

Designing Your Life (IAP-Spring 2009)
Lauren Zander and Gabriella Jordan
Lecture/Discussion 5: Parent Traits

Principle: Parent Traits

We have a version of each and every one of our parent traits. We designed ourselves based on them. This is not to say that you should blame your parents. It's not their fault. But by looking at your parents, you can own your own traits and then get them on a leash. It is important that you have sense of humor about the traits. Love them. Accept them. You are not bad for having them. There are positive and negatives associated with each trait. It's funny.

For example, Lauren's father Joel was judgmental. He was always right, and, according to Joel, no one else thought things through. He would raise an eyebrow with a look that said "you are an idiot for thinking that this will end well, but I am your father so I won't say anything." Lauren's version was to be judgmental about environmental issues. She was angry and arrogant toward people who wore leather, ate meat, and didn't recycle. She was mad all of the time and unhappy.

As another example, Lauren's mother was vain. Her #1 priority was to look nice all the time no matter what. Lauren's version was to say, "screw this" and wear cruddy clothes, not shave, don't take care of her body, etc. But she wasn't happy. Because she wasn't able to design. It was either be like her mom, or struggle as hard as she could to be the opposite.

These traits drive us. They are like little beings in your head that have their agendas. They each try to have their way. You need to be the dog walker. Aware of the dogs, where they want to go, and how much leash you want to give them.

Again, humor is important. You need to entertain yourself. This is funny and beautiful, and boy aren't we a work of art. If you beat yourself up about it, you won't be able to release it.

Each trait has good behind it. For example, arrogance can be used for the forces of good.

Class Participation

Participant 1: I found out that my mother is a superhero for everyone else's needs but her own. I will drop anything for anyone at any time.

Participant 2: My grandfather, father and I are all about brute force. Why go to the hardware store to get the right tool, when you have a hammer right here? But I realized this and swung to the other extreme. I analyze choices of tools to an extreme, and must have the perfect tool before I begin anything. I need to find a balance.

Participant 3: My mother had "the hamster on the wheel," where as deadline approaches, she runs faster and faster and assumes that people should accommodate her needs and move faster as well.

Participant 4: My parents don't notice other people's emotions. My dad is oblivious, and my mom doesn't care. I have a bit of both.

Participant 5: The trait: no one is good enough for my son. My dad checks out the credentials of the women who date his sons. My mom checks out their family background. In me, I look for the flaws in the people I meet.

Participant 6: The trait is that I avoid competition, because my father was overly-ambitious. And yet I went to good schools and did well, but I always downplayed it.

Lauren: So you mean that you really are ambitious but are closeted about it. So this is really a good trait, right? Something here is fishy. Something here is tangled.

Participant 6: I would lie about the schools I went to because when people hear "Harvard" or "Oxford" they treat me funny, so I hide it. I said I went to Radcliffe, since people don't know that school as well. Then I said I was doing graduate work in Cambridge, instead of saying Oxford.

Lauren: This is a wacky theory you have. Handed down from your parents. I don't want to seem like I tried hard, but I did. If you really want to go to Harvard, own what comes with Harvard. Otherwise, don't go to Harvard. You have a wacky relationship to achievement. Harvard is not allowed to be excellent, I am not allowed to be excellent. Don't worry, you don't get to experience any of it, because you deny excellence. Here's an extra homework assignment: write up your relationship to achievement and ambition. Why is it disgusting? You are going after your father because he was ambitious, but that is a good trait. There is a different trait that is bothering you that is not ambition.

Key point: There are seven traits that you have included in "ambition." And so you are blaming ambition for what bothered you about your dad. But really it was his coldness, or his distance, or his ruthlessness. So you avoid ambition like the plague.

Homework

1. Continue making and keeping promises, reporting in every Sunday. Report on whether you kept or did not keep your promises. Suggested format:
 - a. Describe the promise
 - b. Write for each promise "KEPT" or "NOT KEPT"
 - c. Describe the consequence
 - d. Write if you paid the consequence or not. IF no, by when will you pay it?
 - e. What are your stats on keeping the promise (e.g. I kept 5/7 days).
 - f. What did you notice about yourself? Where did you stop yourself? Where were you a chicken or brat, and where were you great? You can include this for any promise, but ALWAYS do this for every promise that was NOT KEPT.
2. Week 1—Identify one trait you want to take down, such as "Judgmental"
 - a. which parent does it come from?
 - b. describe their version of it.
 - c. Identify 2 different styles of the trait in you, ways that it manifests/shows up. For example,
 - i. I am judgmental when I watch and say nothing
 - ii. I am judgmental when I do say something
3. Week 2—Catch the trait and have some insights about it (getting the character/personality understood) [NOTE – RULE—DO NOT FEEL BAD ABOUT IT—get a sense of humor about it, have fun, laugh at it, love it.]