

Coming Home: A Daddy Dilemma

by Jeff Westover

My day was nothing short of disastrous. We lived in high the Southern California mountains and it started out by having to put chains on the car just to get through the snow to work.

I traveled that day to Palm Springs where it was over 70 degrees on this particular January afternoon and endured a laughable series of workplace tragedies. One of my subordinates quit, my boss called me to fly up to Seattle for a weekend meeting and the latest reports showed my part of the company was struggling to meet objectives.

By the time I headed back up the mountain after stopping to put chains on again I was in no mood for diplomacy.

I was met at the door of our mountain home by the loud voices of our children, all stricken with a case of cabin fever brought on by a day of inclement weather.

One look at my wife and I could tell she had had a rough day too.

Almost immediately, I was hit with the dilemma of the day. I cannot recall now what the issue really was. But basically I imposed a death sentence for what amounted to a parking violation.

~ Same Planet, Different Worlds ~

As a stay at home mom, my wife deals with a world that revolves in a completely different direction than my own. I spend my days dealing with people, problems and adult situations. She deals with boo-boos and governing the big worlds trod by little feet.

At the end of the day, I just want to crawl in and find peace. And all she wants to do is escape and find a grown up to talk to.

It is when our worlds collide that we have problems -- especially when it comes to disciplining the kids. In my adult world, I have to practice political correctness and endure compromise. By the time I get home and assume the role of master of my domain, I have had enough of being patient. I just want to turn all the turmoil off.

Sometimes I find myself doing so with all guns blazing.

On this particular day, I failed to even consider all the circumstances of the case against my five year-old son. I heard two sentences of evidence and threw the book at him.

Suddenly my wife turned into his defense attorney. I tried to remind her that it was a violation of courtroom protocol to play the role of both prosecutor and defender.

But my lack of judicial use of parental authority had dismissed his case and put me on trial for abuse of power.

~ It's Not Fair ~

Naturally, none of this was fair. It was unfair that I would have to be placed in this position right when I came home. It was unfair for my wife to deal with the issue for hours on end alone. It was unfair for my son to be dealt with so harshly.

Over the years, I have developed a strategy to avoid chaos in the first 30 minutes when I arrive at home. Here are a few things fathers and husbands can do to avoid fire-fighting the minute they walk through the door at the end of the day:

Take a break. Back in the days when I was on a time clock, I use to take regular breaks. Those days are long past but I still try to find five minutes to call my wife an hour or so before coming home.

These short conversations can serve several purposes and they will provide a preview for what lies ahead. This lowers the prospect of a sneak attack right when you walk through the door.

Turn off the radio. Sometimes the only peace of the day comes on the ride home when you are driving through a dead zone for the cell phone. While the car is a great escape from both work and home, discipline yourself enough to allow ten minutes of "psych" time before you walk through the door.

As the old saying goes, 90 per cent of the game is half mental.

Don't be predictable.

"Dad is going to kill me," my kids often predict to each other. And that is because they know your reactions in the heat of battle.

But you've got time to diffuse things on the way home by doing what is advised above. Follow through on that preparation by reacting with a conscious strategy of using the lighter touch.

Not only will it help reduce the tension your spouse is under it will soften the hearts of the kids you have to address.

Nobody ever goes to school to be a parent. But the answers are always more of a question of self-discipline rather than the mere force of will. Ultimately, there is no Supreme Court to overturn our extreme decisions made in haste.