able to teach them everything but you can give them a really good start.

A child educated only at school is an uneducated child.

**– George Santayana
Spanish-American philosopher,
essayist, poet, and novelist**

My hope is that these *50 Essential Experiences* will provide your sons and daughters with practice for situations they will surely encounter as they get older, and that it will put your children on the fast track to gaining the street smarts/society smarts that will help them achieve success.

Are these *50 Essential Experiences* a definitive list? Absolutely not! They are just a starting point. Chances are there will probably be a sequel with 50 more Essential Experiences to Teach Your Children Well.

Children need to get out and do stuff, learn things, experience life. You need to guide them, lead them, and challenge them.

So go ahead and get started.

– Bob Litt