

GEARING KIDS FOR THE REAL WORLD

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Recently, Sally and I had a tour through a rather amazing pottery factory in an artsy place in New Zealand. We watched a man make the most exotic planter pot. As he transformed the soft round cylinder into a shapely creation we stood there astounded at his artistic ability. He was the creator, and throughout any day he could turn a lump of moist clay into any shape he wished.

This so reminded me about the responsibility we have as parents to shape our children, equipping them with all the life-skills necessary for them to be productive, caring and responsible adults. Mrs. Garrett was a Middle School teacher and I was her school administrator. She came to me and said, "Mr. Burgess, could I please have Thursday off as my son is leaving for college and I need to pack his bags." I asked how old her son was and she told me he was 18. I said, "You may as well place him in a wheelchair because you are making him a crippled person. Next week you might ask for another day off so you can do his laundry." Her reply floored me. "I don't have to worry about that because we are paying for a laundry service."

I have requested students to be really honest with me when taking character-building sessions. I often ask how many are required to do duties/chores at home. I am appalled that only just over 50% raise their hands. I am astounded how many parents never teach their children to cook, do the laundry, set the table, stack or empty the dishwasher, iron clothes, clean and vacuum the house, do basic car maintenance, manage money, garden and so on. Some parents are very diligent at teaching these skills to their children and I applaud them. Then there is the whole 'keeping your bedroom neat and tidy' syndrome!

Why would we not train and equip our children with these absolutely essential life-skills? Firstly, I have heard some parents say that their kids are going to have to do plenty of work in the future, so they would rather keep them free of these tasks now. Other parents have said that their kids don't do a good enough job, they complain too much or are too slow so they would rather do it themselves. Some parents simply don't even think that they are supposed to be shaping and equipping their kids for adult life, considering it the school's or someone else's responsibility. Some parents are not appropriate role models.

All of the excuses above are crippling the child's future and therefore are doing the kids a huge disservice. Who wants to marry a person who has very few life-skills? When you have two people like this, the relationship is very dysfunctional. I know of such relationships where neither spouse cooks, their homes are poorly kept and the couple's lives are rather chaotic.

Shaping our kids for the future is not just a good idea. I believe that it is our duty and has been a parent's responsibility for thousands of years now. I would ask you to stop and reflect for a moment. Ask yourself, "Am I teaching and training my children to effectively manage their lives, their homes and their future families? It should be part of the inheritance and legacy we pass on to our children. To those who are already doing this, well done! To all others, take time to map out what skills your children will need to lead independent adult lives.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org and check out our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com and our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org