



You Make it Hard When You Make it Easy on Them

When my daughter was a Girl Scout, she was responsible for raising money for camp by selling boxes of cookies. After school and on weekends for about two weeks, Whitney would put on her uniform, grab her order sheet, and head out across the neighborhood to knock on doors and take orders. When the sales period ended, she'd tally up her sales and turn in her order in to her Scout leader. Several weeks later, the cookies would arrive and she would then venture back into the neighborhood with the inventory to deliver the goods and collect money. Prizes were awarded for those who sold the most cookies, and her mother and I chose to let her do all the work so that she could take full ownership of the results.

I haven't had a Girl Scout knock on my door since the mid-nineties. But the public is still buying up record numbers of Thin Mints, Tagalongs, and Samoas. The only thing that's changed is the sales process.

Today, Girl Scouts—or should I say the parents of Girls Scouts—simply get permission from the store manager at the local neighborhood supermarket to set up a card table on weekends and then hit up every shopper who's going out to get their local groceries. Gone are the sign-up order sheets. Now you pay and take your cookies from the inventory on the table. It couldn't be any easier on you—or the 10-year-old girl, right? All she has to do is wait until you're about 15 feet from the front door and shout, "Would you like to buy some Girl Scout cookies?" And all you have to do is play nice and ante up.

I'm not picking on Girl Scouts. They are only one of dozens of local groups, youth sports, and school clubs that rely on "parking lot panhandling" for their sustenance. And unlike the Girl Scouts, most of these groups sell overpriced items that are of little or no value to the consumer, but citizens feel compelled—or obligated—to contribute/donate in the name of 'community'.

Okay, so it's not as safe as it once was to send a kid out door-to-door. But parents could chaperone that activity with the same degree of time and energy they spend selling in front of the big box.

It just wouldn't be as easy.

And that's my point. When we make earning easy for kids, we make it hard for them as adults. In our desire to help children raise or earn money, we deprive them of the critical lessons that build character, engrain work ethic, and demonstrate the way the real world works.

Sure it's hard to bundle-up Junior on a cold morning and let him go solicit snow shoveling jobs from neighbors to earn his pocket money. And yes, it's easier to take Missy's order sheet to the office and pass it around your co-workers than it is to make her venture out to knock on doors and risk rejection. But rob them of those experiences—even if they end up falling short of their goal—and they'll likely show up at their first job interview not knowing how to introduce themselves and why it's imperative to maintain eye contact, be courteous and polite, and speak in complete, audible sentences. They'll also miss an impactful early introduction to the essential lessons of handling money, making change, and keeping accurate records. Separate them from the tough stuff and it's extremely likely they'll go into their teens and twenties with deeply rooted feelings of entitlement, expecting job and money to come easy.

The Take Away

Parents (and educators) walk the fine line that exists between supporting and encouraging kids/teens/young adults and shielding them from life's most important lessons. Really good parents (and educators) filter each teachable moment by asking, "is it time for me to step aside and let them discover the real consequences and rewards of their actions?"

Employers, meanwhile, aren't walking that line. They exist only to make a profit and grow their business. When interfacing with an employee— even a young one—the only filter they use is whether or not that employee is helping them to achieve that result. Performance is all that matters. If tender young egos are trampled in the process, so be it.

Parents – Your kids are going to experience the harsh realities of business when they get into the workplace; it's unavoidable. And the older they are when the natural consequences of their actions come back on them, the more likely they will be to irresponsibly blame the company or their boss for their circumstances. Sometimes the best thing you can do to help them succeed in business is to allow them to fail, and then encourage them to try again with a different approach.

Employers – Be leery about hiring mollycoddled kids. While they may appear to be nicely packaged potential stars at first glance, first impressions can be deceptive.

Take the time in an interview to discern how much parental involvement they've had in recent years. Ask who helps them figure out tough homework assignments and school projects. Ask how they get money for gas, car insurance, and just running around. Ask how do they plan to fund college. Have them tell you about a time when they got into a really difficult jam and how they managed to get out of it, and see if they mention mom or dad. Ask them to define hard work and give you an example of a time they gave their all, and what they learned through it.



You'll know you're talking to a performer when you hear words like, 'earn', 'sacrifice', and 'dedicate'. If not, you may be talking to a parking lot panhandler.

Finally, resist the temptation to pamper your young employees. In an attempt to be well-liked by your young staffers or to be seen as cool by letting them off easy, you may be enabling behaviors and attitudes that are damaging to your business, corroding your culture, and impeding their long term success.

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