# Raising Leaders




*The Parents' Guide to Growing 5-to-15-Year-Olds Who Stand Out, Step Up, and Lead*

**Alan E. Nelson, Ed.D.**

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This book includes revised manuscripts from Dr. Nelson's KidLead Academy YouTube training videos and his podcast series.

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# Dedication & Thanks

To our three sons and their children—you are an endless source of inspiration and joy.

To the adults and trainers around the world who believe in developing the leadership potential of their families, schools, communities, cities and nations.

And, as always, to **Nancy**, my wife and partner and developing people.

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# The 5-15 Portal

## *Don't Miss the Bus*

I'm writing this in my 60s, yet I remember a winter morning when I was eight years old as vividly as if it were yesterday. I heard a horn honking outside my bedroom window. It was 7:30 a.m.—the exact time Don Berry arrived in his yellow school bus to pick me up every weekday. But that morning, my parents had somehow forgotten to wake me. I watched from upstairs as my dad walked outside and waved Don on. I had officially missed the bus.

That was the only time it ever happened, but it stuck with me. Missing something that matters—whether it's a meeting, a moment, or a milestone—can carry more weight than we realize at the time. And as a longtime leadership professor, I've seen too many well-meaning, busy parents miss something far more important than a school bus. They miss what I call the **5–15 Portal**—the window of time between ages 5 and 15 when children are most open, eager, and neurologically primed to learn leadership.

The word *portal* comes from the Latin *porta*, meaning gate. In architecture, it refers to the grand entryway of a cathedral—a space of significance and transformation. That's what the 5–15 age span is. It's not just a phase; it's a gateway. At no other time in life do cognitive growth, social-emotional awareness, and character formation align so

powerfully. And when that portal closes, it often doesn't reopen until middle age—usually around age 40, when most people first receive any form of formal leadership training.*

Society intuitively recognizes this. Kindergarten begins at five. By sixteen, kids start to drive and get jobs. They see themselves more as emerging adults than children. Their identities begin shifting away from the family and toward peers. That's why, by the time your child turns sixteen, it becomes much harder to teach the foundational leadership habits that come more naturally—when modeled and practiced earlier.

That's why I began investigating and experimenting with young leader development in 2005: to train parents and caring adults to recognize and develop leadership potential in kids during this critical window. Through research, curriculum design, and global training programs, my focus has been equipping parents to build leaders—not someday, but now, while it matters most.

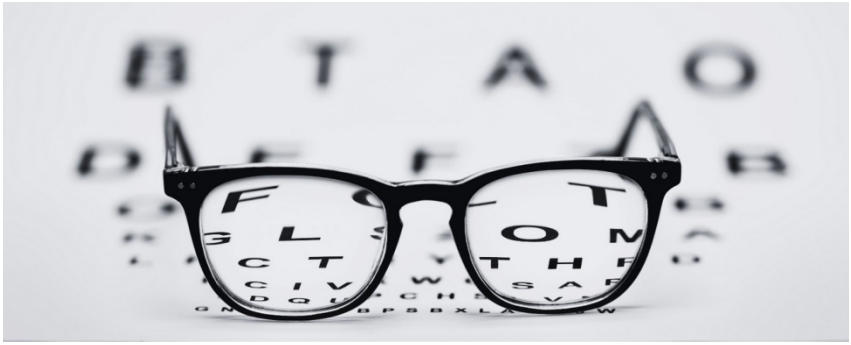
This book is a small sample of what's possible. It features sixteen short, five-minute chapters—many adapted from my *KidLead Academy* podcast and YouTube series. You can read one while waiting in the carpool line or winding down at night. Each chapter offers encouragement, insight, and simple action steps you can use right away. If you want to go deeper, we also offer a full 7-hour online course that walks you through how to teach your child to lead at home.

But whether you take the course or not, I'm grateful you picked up this book. If your child is between the ages of 5 and 15, you are standing at a powerful gateway. A moment that—if used intentionally—can shape their entire life.

Shhh… listen. Do you hear it? That's the bus coming down the road. Don't miss it.

—Alan E. Nelson, Ed.D.
Los Angeles

*Based on a survey of 17,000 managers, when asked when they receive their first, formal leadership training, 42 was the average age. (Results published in Harvard blog.)



Chapter 1

# Nearsighted Parenting

## *Your short game is sabotaging your child's future*

We all understand the value of clear vision. Good eyesight helps us navigate safely, avoid danger, and recognize what's coming. Nearsightedness—also known as myopia—means we can see what's right in front of us, but struggle to see the long view.

The term was coined by the Graeco-Roman physician Galen, from *meyein* (to close) and *ops* (eye). It literally describes the condition of a "closed eye." In leadership development, "myopic thinking" refers to short-sightedness—focusing on the urgent while neglecting the important. And in parenting, that metaphor couldn't be more relevant.

While I don't hold a medical degree in ophthalmology, my doctorate in leadership—and decades spent working with families, educators, and organizations—has convinced me that many well-meaning parents suffer from parental myopia. That is, they focus intensely on the immediate: grades, games, recitals, and routines, while overlooking what will matter most down the road—how their child shows up as an adult in the real world.

Most of our children's future waking hours will be spent interacting with systems—companies, teams, nonprofits, governments, and communities. The difference between thriving or struggling in these environments won't come down to IQ or talent alone. It will depend largely on leadership capacity: influence, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and the ability to collaborate and solve problems.

Yet many parents organize their family life around three common pillars of child development: academics, athletics, and the arts. I call this the "Triple-A" track. These are good pursuits. But when they dominate a child's schedule and identity, they can push out something with even greater lifelong value—leadership development.

Let's take a closer look.

**Academics: High Grades, Low Return Without Life Skills**

As someone who has taught at the University of Southern California, Pepperdine, UC Irvine, and the Naval Postgraduate School, I deeply value education. Our sons have attended public, private, and homeschool settings. Between them, they've earned multiple graduate degrees from Duke, USC, and the University of Florida. Education matters.

But academic excellence has limits. The world is full of intelligent people who struggle socially, emotionally, or professionally. They may have a polished résumé, but not the resilience to back it up.

Formal education builds content knowledge and cognitive ability. But it doesn't teach self-awareness, emotional regulation, initiative, or collaborative leadership—skills essential for long-term success. A 2021 World Economic Forum report listed the top ten skills for the future. Among them? Leadership, emotional intelligence, and complex problem-solving. GPA didn't make the cut.

Many parents unknowingly overinvest in academics—pushing AP classes, paying for SAT prep, and stressing over college admissions.

When the Varsity Blues scandal broke, revealing wealthy parents bribing their kids' way into elite schools, I was teaching at one of those institutions. Ironically, some of those students might have made it on their own—had their parents not tried to manipulate the system.

I once spoke with a Stanford admissions officer who said, "We reject perfect-score applicants and valedictorians every year. Parents are baffled. But we're not just looking for credentials—we're looking for contribution." Their goal? Finding students who will shape the culture of the campus, not just survive it.

As Henry Ford once said, *"I hire people smarter than me all the time."* Intelligence opens doors. But influence, integrity, and initiative are what build lasting success—and those aren't found in textbooks alone.

**Athletics: Great for Character, Limited Shelf Life**

Our family has logged many hours on the sidelines—soccer, baseball, tennis, basketball. I've coached teams, carpooled to practices, and stood cheering in the rain like any sports parent. One of our sons now trains a top MLB player. I value sports.

But I also value perspective.

According to the Aspen Institute, American families spend between $30 and $40 billion annually on youth sports. Yet most kids stop playing by age 11. The average participation span? Less than three years. And the odds of making it to the pros? In basketball, for example, only 1% of high school players earn a Division I scholarship—and just 1% of those make it to the NBA.

Sports can teach teamwork, discipline, and physical fitness. But athletic ability fades. Being part of a team doesn't guarantee the skills needed to lead one.

Leadership requires strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate others under pressure. These aren't built by drills

alone. And while sports trophies often end up in storage bins, leadership capacity compounds over time—because it's built on character.

As leadership expert Warren Bennis put it, *"The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born—that there is a genetic factor to leadership. That's nonsense. Leaders are made."*

**Arts: Beauty, Expression, and Balance**

I played trumpet in my high school band. My wife acted in theater productions and sang in a college ensemble. Our granddaughters take piano lessons and dance classes. We've invested in the arts, and we believe in their value. But we also recognize limits.

The average income for a full-time professional in the arts hovers around $71,000 annually—if they can find full-time work. And that's for those who make it. Beyoncé has released 89 songs—only 22 of them have become hits. That's a 25% success rate for one of the most famous artists in the world.

Creative pursuits bring joy, confidence, and emotional outlet. But most artistic training doesn't focus on skills like organizational leadership, ethical influence, or systems thinking—qualities that fuel long-term impact in nearly every career.

Art should absolutely be part of a child's experience—but it shouldn't crowd out the opportunity to develop the leadership mindset they'll need to thrive.

**The Lasting Value of Leadership Training**

Leadership development builds what the Triple-A track often misses: transferable skills that grow more valuable with time. Clear communication. Conflict resolution. Vision casting. Adaptability. Emotional regulation. Ethical influence. These aren't just workplace perks—they're life essentials.

In a 2022 Gallup report, employees who demonstrated strong leadership traits—especially adaptability and influence—were 29% more likely to be promoted and 42% more likely to report high job satisfaction. Another study by the Center for Creative Leadership showed that individuals who received leadership training early in life were significantly more likely to hold executive positions by age 40.

You've probably heard the saying: *"You get hired for what you know, but promoted for how you lead."* It's true. Technical skills might get your child into the room. But leadership is what keeps them at the table.

**A Call to See Further**

Nearsighted parenting happens when we over-prioritize what's urgent and under-invest in what's lasting. Academics, athletics, and the arts are valuable—but they are incomplete. To truly thrive, your child needs more than achievement. They need adaptability, purpose, and the ability to influence others for good. These qualities are the result of intentional leadership development.

That's why we created *KidLead Academy*—the world's first online course to equip parents to develop leadership potential in their kids. The program consists of 7 hours of video content, broken into 10–30 minute segments, so you can watch from home, the office, or on the go. It's designed to help families integrate leadership activities into everyday life—fun, free, and profoundly formative.

Visit www.kidlead.com/kla or email info@kidlead.com to learn more.

**See the Future. Lead Today.**

Raising great grown-ups isn't easy—but it's worth it. It requires the courage to choose what matters most, not just what's most popular. To think beyond grades and games and recitals, and invest in the kind of skills that last a lifetime. If we want our kids to lead well someday, we must train them to lead today. So cheer for the biology test. Applaud the recital. Snap the game-day photo. But don't forget to build your

child's ability to influence with empathy, wisdom, and courage. Because if you want your child to succeed, develop them to lead.





Chapter 2

# The Science of Why It's Better to Be a Boss

*What Research Reveals About the Perks of Leadership—and Why Parents Should Care*

**Parenting Without a Playbook**

Let's be honest: as parents, we wing it a lot of the time. Even those of us who finished four years or more of college—some with graduate degrees—rarely crack open a book when it comes to raising kids. Go figure. We study literature, law, engineering, or business, but when it comes to parenting, we rely more on memory, instinct, and what we picked up along the way. It's a wonder we're not more surprised by the outcome.

Our children often receive a potluck of parenting practices. Some of us mimic the way we were raised. Others go in the opposite direction because we disliked our parents' approach. Add in the unique chemistry

of Mom and Dad's personalities, combine that with a child's temperament and birth order, then sprinkle in extended family influence, friend groups, household income, and cultural values—and voilà, you've got the developmental stew that cooks up a future adult.

The problem isn't a lack of love or effort. The problem is that this patchwork approach, while well-intended, tends to leave gaps. And one of the most consistent gaps I've seen—both in homes and in schools—is the failure to develop leadership in kids.

**The Leadership Development Gap**

Over the past two decades, I've focused much of my work on this very issue. The consequences of this leadership gap can be subtle at first. Children may grow up obedient and well-behaved, but unsure of how to make decisions, solve problems, or step into influence. As adults, many drift through careers without direction, waiting for someone else to tell them what to do.

What's more striking is that most grown-ups never receive formal leadership training until they're well into their careers. As I noted in the introduction, it takes an average of 20 years before a company invests in leadership development. Imagine how much more prepared—and confident—those individuals might be if we started earlier. The Center for Creative Leadership posted a survey of 462 global leaders. Nearly half (49%) said leadership development should begin by age 10; 89% said by 17, and nearly everyone agreed by 21 (2012).

Here's the point: When parents fail to develop their child's leadership potential, they risk limiting not only their child's career trajectory but their overall quality of life. Leadership isn't just a workplace role. It's a mindset—and a skillset—that influences every domain of a person's life.

**The Research Is Clear**

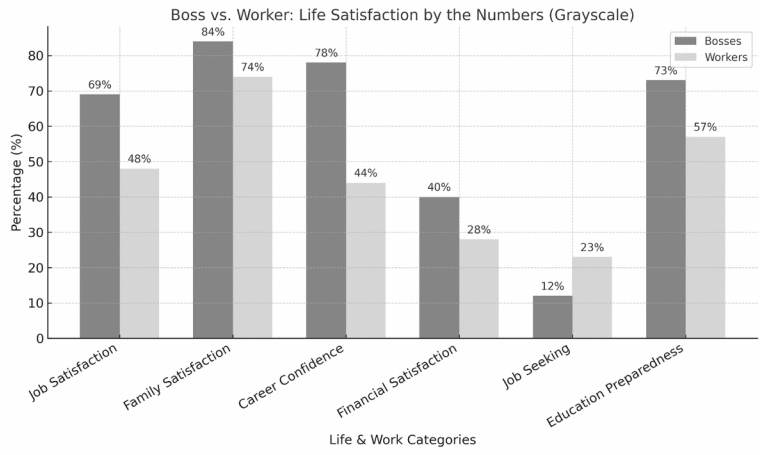
As a professor, I've learned to trust the science. The data overwhelmingly supports the idea that leadership has long-term

benefits, both professionally and personally. Consider this snapshot of the research:

- Managers possess higher job satisfaction than employees.[1,5]
- Supervisors have significantly higher work engagement* than line-level employees.[2]
  (*Highly engaged employees are more positive about their jobs and organizations, treat co-workers with more respect, help others improve work efficacy, continually improve work-related skills, are highly active, and demonstrate in- and extra-role performance.) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2009)
- Supervisors have lower turnover intentions than line-level employees.[3]
- Supervisors tend to have stronger non-financial recognition needs and attach less significance to financial rewards.[4]
- Higher job status is associated with greater workplace community and commitment to organizational goals.[6]
- Findings indicate satisfaction increases with the number of employees being supervised and was associated with individual power values.[7]
- Supervisors rated the following work qualities higher than non-supervisors: satisfaction, interesting work, job autonomy, helping others, job useful to society, pay, promotional opportunities, relations with co-workers and management, contact with others, schedule flexibility, and less physical effort.[8]
- Top managers with children are less likely than other working parents to say parenthood has been an obstacle to job advancement (33% to 17%).[9]

- Top managers are more likely to say their current position is their career (78% vs. 44%) rather than just a job to get them by (12% vs. 23%).[10]
- 84% of bosses describe themselves as “very satisfied” with their family situation, versus 74% of workers.[11]
- 69% of bosses are more satisfied with their current position than workers (48%).[12]
- 40% of top managers are very satisfied with their financial situation compared to 28% for workers.[13]
- Bosses are more likely to say they have sufficient education and training to help them succeed (73% vs. 57%).[14]
- Only half as many bosses are likely to be looking for a job (12%) than workers (23%).
- Managers often have better health. One reason is that the managerial position offers access to more resources that promote health.[15]

These findings are striking. They demonstrate that leadership is not just a position—it’s a pathway to greater engagement, resilience, autonomy, and overall life satisfaction.



**Why Are We Still Raising Followers?**

Despite all this evidence, the truth is that most parents are better at raising followers than leaders. And it's not their fault. That's the model most of us inherited.

We tell kids to follow instructions, to be polite, to stay in line. We reward compliance and discourage defiance. And while there's nothing wrong with respect and order, we often forget that leadership involves taking initiative, speaking up, managing conflict, and influencing others. These skills rarely grow in environments focused solely on obedience.

When we fail to teach leadership, we send our children into adulthood vulnerable—unprepared to navigate teams, inspire others, or take ownership of their lives. It's not that kids can't lead. It's that we haven't shown them how.

**A Practical Tool for Modern Parents**

That's why we created **KidLead Academy**—the first-of-its-kind online course designed to train parents to develop their children's leadership potential. This isn't a corporate seminar in disguise. It's a 7-hour, executive-caliber, practical program designed specifically for families. It walks you through how to identify leadership tendencies, reinforce positive habits, and structure home life in ways that cultivate leadership.

Most parents never learned how to lead, let alone teach it. That's okay. You don't need to be a CEO to raise one. You just need a framework and the right tools.

To learn more or get started, visit **www.kidlead.com/kla** or email us at **info@kidlead.com**. Whether you have five minutes or an hour, this is a resource designed to meet you where you are.

**Leadership Has Its Privileges**

Years ago, American Express ran an ad campaign with the slogan: *"Membership has its privileges."* It was catchy. And it was true. But here's something else that's true: Leadership has its privileges, too. Leaders enjoy more than just authority or influence. They experience deeper engagement, stronger identity, more control over their time, and higher levels of personal fulfillment. They shape the environments they're in, instead of simply reacting to them.

As parents, if we want to give our kids a head start, we need to prepare them not just to follow rules—but to guide others, to see solutions, and to act with courage and empathy. Savvy parents who want to set their kids up for success don't wait for someone else to teach leadership. They take the reins. They model it, nurture it, and yes—coach it at home.

The science tells us that developing your child to lead will set them up for greater satisfaction in life as a whole. Who wouldn't want that for their kids?

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Chapter 3

# The Five Parents You Don't Want to Be

*If You Want to Raise a Leader*

**Alan's Story**

I grew up on a farm in southwest Iowa. I'm an only child, which meant that when I wasn't in school, I was working. That's how it goes when you're a kid on a farm without siblings. My dad and I would tackle all sorts of chores together. At first, I was the assistant—handing him tools, closing gates, holding the flashlight while he fixed something. By the time I was ten, I was driving the tractor to pick up hay, cleaning stalls for our hogs, and serving as his go-to helper.

That childhood experience instilled a strong work ethic and a deep respect for responsibility. But one thing I never really experienced at home was leadership. There was only room for one leader in our house—and it wasn't me or my mom. It was my dad.

Now, let me be clear: I loved my dad. I still do. This isn't a character

assassination. It's a reflection. As a kid, I didn't have the vocabulary or perspective to understand the dynamic. But looking back as an adult, I see that while I may have been learning to follow orders, I wasn't learning to lead. At school, it was a different story. Classmates often looked to me to organize games at recess, and I was regularly chosen as a team captain. Leadership showed up in me naturally—but it didn't have much of a place in my home.

My dad passed away in July of 2023. A few years before that, during some heart-to-heart conversations, he acknowledged that he hadn't known how to raise child, let alone a leader. He apologized, more than once, for being too hard, too controlling. Like so many young parents, he did his best with what he knew. And still, the experience left a mark.

That reflection became one of the hidden motivations behind starting KidLead. Most people know the public reason: I began to realize that trying to change adult leaders had a low return on investment. Adults are generally interested in leadership, but they're also busy and set in their ways. They've already hardened into habits. I started saying, "We need to reach leaders when they're moldable, not moldy."

But the private reason was more personal. I wanted to create the kind of resource my parents could have used to help me grow as a leader. I wanted to provide tools that could help well-meaning moms and dads recognize the leadership potential in their children—especially during those key years between ages five and fifteen.

In the process of doing this work, I've identified five common parenting styles that unintentionally stifle leadership growth. These aren't "bad parents." In fact, many of them are doing what they think is best. But intention doesn't always equal impact. Let's take a look at the five parent types you don't want to be—if your goal is to raise a leader.

**The Dictator: "Because I Said So"**

This parenting style is rooted in control. Dictator parents run their households with strict rules, minimal discussion, and an emphasis on

obedience. These are the parents who view questioning as disrespect and alternative ideas as rebellion.

When a child tries to explain their side of a situation or offer a creative suggestion, the conversation is often shut down with a phrase like, “Just do what you’re told.”

The irony is that this kind of home environment teaches children how to follow—but not how to think. They may learn discipline, but they don’t get to practice influence.

Developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind found that authoritarian parenting—high control, low warmth—is correlated with lower self-confidence, weaker problem-solving skills, and poorer social competence. Obedience becomes the ultimate goal, rather than independence or initiative.

*Ask yourself:*

- Do I tend to shut down disagreements quickly?
- Do I say “because I said so” more often than “what do you think”?
- Do I require everything to be run through me?

If so, you may be unintentionally discouraging the very traits that help children grow into thoughtful, adaptive leaders.

**The Tiger: “Be the Best”**

Tiger parents are focused on performance. They push hard because they love hard. They want their children to excel—to get straight A’s, earn trophies, and check off every box of success.

The problem isn’t the desire to see your child achieve. It’s the pressure and ownership transfer. The parent is often the one setting the goals, choosing the activities, and leading the charge. The child just follows directions.

Leadership, however, isn't about compliance. It's about initiative. When everything is decided for a child, they don't learn to own their growth. They learn to seek approval.

Research from Suniya Luthar and later by Yoonsun Choi and others has shown that intense pressure to succeed can result in high anxiety, depression, and an erosion of intrinsic motivation. The child learns to perform for others but loses connection to their own voice.

*Ask yourself:*

- Do I prioritize results over effort or enjoyment?
- Do I push my child into activities they didn't choose?
- Am I raising a high-achiever or a confident decision-maker?

Tiger parents often produce impressive resumes—but those don't always translate into strong, independent leaders.

**The Helicopter: "Let Me Do That for You"**

Helicopter parents mean well. They're protective and nurturing—but sometimes, too much so. These parents step in to shield their children from failure, frustration, or risk.

It might start with forgotten homework that you drop off at school "just this once." Or micromanaging every detail of a science project. Over time, the message becomes: "You can't do this without me."

Segrin and colleagues (2013) found that helicopter parenting is associated with higher anxiety, lower resilience, and reduced autonomy. Children who aren't allowed to fail in small ways don't learn how to recover, adapt, or lead.

*Ask yourself:*

- Do I regularly fix problems before my child can try?

- Do I speak for them more than letting them speak for themselves?
- Do I view small risks as big dangers?

Leaders aren't born by avoiding challenges. They're shaped by learning to rise after they fall.

**The Friend: "I Don't Want Them to Be Mad at Me"**

Friend parents are driven by a desire to be liked. They tend to avoid conflict and often let the child take the lead, even when the child isn't developmentally ready to do so.

This might show up in giving into every food preference, changing household rules on a whim, or letting kids make big decisions (like bedtimes or screen limits) without guidance.

While the intention is kindness, the result is often confusion. Children need structure and boundaries to feel safe. Without them, even strong-willed kids can flounder.

Permissive parenting, as identified by Baumrind and further explored by Lamborn and colleagues, has been linked to impulsivity, low self-regulation, and difficulty respecting authority—all qualities that hinder effective leadership.

*Ask yourself:*

- Do I avoid saying no to keep the peace?
- Do I let my child make decisions they're not yet equipped for?
- Do I lead with consistency, or cave when things get uncomfortable?

Healthy leadership includes setting boundaries—not to restrict your child, but to help them grow within safe, clear limits.

**The MIA: "I'm Just Too Busy"**

The MIA (Missing in Action) parent is usually not absent out of neglect, but out of distraction. They're working hard, managing life, and doing their best—but their attention is scattered. They're physically present but emotionally unavailable.

Leadership requires mentoring, modeling, and conversation. And those things take time. Kids in MIA households often stop asking for input because they're tired of waiting for it. They may turn to peers, media, or social influencers to shape their identity and values.

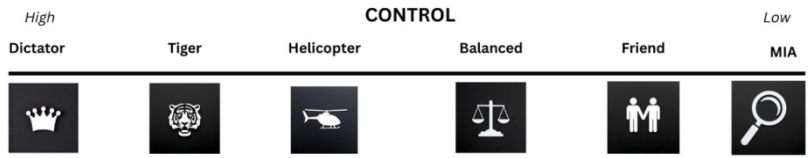
According to a 2019 Common Sense Media report, high parental screen use is correlated with children feeling less emotionally connected at home. Kids begin to internalize the message that they're not worth full attention.

*Ask yourself:*

- Do I regularly put my device down and look my child in the eye?
- Do I follow through on one-on-one time—or keep promising "next time"?
- Do I see leadership as something my child will figure out "eventually" rather than something to actively teach?

Being emotionally present—even in short, consistent bursts—is one of the most powerful gifts a parent can give.

**The Control Continuum**



According to the graphic above, you'll see "Too Much Control" on the left end and "Too Little Control" on the right. Most parents fall somewhere along the spectrum. Dictator, Tiger, and Helicopter parents lean toward over-control. Friend and MIA parents lean toward under-control.

But just to the right of middle sits the sweet spot: the **Healthy Parent Leader**. The reason why it's slightly right is because most parents today overprotect their kids and as a result, discourage leadership skills that grow best with supportive independence.

This is the parent who balances structure with freedom, presence with independence, love with leadership. It's the parent who coaches instead of commands, guides instead of pushes, and equips instead of rescues.

**Becoming a Healthy Parent Leader**

Here are five simple ways to shift into the kind of parenting that builds leaders:

1. **Coach, Don't Command.** Ask open-ended questions. Let them make age-appropriate decisions. Invite them to help set family plans or house rules.
2. **Guide, Don't Push.** Offer new experiences but follow their interests. Cheer for their progress—not just their performance.
3. **Be Present, Not Perfect.** Carve out 10–15 minutes a day for focused, undistracted connection. Small moments of attention can shape lifelong habits.
4. **Lead with Love and Boundaries.** Say no when needed, explain why, and follow through. Calm, consistent limits build security and respect.
5. **Equip, Don't Rescue.** Let them fail forward. Talk about what went wrong, what went right, and what they'd do differently next time.

**Final Thoughts**

If you saw yourself in one—or more—of these five parenting styles, don't panic. That's not a sign of failure. It's a sign of growth. Parenting is a leadership journey. When you reflect, recalibrate, and choose to show up differently, you're modeling exactly what leadership is all about. You are your child's first and most influential leadership coach. And your willingness to lead with intention today could shape their capacity to lead tomorrow.




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Chapter 4

# Lead Less, Empower More

## *A Strong Parent's Guide to Improving Your Self-Awareness*

Let's be honest—many of us who are confident leaders at work can find it surprisingly difficult to let go of the reins at home. When you're used to steering teams, making decisions quickly, and holding others accountable, it's natural to bring that same leadership energy into parenting. But here's the twist: raising a young leader means resisting the urge to over-lead.

If you've ever caught yourself interrupting your child mid-sentence, redoing their chores "the right way," or deciding everything from their wardrobe to their weekend plans, you're not alone. Your instincts are rooted in care and competence. But what helped you succeed in your career can sometimes stifle your child's growth—especially if they, too, have natural leadership potential.

Or perhaps they don't. Maybe your child is more reflective than driven,

more of a collaborator than a commander. And if you're a high-wired leader, you might misinterpret this wiring as weakness, trying to "fix" them by making them more like you. But leadership doesn't always look the same. Some of the greatest leaders are quiet influencers, thoughtful problem-solvers, or deeply empathetic motivators. By trying to replicate ourselves, we risk crushing a leadership style that may be just as powerful—just different.

As Stephen R. Covey once said,
"Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves."

That applies to parenting, too. Today, we're going to unpack why self-awareness is crucial when raising a child who's wired to lead—or even one who isn't—and how to empower them rather than overpower them.

**Why Strong Parents Sometimes Overstep**
Strong-willed parents often raise strong-willed kids. That's both a gift and a growth area. If you're achievement-oriented, solution-focused, and quick to take control, those strengths can unintentionally overshadow your child's budding independence. When we manage everything for them, we risk training them to wait for direction, rather than think critically or take initiative. This isn't about becoming passive or permissive. It's about adjusting your leadership style so your child develops the ability to lead themselves—and eventually, others. That shift starts with one of the most powerful leadership tools: self-awareness.

According to a study by the University of Michigan, Self-aware parents are 30% more likely to raise confident, independent children. And in the workplace, Harvard Business Review found that Leaders who foster autonomy in their teams see a 50% increase in creativity and problem-solving. That principle holds true in families, too. Children who are trusted to make choices—and recover from mistakes—develop stronger internal motivation, problem-solving ability, and resilience.

**When Your Strength Becomes Their Stress**

For strong parents, the risk isn't only over management. It's intimidation. Some kids—especially those with gentle or more reserved personalities—can feel emotionally steamrolled by high-energy, dominant parents. When parents demand confidence instead of modeling it, or treat uncertainty as incompetence, children retreat. They stop speaking up, avoid risk, and rely on parental input rather than their own instincts.

This doesn't mean you should shrink back or pretend to be someone you're not. It means you must become a leader of leaders, not just a leader of followers. That requires deep awareness of your own wiring—and careful encouragement of theirs.

**Self-Assessment: Are You Empowering or Overshadowing?**

Take a moment to reflect on your parenting style. Rate yourself from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always):

1. I allow my child to make decisions, even if I think they might make a mistake.
2. I encourage my child to voice opinions, even when they differ from mine.
3. I avoid jumping in to solve my child's problems, giving them space to figure things out.
4. I recognize when my leadership tendencies are overshadowing my child's growth.
5. I model humility by admitting my own mistakes and showing that I'm learning too.

**Results**

- 5–10 Points: You may be leading a bit too tightly. Don't worry—keep reading for strategies to loosen the reins.

- 11–20 Points: You're building a foundation of shared leadership. Focus on consistency.
- 21–25 Points: You're modeling exactly what young leaders need—well done!

**4 Ways to Build Independence While Staying Engaged**

*Encourage Decision-Making—Even When It's Imperfect*
Leadership isn't about always getting it right. It's about learning through action. Give your child opportunities to make age-appropriate decisions, even when you see potential pitfalls. This builds ownership and confidence.

Let them plan part of a weekend activity, choose how to allocate their allowance, or decide how to solve a conflict with a sibling. If the outcome is less than ideal, resist the urge to say "I told you so." Instead, ask: "What did you learn from that? What would you do differently next time?"

Our oldest son has encourage our two granddaughters (aged 7 and 9 at the time of this chapter) to organize lemonade stands and craft sales. Once, when the signage wasn't visible enough and few people stopped by, the girls felt discouraged. Instead of stepping in and redoing everything, the dad asked them to analyze what could be improved—and they tested a new strategy the next weekend. Sales doubled, but more importantly, so did confidence.

*Practice Active Listening—Your Voice Shouldn't Be the Only One*
Children of strong leaders can often feel like they live under someone else's shadow. Active listening teaches them their ideas matter. It also helps them feel respected—crucial for a developing leader.

"The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood." – Ralph Nichols

When your child presents an idea, pause. Don't evaluate it right away. Instead, reflect it back: "So you're thinking we should try ____—tell me

more about what you'd hope happens." This keeps them thinking and signals that their input has value.

*Step Back—Let Them Struggle a Little*
Growth often comes through discomfort. Your child needs opportunities to face setbacks and figure things out without a safety net every time.

In her parenting research, Dr. Jennifer Breheny Wallace found that children whose parents allowed them to face and overcome challenges independently were significantly more resilient and had higher long-term self-esteem. When your child is stuck—say, on a school project or with a social situation—offer support without solving. Ask open-ended questions:

- "What's one idea you haven't tried yet?"
- "If you were advising a friend, what would you suggest?"

Letting them wrestle with challenges now builds the resilience and creativity they'll need later.

*Model Collaborative Leadership*
Children watch how we lead at home. If your leadership style always demands compliance, they'll either mimic it—or quietly withdraw. Show that great leaders listen, adapt, and make space for others to contribute.

*Involve your child in real decisions*, like planning family events, deciding chore rotations, or setting savings goals. Let them present ideas—and help them refine those ideas collaboratively. During a family budget talk, one mom invited her 12-year-old to present an idea for how to save for a vacation. The child proposed cutting back on takeout once a week. The whole family agreed—and celebrated when the savings added up. That child now feels like a key contributor in the family.

**Final Thoughts: Leadership Requires Letting Go**
If you're a high-capacity leader, you already have what it takes to raise one—but it might require dialing down your strengths just a bit.

Influence doesn’t require control. In fact, the more room you give your child to experiment, decide, and lead in small ways, the more they’ll grow into someone others want to follow.

“You don't inspire your teammates by showing them how amazing you are. You inspire them by showing them how amazing they are.” – Robyn Benincasa

Parenting a young leader takes intentionality, patience, and self-awareness. By creating space for your child to explore their voice, make their own choices, and fail forward, you’re not just raising a capable kid—you’re raising a confident, resilient leader.

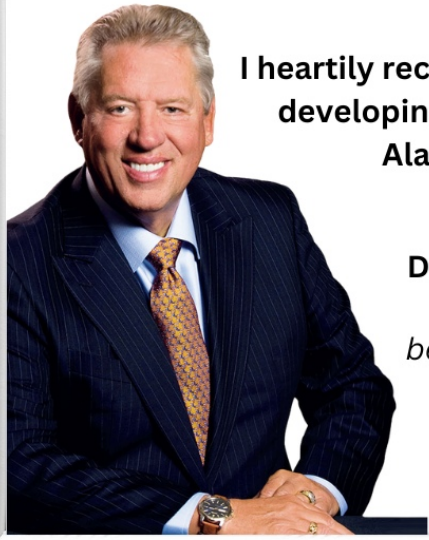
So take a deep breath. Step back. And trust the process. Because sometimes the best way to lead… is to let them.






## More resources like this:

- **YouTube Channel** (free training videos): www.youtube.com/@kidleadacademy
- **Free webinar**: www.kidlead.com/webinar
- **Free parenting assessment**: www.kidlead.com/free-assessment
- **Free podcasts & assessments on children**: www.leadyoungtraining.com
- **KidLead Academy** the world's greatest parent training IF you want to raise leaders: kidlead.com/kla

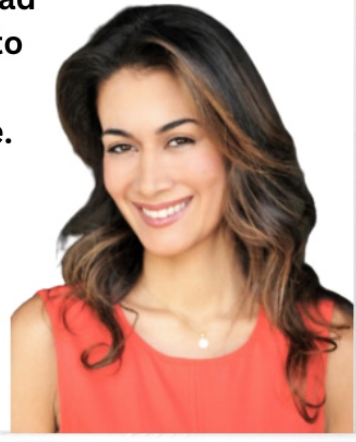


**I heartily recommend the work of developing young leaders by Alan E. Nelson.**

**Dr. John C. Maxwell**
*-New York Times bestselling author & world renowned leader trainer*

**I highly recommend KidLead Academy. It's such a gift to be able to teach kids leadership at a young age.**

**Dr. Sandra Mashihi**
*-organizational psychologist, author, consultant, mother of two*





Chapter 5

# Seagull Parenting

## *How Reactive Parenting Undermines Resilience and Leadership*

Dr. Ken Blanchard, the bestselling author and leadership expert, coined the term *seagull management* in 1985. I've had the opportunity to meet with him a few times, and he's been enthusiastic in his support of KidLead. Living in Escondido, California—just a few miles from the Pacific—he's had a front-row seat to seagull behavior. And living near Malibu myself, I know the drill. Seagulls swoop in, make noise, leave a mess, and fly off.

Seagull management refers to a style of leadership where managers only appear when something goes wrong. They jump into the situation, squawk about what's wrong, offer hasty and often uninformed advice, and then vanish. The result? Confusion, resentment, and disempowered team members.

Unfortunately, this same pattern shows up in parenting more often than we realize. When we parent like seagull managers, we undercut our children's ability to grow into capable leaders. Let's explore what seagull

parenting looks like—and how to avoid it.

**1. Seagulls Swoop in Without Understanding**

Seagull parents rush into problems without taking the time to understand them. Picture this: your child is struggling with a homework assignment. Instead of asking what's confusing or encouraging them to explain their thought process, you take the pencil and do it for them. It might feel helpful in the moment, but the real cost is robbing your child of a chance to think critically and develop problem-solving skills.

"Don't handicap your children by making their lives easy." – Robert A. Heinlein

Good leadership requires decision-making, independence, and resilience. When we swoop in too fast, we send the message that they're not capable.

**2. Seagulls Make a Lot of Noise**

This is the parent who reacts with loud frustration, judgment, or sarcasm when a child makes a mistake. Your daughter spills milk while trying to pour it herself. Instead of saying, "Nice try! Let's clean this up together," you snap, "Why can't you be more careful?"

Criticism delivered without empathy discourages risk-taking. It also undermines your child's willingness to try again, which is essential for learning leadership.

According to a study published in *Developmental Psychology*, children who receive supportive rather than harsh parental responses are 30% more likely to persist through difficult tasks.

**3. Seagulls Leave a Mess**

Seagull parenting means offering quick, superficial advice instead of thoughtful guidance. When your child is upset about a friend issue and you say, "Just ignore them," you miss an opportunity to teach emotional

intelligence.

Real leaders need to understand nuance. Social situations are complex, and kids benefit when parents help them work through emotions and consider multiple perspectives.

“Leadership is not about being in charge. It’s about taking care of those in your charge.” – Simon Sinek

**4. Seagulls Fly In and Fly Out**

This is the hit-and-run parenting move: correct the behavior, then disappear. Your child hasn’t cleaned their room, so you yell, “Get it done now!”—and then you go back to your email. Later, you find the room half-done and your child overwhelmed.

Compare that with sitting down, helping your child break the task into steps, and modeling how to do one drawer. That hands-on time communicates that you're not just there to bark orders—you're there to help them learn.

**The Research on Inconsistent Parenting**

Research supports the damaging effects of reactive, inconsistent parenting. A 2020 study in the *Journal of Family Psychology* found that children with inconsistent parental involvement were more likely to exhibit emotional regulation issues and lower academic engagement.

In contrast, children raised in responsive environments—where parents balanced support and challenge—developed greater problem-solving abilities, stronger executive functioning, and more resilience.

“What we model is what they become.” – Unknown

**Seagull Parenting Undermines Leadership Development**

If we want to raise future leaders, we need to resist the urge to be reactive, noisy, and absent. Leadership is not built through fear or

criticism, but through consistent, empathetic guidance.

Children become leaders when they:

- Learn to solve problems instead of having problems solved for them
- Feel safe to make mistakes and try again
- Receive thoughtful, not dismissive, feedback
- See adults modeling emotional regulation and perseverance

A 2022 report from *Psychological Science* found that children who were regularly encouraged to reflect on their decisions and consequences were 45% more likely to demonstrate leadership qualities in adolescence.

Another study from the *Harvard Center on the Developing Child* concluded that "scaffolded autonomy"—a parenting approach that offers guidance while allowing for independence—was strongly correlated with the development of executive function and leadership readiness.

**A Better Approach: Presence Over Panic**

Here's how we can do better:

**1. Ask Before You Act**
When your child is struggling, resist the urge to fix it immediately. Instead, ask questions like, "What part is tricky?" or "What have you tried so far?"

**2. Stay Calm and Coach**
Rather than raising your voice, take a breath and use a calm tone. This teaches emotional regulation and encourages problem-solving.

**3. Replace Quick Fixes with Guided Support**
Instead of "Just ignore them," try: "Why do you think your friend

reacted that way? What could you do next time?"

**4. Follow Through, Don't Fly Away**
Be present through the learning process. Celebrate effort, reflect on challenges, and stay consistent in your support.

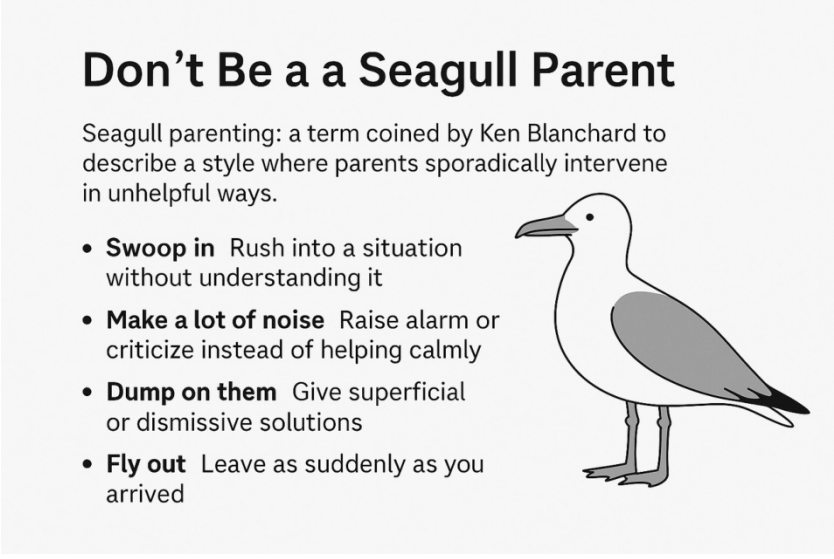
"Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate."
– Anonymous

**Final Thoughts**

Seagull parenting is tempting—especially when life is busy and patience is short. But when we swoop, squawk, and fly away, we miss powerful moments to shape our kids into thoughtful, capable leaders.

Instead of reacting with noise and hurry, let's respond with patience, curiosity, and consistency. The next time you feel like diving into a problem, pause first. Ask. Listen. Then lead.

Because our goal isn't to fix everything for our children—it's to equip them to lead themselves.



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Chapter 6

# You Don’t Have to Be a Leader to Raise One

*How Insecure Parents Can Confidently Grow Leadership at Home*

**Leading from Behind**

What do you do if you’re a parent who’s never been in a formal leadership role? Maybe you’ve always worked in supportive positions—behind the scenes rather than in the spotlight. It has nothing to do with your intelligence, capability, or passion. You may be someone who is thoughtful, dependable, and full of heart. But when it comes to guiding your child into leadership, you might feel a little out of your depth.

You’re not alone. In fact, many parents feel this way. They want their children to grow up confident, responsible, and capable of influencing

others in positive ways. But when they think about teaching leadership, they imagine needing experience in public speaking, strategic planning, or managing teams. That gap—between what we think leadership is and what it actually looks like in family life—can feel intimidating.

The truth is, leadership is not limited to the boardroom or the battlefield. It's not reserved for extroverts, entrepreneurs, or elected officials. Leadership starts in everyday life, in the ordinary moments where we help our children take initiative, solve problems, make decisions, and relate well to others. You don't need a title to be a leader. And you certainly don't need one to raise one.

In this chapter, we'll explore how even the most low-key or insecure parent can nurture leadership potential in their child. All it takes is a willingness to engage, model, and encourage. With a little intentionality, you can help your child grow as a leader—even if you've never seen yourself as one.

**Leadership Begins with Presence, Not Position**

One of the most common misconceptions is that leadership is about power, confidence, or commanding a room. In reality, for children, leadership is often learned through presence—through the way we show up consistently, listen attentively, and guide patiently. Research has shown that parenting behaviors such as emotional support, consistent expectations, and modeling problem-solving skills are far more influential in shaping a child's future than a parent's professional status. A meta-analysis by Fan and Chen (2001) found that parental involvement and encouragement were strongly correlated with student achievement and personal development—even more than income or educational background.

This is good news for parents feeling underqualified. What matters most isn't whether you've led a team at work, but whether you're showing up with curiosity and care in your own home. Leadership is cultivated in the carpool line, around the dinner table, and during those everyday

moments that don't seem like they matter—but they do.

**Start Small: Decision-Making Through Everyday Choices**

One of the simplest ways to help your child grow as a leader is to invite them to make real decisions. This doesn't have to involve high-stakes moments. In fact, small choices are often the best starting point, especially for younger children.

A helpful activity is to let your child plan a family day out. You might offer a few general ideas—a trip to the zoo, a nature hike, or a picnic in the park—and let them choose. From there, guide them in building a schedule. Ask questions like, "What time should we leave?" or "How long do you think we'll spend there?" Encourage them to think through packing needs—snacks, sunscreen, games—and give them the responsibility of preparing what's needed.

This simple process invites your child into leadership through planning, decision-making, and follow-through. They begin to experience the weight and satisfaction of leading something that matters, even if it's just a fun day together.

You don't need to lead the outing like a manager planning a business trip. Let your child take the reins, make mistakes, and adjust. Your role is to be the guide and encourager—someone who cheers them on and helps reflect on what went well and what could be better next time.

**Use Family Projects to Teach Teamwork and Delegation**

Another powerful way to foster leadership in children is through collaborative projects at home. Leadership, after all, is not about telling people what to do—it's about organizing people around a shared goal. Family clean-up days, garage reorganizations, or neighborhood service projects all offer opportunities for your child to learn how to guide others, assign roles, and follow through on a plan.

Choose a project that requires some organization, and invite your child

to take a leadership role. You might say, “We need to clean out the garage this weekend. Would you be willing to help assign tasks and keep us on track?” This doesn’t mean you abdicate your own role as a parent—it simply means you’re giving them room to practice leading.

Support them in listing out what needs to be done, thinking through who might be good at what, and checking in on everyone’s progress. If your child asks for help, provide it—but resist the urge to take over. What you’re cultivating here is not perfection, but process: the ability to work with others, think ahead, and solve problems as they arise.

Family projects also provide a low-pressure environment where your child can learn what leadership feels like from the inside out. They get to test ideas, adapt to obstacles, and experience the satisfaction of completing a shared goal with others.

**Practice Public Speaking in Safe, Supportive Spaces**

Many adults rank public speaking as one of their greatest fears—so it’s no surprise that many parents feel hesitant about encouraging their child in this area. But confidence in communication is a critical part of leadership. And the earlier we help children find their voice, the more likely they are to use it when it matters.

You don’t need to enroll your child in debate club or theater camp to develop these skills. One simple practice is to host a “family presentation night.” Ask your child to choose a topic they care about—a favorite book, a hobby, a school project—and help them prepare a short talk to share with the family.

The key here is to make it fun, affirming, and relaxed. Let them rehearse with you, write down a few talking points, and decorate if they want. Then, on the chosen night, make it a special occasion. Sit together as a family, listen attentively, and offer enthusiastic encouragement.

After the presentation, talk about how it went. Ask, “What part were you most proud of?” or “What would you do differently next time?” By

helping your child reflect on their experience, you're building both skill and confidence.

According to Gallup's research (2018), students who are comfortable with public speaking early in life are more likely to take on leadership positions in school, clubs, and community groups. What begins as a short family talk might one day turn into a senior class speech, a team huddle pep talk, or a courageous conversation among peers.

**Becoming a Leader by Raising One**

One of the most surprising gifts of this process is what it does for you. As you help your child grow as a leader, you may find your own confidence quietly rising. With each new opportunity you offer them, you stretch your own sense of what it means to lead from love rather than from expertise. Your self-doubt may never fully disappear—but it doesn't need to. Growth, after all, is not about becoming someone else. It's about becoming more fully and freely yourself.

You don't have to be the kind of leader who stands on a stage or directs a company. You can be the kind of leader who shapes the next generation with quiet strength and steady belief. When you model patience, reflection, encouragement, and courage, you are demonstrating real leadership—perhaps the kind that matters most.

No parent begins this journey fully equipped. But every parent has the potential to become a leadership guide for their child. Not because you've mastered everything—but because you're willing to try, to learn, and to grow together.

Over the years, some of the best coaches are people who did not excel in their sport. Even if you've not led a large organization or been a boss, you can still assist your child in developing their leadership potential. That's what our KidLead Academy course teaches, along with our YouTube channel and resources like the book you're now reading.



Chapter 7

# Confident Vs. Coddled Kids

## *What to Do When Parenting Styles Collide*

**Out of Sync**

If you're wondering why this family photo is upside down, you're not alone. But it does feel a little familiar, doesn't it? That moment when parenting feels off balance, like one of you is seeing the world from the ceiling while the other insists they're standing on solid ground. This chapter is for those moments—when your parenting styles flip in opposite directions.

Parenting is one of life's most rewarding journeys, but also one of the most debated. How much freedom should kids have? When is too much structure actually harmful? Often, one parent leans toward nurturing and minimizing risks, while the other values independence, challenge, and resilience-building. These differences aren't just normal—they're common. But if left unaddressed, they can lead to tension, confusion, or even conflict in your home.

This chapter is about finding common ground—especially when one of your core parenting goals is to raise a confident leader, not just a compliant child.

**The Numbers Behind Parenting Conflicts**

You're not alone if you and your partner sometimes feel like you're parenting from different playbooks. Research backs that up:

- **46% of parents** report often disagreeing with their partner about how to raise their children—especially around discipline and risk-taking (Pew Research Center, 2021).
- Overly protective parenting increases the risk of anxiety in children by **20%** and reduces their problem-solving ability by **30%** (*Psychology Today*).
- Children who aren't allowed to engage in independent problem-solving are **35% less likely** to develop strong decision-making skills by adolescence (*Frontiers in Psychology*).
- Kids who are allowed to take calculated risks are **25% more likely** to develop traits like confidence and emotional regulation (*Developmental Psychology*).
- And according to the *Journal of Child Development*, children who are consistently coddled are **22% more likely** to show low resilience in their teen years.

These stats aren't meant to gang up on the more cautious parent—but they do highlight an important principle: reasonable risk-taking is essential to raising resilient kids who can lead.

**The Cost of Coddling**

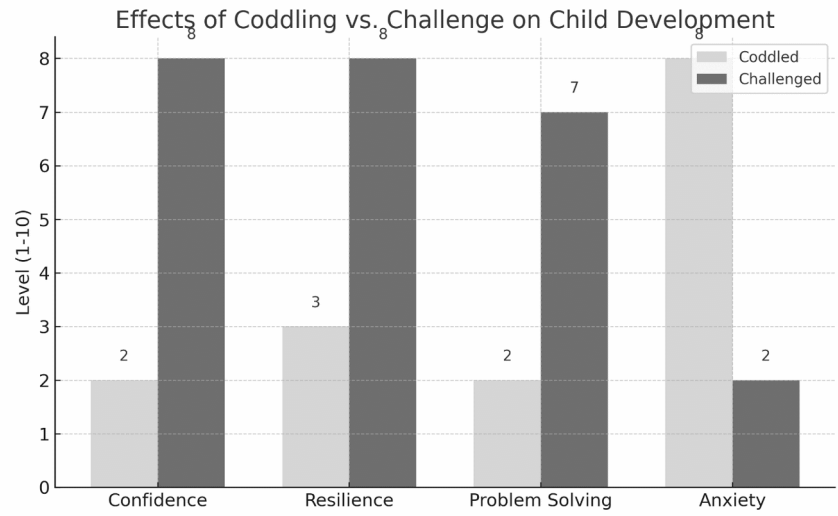
Coddling comes from love—it's an instinct to protect, to nurture, and to keep our children safe. But too much protection can quietly rob children of the confidence and experience they need to handle real life.

Over-coddled children often grow up with:

- Limited coping mechanisms
- A fear of failure or decision-making
- A tendency to follow, not lead

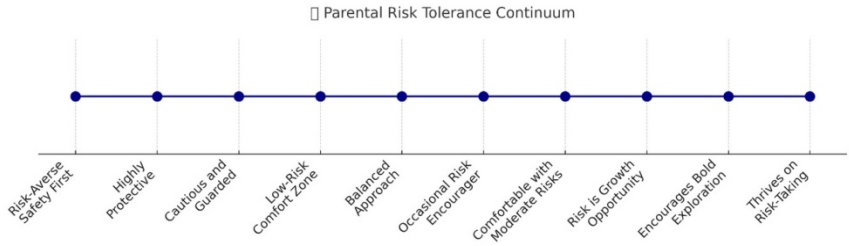
As Dr. Wendy Mogel writes in *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*: *"Our job is not to prepare the road for the child, but to prepare the child for the road."*

Leadership is forged in moments of uncertainty, small failures, and real responsibility. If we want kids who grow into confident, adaptable adults, we need to give them opportunities to stretch, stumble, and self-correct.




**Assessing Risk Tolerance in Parenting**

Here's a tool to help you and your partner reflect on your approach to parenting risk. Look at the continuum below. Mark where you believe *you* fall, and then mark where you think *your partner* falls. Then, compare and discuss—not to "fix" one another, but to understand each other better.




**Reflection Questions for Discussion:**

1. How did your parents' approach to parenting influence your current style?
2. Are there parenting behaviors you admired in your upbringing that you want to replicate?
3. What do you *not* want to repeat from your childhood experience?
4. How does your approach align—or clash—with your partner's upbringing or culture?

This exercise isn't about being "right." It's about gaining empathy for each other's wiring and finding your *shared* vision for your child's future.

**Strategies for Finding Common Ground**

If you're the parent who tends to value leadership-building and independence, here are four ways to work with your more cautious partner to make space for healthy risk-taking—without breaking trust.

**1. Start Small and Build Trust**

Ease into risk by suggesting low-stakes opportunities for growth. For example:

- Let your child choose their extracurricular activity.
- Allow them to walk the dog in a familiar area.

- Encourage them to try small entrepreneurial efforts, like a lemonade stand.

Agree that if the child does well, the next time you'll stretch the challenge a little further. This progressive approach builds confidence in both your child and your co-parent.

**2. Use Research and Real-Life Examples**

Facts can help neutralize emotions. Share data (like the studies in this chapter) or personal stories about kids who built confidence through simple, manageable risks. For example: A child who forgets their lunch one day but figures out a way to borrow a snack or ask for help learns resourcefulness and responsibility—lessons no lecture could deliver as effectively.

**3. Create Clear Guidelines Together**

Risk doesn't mean recklessness. Work together to agree on boundaries. Example: Your child wants to learn to cook. Instead of saying no, create safe guidelines—like adult supervision for knives and stovetops—and let them experiment within those limits. This gives your child the experience of responsibility without unnecessary danger.

**4. Focus on the Big Picture**

Reframe the conversation around your long-term goal: raising a capable adult. Each small risk today is an investment in your child's future ability to lead. Letting them fail a science project because they didn't plan ahead isn't bad parenting—it's a powerful life lesson. Letting them try out for a team and experience the sting of rejection isn't cruelty—it's the beginning of emotional maturity.

**Final Thoughts: Turning the Picture Right-Side Up**

Parenting disagreements aren't about choosing between "safe" and "strong." They're about learning how to balance care with courage, protection with preparation. Your child needs *both* of you—the nurturer

and the challenger. Together, you help them develop a heart that's compassionate *and* resilient, a mind that's curious *and* wise.

So yes, go ahead and flip that upside-down family photo right-side up. Laugh about how different you are. Talk about where you meet in the middle. And remember, when nurturance meets independence, you're raising a child who can face the world with both kindness and courage. Because that's what leadership looks like. And that's what your child is capable of becoming.




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# Chapter 8

# Raising Brave

## *Helping Your Child Face Fear and Grow Confidence*

**Crumpled Paper**

Here's an interesting activity. If you have a sheet of paper near you, crumple it up into a tight ball. Now try to flatten it. Note the wrinkles and creases. Anxiety and fear can leave wrinkles in your child's life—but with your help, they can learn to smooth things out. Confidence and courage aren't just helpful traits; they're essential for young leaders. As a parent, you play a powerful role in shaping how your child handles fear, navigates self-doubt, and builds the courage to lead with strength and integrity.

Today's kids are growing up in a world filled with opportunity, but also one packed with pressure. Between academic demands, social media, and the constant comparison loop, it's no wonder more children are wrestling with anxiety. That's why helping them develop confidence

isn't just a nice idea—it's a strategic move for their future.

**Why So Anxious?**

Let's start by understanding the root of what so many children are experiencing. Anxiety is a natural response to stress or perceived danger—our brain's way of trying to protect us. But when it becomes chronic or exaggerated, it can keep kids from raising their hands, joining teams, or trying new things. And it especially limits their ability to lead.

We're seeing this rise more prominently in Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and Gen Alpha (born between 2013 and 2025). Gen Z was shaped by the smartphone revolution. Gen Alpha is now coming of age during the explosion of artificial intelligence. Both generations are navigating a digital-first world that places enormous emphasis on performance, appearance, and instant feedback.

Research tells us this pressure is taking a toll. Studies show that teens who spend more than seven hours a day on screens are twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety or depression. Almost half of teens say they feel judged by what they post online. According to the CDC, one in five children experiences a diagnosable mental health condition—anxiety being among the most common.

What's more, anxiety can disrupt the development of critical leadership skills. A 2022 meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that elevated anxiety in children is correlated with lower self-efficacy, reduced initiative, and an increased tendency to avoid leadership roles—especially during middle school years.

That's the hard news. The hopeful news? You, as a parent, have more influence than you might realize. Confidence can be taught. Courage can be nurtured. And both can grow stronger with practice.




**Confidence and Leadership Go Hand in Hand**

Confident kids are more willing to take initiative, bounce back from setbacks, and speak up when something isn't right. These are not just valuable life skills—they are leadership essentials. Note the graph above. Most of the time, an inverse connection exists between confidence and experience.

The word *confidence* comes from the Latin *confidere*, meaning "to trust fully." It's not about arrogance. It's about trust—trust in one's ability to figure things out, to face difficulty, and to influence others in a positive direction. Similarly, the root of the word *courage* is *cor*, Latin for "heart." True courage comes from within. It's not the absence of fear—it's the ability to move forward in spite of it.

As Mark Twain said, *"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear."* And Eleanor Roosevelt added, *"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face."*

In the world of leadership, fear and anxiety are like static noise. They distract, distort, and discourage. Confidence and courage, on the other

hand, bring clarity, connection, and conviction. And that's what the world needs more of—especially in our next generation. As Nelson Mandela once shared, *"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."*

**Four Practical Ways to Build Confidence and Courage**

So how can you help your child develop the traits that build resilience and leadership capacity? Here are four intentional, doable strategies that can be part of everyday life.

**1. Confidence Journaling**

Help your child track their growth by keeping a "confidence journal." This can be as simple as a spiral notebook or a digital folder where they reflect on wins—big or small. Maybe they finally mastered a chord on the guitar or asked a question in class they were scared to ask. Each success reinforces the idea that progress, not perfection, is the goal.

You can also create a "Courage Box" section where they write down one thing each week they did even though it made them nervous—like calling a grandparent, talking to a new kid at school, or presenting something in front of a group. These moments, when documented and celebrated, become stepping stones toward long-term confidence. The simple act of reflection gives children a chance to internalize their growth. It reminds them: "I did something hard—and I made it through."

**2. Public Speaking Games**

Speaking up in front of others is one of the biggest fears many people have—even adults. You can help your child overcome this by turning it into a game. Host a "Family Debate Night" where they argue silly topics like "Why pizza is better than tacos" or "Should pets have their own bedrooms?" The point isn't to win—it's to have fun and get comfortable expressing ideas out loud.

You can also encourage your child to read aloud at dinner, recite a poem, or give a short “daily update” on what they learned at school. Public speaking becomes less intimidating when it’s normalized and practiced in a safe, supportive setting.

**3. Stretch Zone Challenges**

Growth doesn’t happen in the comfort zone. But you don’t have to shove your child into high-pressure situations to help them grow. Instead, give them small, age-appropriate challenges that gently stretch their courage.

Ask them to order food at a restaurant, introduce themselves to a new classmate, or email a teacher with a question. Role-play the scenario first, then celebrate their effort afterward. Each stretch builds their belief that they can handle more than they thought.

One mom shared how her daughter was terrified to join the school robotics team. So they set a small goal—just attend one meeting. That led to another. By the end of the year, she was co-leading a team project. Confidence is often born from one small, brave decision.

**4. Courage Role Models**

Sometimes courage looks like a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Other times, it looks like a cartoon fish swimming across the ocean. Share books, movies, and stories that showcase bravery in action. Read a biography of Malala Yousafzai and discuss how she stood up for education despite danger. Watch *Finding Nemo* and talk about how both Nemo and Marlin showed courage in different ways. These stories become mirrors and maps—mirrors that reflect your child’s inner potential, and maps that guide them toward it.

You can even ask your child, “What’s one brave thing someone you admire has done?” Use their answer as a launching point to talk about how bravery is often about doing the right thing, even when it’s scary or hard.

**Confidence is a Muscle—Use It or Lose It**

Think of confidence and courage like muscles—the more your child uses them, the stronger they become. And just like physical training, these emotional muscles grow when they're pushed, stretched, and then given space to recover. With each challenge met, each small success celebrated, your child begins to build an internal framework of trust in themselves. They learn that failure isn't fatal. That discomfort is temporary. And that trying—even if imperfect—is worth it. And just as muscles can atrophy without use, fear can grow if it goes unchallenged. That's why it's essential to help your child take regular, manageable steps outside their comfort zone. One small brave act today becomes the foundation for bigger acts tomorrow.

One more helpful image to keep in mind: Fear is a shadow, and confidence is the light. The brighter the light, the smaller the shadow becomes.

**Final Thoughts: Raising a Leader Worth Following**

Leadership isn't about having all the answers—it's about having the heart to keep going when others would give up. It's about showing up, speaking up, and stepping up—even when it's hard. That kind of courage doesn't just appear in adulthood. It begins now, in childhood. In the daily choices your child makes, and in the support you provide to help them believe in themselves.

Remember: your influence matters more than you may realize. The way you encourage risk-taking, normalize failure, and celebrate courage will shape how your child views challenges for years to come. You're not just raising a child. You're growing a leader. So start small. Cheer loud. Be patient. And above all, believe in the brave heart beating inside your child—even when they're still learning how to believe in themselves.




# More resources like this:

- **YouTube Channel** (free training videos): www.youtube.com/@kidleadacademy
- **Free webinar**: www.kidlead.com/webinar
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- **KidLead Academy** the world's greatest parent training IF you want to raise leaders: kidlead.com/kla

**Having known Alan for nearly four decades, I can highly recommend the value he brings to parents, serious about developing their child's leadership potential.**



**Dr. Tim Elmore**
*-Growing Leaders CEO & author of Gen Z Unfiltered*




**Since 2007, I've seen scores of young leaders we've trained, grow up to be amazing adult leaders. Plus, KidLead changed my life as a leader.**

**Nina Lewis**
*-community activist, photographer, trainer, mother*



Chapter 9

# Discipline That Develops Leaders

*Not Followers*

**Rethinking the "D" Word**

When you hear the word "discipline," what comes to mind? For many, it's punishment, obedience, or getting a child to "behave." But what if we shifted our mindset? What if discipline wasn't just about control, but about coaching? What if it could help our children grow into courageous, capable leaders rather than passive followers?

That's exactly what we're exploring in this chapter. Because when it comes to raising kids aged 5 to 15, how we handle discipline matters—not just for their behavior, but for their leadership potential. Let's begin with a challenging but important question: Are you raising a future leader, or a passive follower?

The truth is, leadership doesn't happen by accident. It's cultivated

through experience, example, and the environment we create at home. Discipline—when done right—is one of the most powerful tools we have to shape that environment. But not all discipline creates leaders. In fact, some of it does just the opposite.

**When Discipline Becomes Domination**

There's a long-standing belief that strict, harsh discipline—yelling, threatening, or spanking—is the best way to "keep kids in line." And sure, it might work in the moment. A child may snap to attention, obey, and avoid trouble. But over time, that kind of fear-based approach can have damaging consequences.

A 2019 study published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* found that children exposed to harsh discipline were 50% more likely to struggle with decision-making and suffer from low self-esteem as adults. The message they receive isn't one of strength—it's one of submission. They may learn to follow orders, but they don't learn to think critically, take initiative, or stand up for themselves. And those are non-negotiable skills for leadership.

As Dr. Jane Nelsen of *Positive Discipline* wisely asks, "Where did we get the crazy idea that to make children do better, we must first make them feel worse?" Leadership doesn't grow out of shame. It grows out of respect, trust, and guidance.

Domineering discipline can unintentionally teach children that power comes from fear, that conflict must be won, and that questioning authority is dangerous. But great leaders don't just follow—they think, evaluate, and decide. If our discipline methods silence our children's voices, we're not teaching them to lead—we're teaching them to comply.

**The Pitfalls of Permissiveness**

Now, if one end of the spectrum is authoritarian control, the other is permissiveness—when boundaries are blurred or non-existent, and kids

essentially run the show. This may feel like a more nurturing or “free” approach, but it comes with its own risks.

Without clear limits, children may grow up without a strong internal compass. They may mistake freedom for entitlement and struggle to respect authority or collaborate with others. In leadership, that kind of behavior doesn’t create trust—it breeds disorganization, resistance, and poor decision-making.

In fact, research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found that children raised in permissive environments were 30% more likely to reject authority and struggle with collaboration —two major red flags for future leadership.

Dr. Charles Fay of *Love and Logic* explains it this way: “Great leaders understand limits because they’ve been lovingly taught limits.” Structure doesn’t suppress leadership—it gives it form. Think of discipline not as a cage, but as a frame. It provides the shape in which responsibility, confidence, and respect can grow.

**Discipline That Builds, Not Breaks**

So if harsh control leads to fear and passivity, and permissiveness leads to chaos, what’s the alternative?

It’s what we might call *constructive discipline*—a balance of structure and support. This type of discipline respects a child’s dignity while still holding them accountable. It’s built on connection, not coercion. And it’s far more likely to produce the kind of young person who leads with integrity, empathy, and courage.

Let’s look at four practical strategies that can help you discipline in a way that develops future leaders:

**1. Set Boundaries with Choices**

Instead of giving demands, offer limited choices. For example, “Would you like to do your homework before dinner or after?” This approach

gives your child a sense of control while still honoring the boundary. When children make choices within limits, they learn decision-making and responsibility—two pillars of effective leadership.

If they resist? Stay calm and enforce natural consequences. “You chose to wait, so now we’ll need to skip screen time to finish your homework.” The tone matters. You're not punishing—you’re following through.

**2. Use Natural Consequences**

Let the real world do the teaching. If your child refuses to bring a jacket, they may get cold. If they forget their lunch, they may feel hungry. These experiences, while uncomfortable, are memorable—and they build problem-solving and accountability.

Later, talk through the lesson: “What would help you remember your jacket tomorrow?” You're fostering self-reflection, not guilt.

**3. Collaborate on Consequences**

Instead of assigning a consequence, involve your child in creating one. Say, “You didn’t follow through on our cleanup agreement. What do you think would be fair to make it right?” This opens the door to critical thinking, fairness, and ownership.

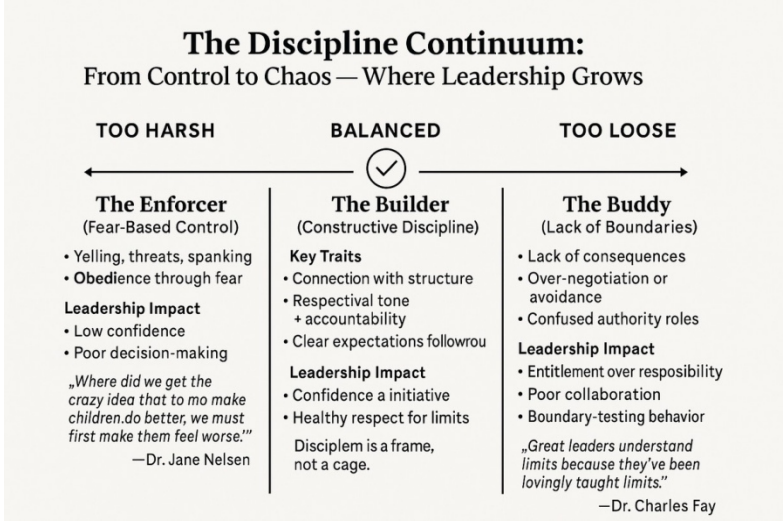
When children help solve problems, they internalize the values behind the rules—not just the fear of breaking them.

**4. Model Calm, Respectful Leadership**

Discipline isn’t just about what we say—it’s about how we say it. Children learn how to handle conflict by watching how we handle it. If your child raises their voice, respond with, “I hear you’re frustrated. Let’s take a break and talk when we’re both calmer.”

When they come back with a better tone, praise the growth: “That’s how strong leaders solve problems.” You’re reinforcing self-regulation, empathy, and respect—key traits of emotional intelligence and

leadership. Discipline is about teaching. It's setting limits with love and respect, not control.




**The Leadership Payoff**

When you use discipline to teach instead of punish, you're shaping more than behavior—you're shaping character. You're building the muscles of responsibility, emotional intelligence, and resilience that your child will carry into adulthood. A recent study in *Leadership Quarterly* found that teens with leadership opportunities were 25% more likely to succeed in collaborative environments later in life. But leadership starts long before a teen joins a club or leads a team. It starts with the values and habits learned at home—especially through discipline.

As Fred Rogers once said, "Discipline is a form of teaching. It's setting limits but also encouraging your child to do better because they know you believe in them." That belief—your trust in their potential—is what empowers them to grow into someone others will follow. So the next time you're frustrated, take a breath. Ask yourself: "Am I trying to control… or to coach?" The answer can change the entire trajectory of your child's growth.

**Summary:**

**“The Enforcer” – Harsh Control**

**Key Traits:**

- Yelling, threats, spanking
- Obedience through fear
- Silence mistaken for respect

**Leadership Impact:**

- Low confidence
- Poor decision-making
- Fear of risk or authority

*50% more likely to struggle with self-esteem and decision-making as adults* (*Journal of Family Psychology*, *2019*)

**“The Builder” – Constructive Discipline**

**Key Traits:**

- Connection with structure
- Respectful tone + accountability
- Clear expectations and follow-through

**Leadership Impact:**

- Confidence and initiative
- Healthy respect for limits
- Empathy, problem-solving, critical thinking

**Core Message:**
*Discipline is a frame, not a cage.*

**“The Buddy” – Permissiveness**

**Key Traits:**

- Lack of consequences
- Over-negotiation or avoidance
- Confused authority roles

**Leadership Impact:**

- Entitlement over responsibility
- Poor collaboration
- Boundary-testing behavior

*30% more likely to reject authority and struggle with teamwork* (*NICHD Study*)




# Chapter 10

# The Emotionally Smart Leader

## *A Parent's Guide to Unlocking the Social-Emotional Skills that Matter Most*

**Trick or Treat!**

No, it's not Halloween—but it is the perfect metaphor for a typical day in your child's social world. Whether they're navigating the school lunchroom, joining a new activity, or handling conflict with a friend, children constantly face moments that challenge their ability to relate to others and manage their own feelings. And far too often, they hide behind emotional "masks"—shyness, avoidance, anger, defiance—not because they want to be difficult, but because they haven't yet learned how to understand or handle what they're feeling inside.

But the best leaders wear no masks. Instead, they engage with authenticity, regulate their emotions wisely, and build trust through connection. That's why SEI—socio-emotional intelligence—is not just helpful for children. It's essential.

## Why SEI Matters More Than Ever

Socio-emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and manage one's own emotions, empathize with others, and build strong, healthy relationships. For children, SEI shows up in ways like recognizing their feelings, navigating peer pressure, handling frustration without meltdowns, and working well with others. For adults, it's the defining soft skill that separates exceptional leaders from those who rely solely on technical skills or authority. As Dr. Daniel Goleman famously put it, "Emotional intelligence accounts for 85% of what sets top performers apart from others."

Helping your child develop SEI doesn't just equip them for better social interactions—it lays the foundation for lifelong confidence, purpose, and influence. According to a CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) study, children with strong SEI are 54% more likely to succeed both academically and socially. Research from TalentSmartEQ found that leaders with high emotional intelligence are 32% more effective in managing people and outcomes. Children who develop strong emotional regulation early also experience lower levels of anxiety and higher self-esteem by adolescence.

And here's the good news: SEI isn't a talent you're born with. It's a skill that's nurtured, shaped through ordinary, daily experiences with parents and caring adults. You don't need a psychology degree or special curriculum. What you need is presence, intentionality, and a few simple tools to create teachable moments.

## Start with Emotional Vocabulary

One of the first building blocks of emotional intelligence is the ability to name and articulate feelings. Children can't manage emotions they don't have words for. When your child says, "I'm mad," that's a start—but there's a world of nuance underneath. Are they frustrated? Embarrassed? Hurt? Left out? Helping them identify their feelings with precision is the first step toward calming them and responding well.

Instead of jumping to conclusions or dismissing feelings as overreactions, pause and ask, “Can you tell me more about what that felt like?” or “What kind of mad—were you embarrassed or disappointed?” Over time, your child will begin to develop an emotional vocabulary that allows for better communication and self-awareness.

One parent shared how their daughter began drawing “emotion maps” after tough days at school—a habit they started as a family. She’d sketch out what happened, who was involved, and how she felt at different points. It became not only a valuable tool for expression, but also a new window into her inner world.

**Teach Empathy Through Conversation and Storytelling**

Empathy—the ability to understand and feel what someone else is experiencing—is one of the most powerful predictors of strong leadership. Children who grow in empathy are better friends, more thoughtful teammates, and more compassionate problem-solvers. One of the best ways to develop this trait is through story.

After watching a movie or reading a book, take a few minutes to discuss character motivations and feelings. Ask questions like, “Why do you think she reacted that way?” or “What would you have done in that situation?” This helps your child learn to look beyond their own perspective, imagining the thoughts and emotions of others.

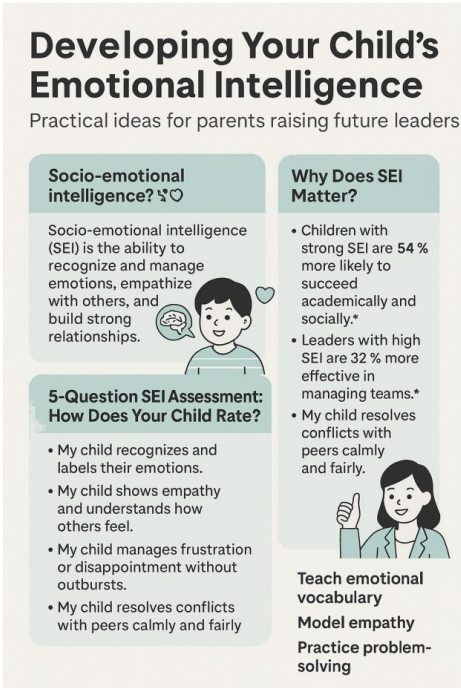
Even in real-life situations, you can bring empathy into conversation. If your child tells you about a classmate who acted out, instead of labeling the behavior, ask, “What do you think might be going on for them?” These kinds of reflections teach children to lead with understanding rather than judgment—a quality that becomes even more vital as their social world expands.

**Let Conflict Be a Classroom**

No one likes to see their child struggle socially, especially when it comes to arguments with siblings, classmates, or friends. But conflict, when

handled wisely, is one of the best teachers of socio-emotional growth. The next time your child comes to you after a disagreement, resist the urge to fix it immediately. Instead, become their coach.

Ask guiding questions: “What happened?” “How did you feel?” “What do you think they were feeling?” and “What’s a fair way to move forward?” Helping your child process both sides of the conflict promotes problem-solving, accountability, and the ability to seek resolution with empathy and fairness.




When children learn that relationships can survive disagreement—and even grow stronger through honest repair—they gain resilience. And when they feel empowered to handle conflict without an adult always stepping in, they develop independence and emotional strength.

**Rehearse Real-Life Social Situations**

Sometimes what looks like defiance or anxiety is actually a lack of preparation. Social situations can be overwhelming for kids who don’t yet know what to say or how to say it. That’s why role-playing is so helpful. Practicing real-life scenarios ahead of time helps children approach those moments with clarity and confidence.

You might rehearse how to introduce themselves to someone new, ask a teacher for help, or say “no” to something that makes them uncomfortable. Even seemingly simple things—like how to join a group

at recess or respond if someone teases them—can feel huge to a child. By helping them rehearse, you give them a sense of agency, not just advice.

One parent shared that their son used to freeze up before school presentations. Together, they began practicing calming techniques, journaling about emotions, and doing mock speeches at home. Within a semester, his confidence had grown so much that he began volunteering to speak—and eventually started mentoring younger students. With the right support, anxiety transformed into leadership.

**Evaluate Progress with Gentle Curiosity**

As your child begins developing these skills, it's helpful to periodically reflect on how they're doing—not just in terms of behavior, but in terms of emotional growth. The following self-assessment can offer insight into your child's current stage of SEI development:

**Quick SEI Reflection (Rate each from 1 to 5)**

1. My child can identify and name their emotions.
2. My child understands how others might be feeling in social situations.
3. My child manages their frustration or sadness without extreme reactions.
4. My child resolves peer conflict without constant adult intervention.
5. My child feels comfortable adapting in unfamiliar social settings.

A total score of 21–25 suggests your child's SEI is highly developed. Scores between 16–20 indicate strong potential with room to grow. A score below 15 signals a need for more focused guidance and support—exactly the kind of support this chapter is meant to help you offer.

**The Real Gift: A Good Head and a Good Heart**

As a parent, you don't need to become an emotional intelligence expert. You just need to be intentional. Every time you help your child name a feeling, notice someone else's emotions, work through a disagreement, or rehearse how to respond with grace, you're building leadership from the inside out.

Emotional intelligence offers something far more enduring than temporary social popularity or well-behaved compliance. It gives children the inner resources to navigate life with strength, compassion, and clarity.

As Nelson Mandela said, "A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination." When your child learns to lead with both, they become the kind of person others look to—not because they demand attention, but because they create connection.

That's the power of emotional intelligence. And that's the gift you're giving them—one authentic, empathetic, resilient day at a time.





# Chapter 11

# The Power of Perspective

## *Teaching Locus of Control to Young Leaders*

**Out Sourcing Vs. In Sourcing**

Every great leader begins with a belief—the belief that their actions matter. That belief doesn't magically appear. It comes from a mindset that psychologists call "locus of control." It's a simple idea with big implications: whether you believe life happens *to* you or *because* of you. Helping your child understand this concept early in life is one of the most powerful things you can do to set them up for success. In this chapter, we'll explore what locus of control is, how it influences leadership, and how to help your child develop an internal locus of control—a key driver of confidence, resilience, and motivation.

**A Bit of Background**

The term "locus of control" was coined by psychologist Julian Rotter in the 1950s. It describes where a person perceives control over their life

events resides. People with an *internal locus of control* believe that their actions, decisions, and efforts largely shape their outcomes. People with an *external locus of control* believe that outside forces—luck, fate, other people—are mostly responsible for what happens.

Children with an internal locus of control tend to be more motivated, persistent, and confident. They believe their actions make a difference, which is the heart of leadership. In contrast, those with an external locus of control often feel helpless, blame others, and avoid responsibility. They are more likely to give up when faced with challenges, waiting for someone else to fix the problem or for luck to turn in their favor. This matters deeply when it comes to raising future leaders. Leaders are expected to take initiative, make decisions, and guide others—all of which require a strong belief in one's own influence. That's why developing this mindset early on is crucial.

**Examples**

Imagine two kids fail a math test.

One says, "I didn't study enough. I'll ask for help and do better next time."

The other says, "The teacher is unfair. I always get bad luck."

Same result. Totally different mindset. One leads to learning. The other leads to learned helplessness.

The same happens on the playground, in friendships, on sports teams, and eventually, in jobs and relationships. Kids who learn to take ownership build momentum. Those who don't, often stall out.

Psychologist Martin Seligman, in his work on learned helplessness and optimism, found that children who feel in control of their circumstances tend to be more resilient and mentally healthy. In fact, studies show that a strong internal locus of control is associated with higher academic performance, better stress management, and more effective leadership

in adulthood. So how can you teach your child this powerful mindset?

**Four Strategies**

Use at home to help build an internal locus of control in your child:

**1. Watch Your Language** The words we use shape how kids think.

Instead of saying, "We have to do this," say, "We're choosing to do this because..." Instead of "That's just the way it is," say, "Let's figure out what we *can* do." Instead of, "You made me mad," say, "I feel frustrated when..."

By modeling ownership in your speech, you teach your child that they can choose their responses, attitudes, and actions—even when circumstances aren't ideal.

**2. Encourage Problem-Solving** When your child faces a challenge, resist the urge to jump in and fix it right away.

Instead, ask: "What do you think you could try?" Or, "What's one small step you could take to work on this?"

This helps your child connect effort with outcome. Even small wins help reinforce that they have power over what happens next.

**3. Celebrate Effort, Not Just Outcomes** Praise your child not only for what they achieve, but for what they attempt.

"I'm proud of how you kept working on that puzzle, even when it got tricky."

"You really stuck with it at practice today. That's what makes you better over time."

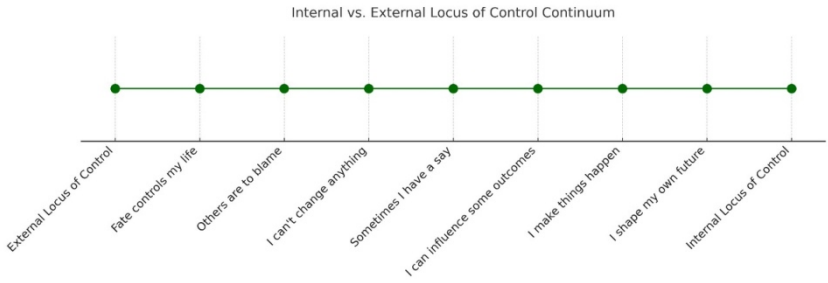
These kinds of affirmations build your child's belief in their ability to improve and shape their experiences—an essential part of an internal locus of control.

**4. Tell Stories of Ownership and Initiative** Share examples of leaders, both famous and personal, who took responsibility and changed their circumstances.

Talk about young leaders who solved problems, made mistakes, learned from failure, or stood up for others. One great story is that of Malala Yousafzai, who stood up for education in Pakistan as a young girl, even after facing danger. Her story demonstrates how belief in one's own voice and power can create real change.

Another example comes from a dad who told me about his daughter's journey with violin. She used to say, "I'm just not musical." But after months of consistent practice and encouragement to take ownership of her progress, she performed confidently in her school recital. She learned that effort—not talent alone—determines growth.

These real-life stories reinforce the idea that we are not passive passengers in life. We are participants. Let's be clear: an internal locus of control isn't about ignoring real obstacles or pretending we control everything. Life is unpredictable. But the mindset shift is in focusing on what we *can* influence—our actions, our attitude, our next step. As Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and psychologist, once wrote: "Everything can be taken from a (person) but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." That's the essence of internal control. And it begins in childhood.




One more practical idea: create a simple journal or reflection habit with

your child. At the end of the day, ask:

- What went well today?
- What did *you* do that helped it go well?
- What didn't go as planned?
- What's one thing you could do differently next time?

These questions help reinforce the link between choices and outcomes. Teaching your child the power of perspective doesn't just prepare them to succeed—it prepares them to lead. Leaders don't blame. They respond. Leaders don't wait. They initiate. Leaders don't see themselves as victims of circumstance. They see themselves as capable of influence. When you nurture this mindset in your child, you're not just helping them feel more confident. You're helping them become the kind of person others want to follow. Because the best leaders don't just control outcomes. They control themselves.





Chapter 12

# The Leader’s Edge

*Building Decision-Making Skills in Your Child*

**Make or Break Matter**

If there’s one skill that separates average leaders from great ones, it’s decision-making. Leaders face choices every day—some small, like when to speak up in a meeting, and others life-changing, like who to hire or how to handle a crisis. But regardless of size, each decision has the potential to build—or break—trust, momentum, and progress.

The good news is this: effective decision-making isn’t just something people are born with. It’s a learned skill. And that means your child can grow into it—with the right support and practice. Let’s explore why decision-making is such a crucial leadership trait, share some real-world research, offer a few favorite quotes for inspiration, and give you practical, at-home ways to help your child build this vital ability.

**Effective Leaders Make Good Decisions**

We all want our kids to become confident and capable. But many children struggle with uncertainty and indecision, especially in today's world of endless options and instant feedback. Whether it's choosing a school project topic, deciding how to respond to a conflict, or figuring out how to spend their time, decision-making is a skill that can shape the trajectory of their personal, academic, and future professional lives.

**Stats & Quotes**

A study by McKinsey & Company found that leaders who make decisions quickly and effectively are 12 times more likely to be high performers. That's a powerful statement on how decision-making separates top leaders from the rest. Another study by the National Academy of Sciences revealed that children who learn structured decision-making skills are 40% less likely to make impulsive choices as teenagers. And perhaps most telling, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that leaders who involve others in their decision-making process experience a 50% increase in team engagement and satisfaction.

So, how do we take this abstract concept and turn it into something teachable? It starts with small moments at home. Decisions don't have to be life-or-death to have a long-term impact. Helping your child learn to think critically, weigh their options, and take ownership of their choices builds confidence—and that's exactly what young leaders need.

Throughout history, wise people have recognized the power of decisions. Theodore Roosevelt once said, *"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing."* That's true for presidents, and it's also true for a ten-year-old deciding whether to stand up for a friend or stay silent.

J.K. Rowling put it this way: *"It is our choices that show what we truly*

*are, far more than our abilities."* She understood that decisions reflect values—and values shape leadership. Even Plato weighed in, noting that *"A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers."* And entrepreneur Randy Komisar offers a modern reminder: *"The risks of bad decisions are the cost of learning good judgment."*

These quotes offer not only wisdom but an invitation: to see decision-making not as pressure, but as a practice. Like a muscle, it gets stronger with use. So how do you, as a parent, help your child exercise their decision-making muscle? Here are four practical, simple, and fun activities you can do at home to turn everyday moments into leadership lessons.

**The "Pros and Cons" Challenge**

This is a great way to help your child learn how to break a decision down logically. Present them with a real-life choice—something age-appropriate and meaningful. Maybe it's deciding what the family should eat for dinner or where to go for your next outing.

Together, create a simple pros and cons list for each option. Let them guide the discussion as much as possible. What do they see as the benefits? What trade-offs might there be?

By doing this, your child is learning to think through their choices with clarity, not just react. They're also learning how to anticipate outcomes —a skill that will serve them for life.

**Decision Dice**

This one adds an element of surprise and fun. Start with a simple challenge or scenario—like resolving a disagreement with a sibling or deciding how to spend a free afternoon. Together, brainstorm six different possible solutions and write them down, assigning one to each number on a die.

Have your child roll the die and, whatever number they land on, ask

them to make a case *for* and *against* that option. Would it work? Why or why not?

This activity strengthens two key leadership skills: creative problem-solving and evaluating alternatives. It also helps kids realize that not every solution is perfect—and that's okay.

**The Role-Playing Game**

Leadership is tested in the moment—and decision-making under pressure is a critical part of that. That's where role-play comes in.

Create a pretend scenario—maybe they're running a lemonade stand, planning a birthday party, or leading a school team. Now throw in a challenge: they run out of supplies, a team member quits, or a customer complains.

Ask: What do you do? Let your child talk through it. If they feel stuck, ask guiding questions: What are your options? What matters most here? What would you want someone to do if they were leading you?

By role-playing scenarios, you're giving your child low-stakes practice that builds real-life readiness.

**The "What If?" Debate**

This is a great way to stretch imagination and critical thinking. Pose a fun or challenging hypothetical question and ask your child to explain their reasoning.

Some examples:

- What if you could only save three items from your room in a fire—what would you pick and why?
- What if your best friend wanted you to skip school for a prank—what would you do?

- What if you had to create a new school rule—what would it be and how would you convince others to follow it?

These “what ifs” let children practice prioritization and values-based decision-making. It also gives them practice articulating their thoughts—something every leader needs to do well.

These simple activities, repeated over time, begin to shape how your child sees themselves—not just as someone who reacts, but as someone who decides. They begin to ask better questions, weigh options more carefully, and most importantly, take ownership for the outcomes of their decisions. That’s what separates passive followers from emerging leaders. It’s also worth noting that part of helping kids make better decisions is giving them room to make *bad* ones. Not dangerous ones, of course—but imperfect ones. If your child makes a choice that doesn’t work out, resist the urge to swoop in or say “I told you so.”

Instead, walk through it with them. Ask what they learned. What they might do differently next time. Remind them that mistakes are part of the process. And that wisdom is usually born from failure, not perfection. At the same time, model this for them in your own life. Let them see you wrestle with choices. Talk out loud when you’re trying to make a decision—explain your thinking, your options, and what you’re weighing. When they see you do it, they learn by example.

The world needs more leaders who pause before reacting. Who think beyond themselves. Who are willing to take responsibility for their actions. Your child can be one of those leaders. Help them start today—not with pressure, but with practice. Not with perfection, but with presence. And remember: great leaders aren’t afraid to make decisions—because someone helped them learn how.




## More resources like this:

- **YouTube Channel** (free training videos): www.youtube.com/@kidleadacademy
- **Free webina**r: www.kidlead.com/webinar
- **Free parenting assessment**: www.kidlead.com/free-assessment
- **Free podcasts & assessments on children**: www.leadyoungtraining.com
- **KidLead Academy** the world's greatest parent training IF you want to raise leaders: kidlead.com/kla



**I've seen KidLead change the lives of many kids, including my daughter. I highly recommend it.**

**Rose Pucan-Meagor**
*-teacher, trainer, church leader, mother*



**We must rethink the way we develop our young leaders. I recommend Dr. Nelson's program for parents.**

**Dr. Robert Epstein**
*-psychologist & author of Teen 2.0*



# Chapter 13

# Promise Keepers

## *Closing the Say-Do Gap in Young Leaders*

**Leader Currency**

Imagine a world where leaders always kept their promises. Where words and actions aligned seamlessly. Where trust wasn't something demanded—it was something earned. Now, imagine raising a child who embodies that kind of integrity. A young person whose follow-through inspires trust and respect, someone others naturally want to follow. That's the power of integrity. And as a parent, you have the opportunity to help shape that in your child now—starting long before they're grown.

Integrity is the foundation of trustworthy leadership. Without it, everything else eventually crumbles. The word itself comes from the Latin *integritas*, meaning "wholeness" or "completeness." It's derived from *integer*—something that's undivided or untouched. A leader who lacks integrity is incomplete—fractured, inconsistent, unstable. And

when others can't trust a leader's words, they stop following their lead.

In today's culture, where shortcuts and broken promises are often normalized, raising kids who *mean what they say and do what they promise* is a bold, countercultural act. But it's one of the most important leadership gifts you can give your child.

**Why Integrity Matters for Leadership**

Leadership depends on trust. And trust, like currency, must be earned and protected. In fact, 69% of employees say they would work harder if they trusted their leader (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2023). Another report in the *Harvard Business Review* found that employees in high-trust companies experience 74% less stress and 50% higher productivity. In contrast, when leaders consistently break promises, their teams disengage, and their credibility erodes.

Children who learn to follow through on their word are more confident, less susceptible to peer pressure, and better equipped to form healthy relationships. These are the very qualities that create strong, stable leaders. As C.S. Lewis famously put it, *"Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."* It's not enough to teach our kids what integrity *means*. We have to show them how it works.

**Starting Early: The Pliability of Young Character**

I often compare childhood to working with wet clay or uncured pottery. When children are young, they are highly moldable. Their moral framework, their response to challenges, and their ability to own their actions are all being formed. Once fired in the kiln of adolescence and adulthood, character becomes harder to shape.

That's why integrity training needs to start early. Like any leadership quality, it's best taught when kids are pliable. A child who regularly experiences honest, respectful accountability at home is far more likely to carry those habits into their friendships, classrooms, and future workplaces.

Dr. William Damon, the director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, once told me that schools often mislabel leader-oriented kids as non-compliant or difficult because they resist conformity. Damon believes these very kids—when guided well—have the greatest potential to become ethical, change-making leaders. I couldn't agree more. And he's right: teaching business ethics to adults is far less effective than teaching moral reasoning to children before they leave our homes.

**Visual Aids That Teach Integrity**

Young people respond powerfully to visuals—objects or metaphors that turn abstract ideas into something tangible. Here are three family-friendly tools to help your child understand, practice, and value integrity.

**1. The Mirror Challenge**
Ask your child, "Did you promise to finish your homework before watching TV today?" Then hand them a mirror. Ask them to look into it while reflecting on their answer. If they didn't keep their promise, use the moment for reflection rather than shame.

The mirror creates a personal, visual experience. They're not just answering *you*—they're looking at themselves. That builds internal accountability.

Say something like, "I'm proud of you for being honest. What do you think you could do differently next time to keep your promise?" These kinds of conversations build self-awareness without crushing self-esteem.

**2. The Coin Flip Activity**
Present a dilemma: "You promised to help your sibling clean their room today, but your friends just invited you to play a new video game. What do you do?" Let them flip a coin as part of the game—but then talk about how leaving decisions to chance isn't a reliable leadership

strategy.

The coin is a symbol of how tempting it is to let outside influences dictate our choices. Then guide the discussion toward internal responsibility. “What would show your sibling that they can count on you? What kind of leader do you want to be known as?”

When children realize that every broken promise chips away at their influence, they begin to take their word more seriously.

**3. The Family Integrity Jar**
Place a clear jar in a central area of your home. Any time a family member keeps a promise—big or small—drop a marble into the jar. When it fills up, celebrate together with a fun reward, like a game night or a trip to the park.

This turns integrity into a visual, shared experience. Instead of lecturing about trust, you’re building it brick by brick (or marble by marble) as a team. And yes—include yourself as a parent. When you keep a promise, say, “I told you we’d have pancakes on Saturday—and we did! Let’s add a marble.” Kids watch what we *do* more than what we say. As Stephen Covey wrote, *“What you do has far greater impact than what you say.”*

**Closing the Say-Do Gap at Home**

One of the simplest ways to define integrity for a child is this: *“When what you say and what you do match.”* The larger the gap between those two things, the less trust others will have in you. That’s the say-do gap—and every future leader must learn to close it.

Here are three tips to help reduce that gap in your home:

- **Talk about follow-through.** When someone in the family doesn’t do what they said, talk about it calmly. Ask, “What happened?” and “How did that affect others?” These conversations normalize accountability.

- **Avoid shame.** Kids don't learn from being shamed. They learn from being coached. Focus on improvement and growth, not guilt.
- **Celebrate consistency.** Don't just correct broken promises—recognize the ones that are kept. That builds momentum and reinforces positive behavior.

According to a 2021 Gallup youth integrity study, children who regularly received affirmation for keeping their promises were 38% more likely to initiate problem-solving in peer conflicts, compared to children who were only corrected when they made mistakes.

Integrity isn't about perfection. It's about direction. The goal isn't raising flawless kids—it's raising ones who understand the *weight of their words* and are willing to correct course when they fall short.

**Integrity in the Real World**

History gives us countless examples of leaders who failed due to a lack of integrity—leaders who hurt others, collapsed institutions, or damaged nations because their say-do gap widened beyond repair.

But the opposite is also true. Some of the most effective and beloved leaders in history built their legacy not on charisma, but on consistency. People trusted them because their actions mirrored their values. That kind of trust doesn't happen overnight. It's built over years of small, often invisible decisions. And it starts in childhood—with daily choices, household conversations, and modeling by the adults closest to them. As Confucius once said, *"The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home."*

**Final Thoughts: Promise-Keeping Builds Leadership**

If you want your child to be trusted by others, start by helping them trust themselves. Let them experience the pride of follow-through. Let them feel the sting of broken promises—and learn how to make it right. Let them see that keeping your word builds something bigger than a

moment—it builds your reputation.

At KidLead, we believe leadership starts young. And integrity is one of its earliest and most essential building blocks. The next time your child says, “I promise,” don’t just hope they mean it. Teach them what it means. Because leadership begins with trust. And trust begins with keeping your word.




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Chapter 14

# From Pitch to Power

## *Acquiring Selling Skills that Benefit Leading*

**Sidewalk Salesman**

The other day, I walked into a hardware store and saw a little boy—maybe five years old—in a scout uniform, standing at a table with a small stack of fundraising items. His dad stood nearby, giving him space to shine. I stopped, like I often do, because I love hearing kids give their sales pitch. This little guy lit up, delivered a confident presentation, and before I knew it, I was walking out with a $20 bag of popcorn.

When I got home and opened the bag, I noticed the label: *"Thank you for supporting future leaders."* That simple phrase captured the moment. Selling doesn't make you a leader, but leaders must learn to sell—to cast vision, to persuade, and to negotiate. Selling is about influence. And influence is the currency of leadership.

In this chapter, we're exploring one of the most surprisingly powerful leadership tools you can begin teaching your child now: selling skills.

Whether they're asking for a later bedtime, leading a school project, or one day pitching an idea in a boardroom, these skills matter.

Let's break down how selling is connected to leadership, why it matters for kids, and how you can make it fun and natural to teach at home.

**Selling and Leadership: The Overlooked Connection**

When most people think of leadership, they picture someone giving a speech, solving problems, or making tough decisions. And yes, those are essential. But under the surface of every great leader is the ability to communicate an idea and inspire others to believe in it. This is selling in its most basic form—not in a transactional, "buy now" sense, but in the relational, visionary sense. Leaders need to gain support, secure resources, and align others to a common goal. None of that happens without influence. And influence requires persuasive communication.

In fact, over 70% of employers say that communication and persuasion are two of the top skills they look for in future leaders (LinkedIn's 2023 Global Talent Trends Report). Another study published in *Child Development* found that children who learn negotiation and persuasive communication by age 10 are 50% more likely to exhibit confidence and initiative in their teen years. Selling, when taught with integrity, teaches kids to be clear thinkers, good listeners, and bold communicators. It helps them develop grit, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking—all core traits of leadership.

**"But Won't My Kid Start Using Sales Skills Against Me?"**

Let's be honest—this might be your first concern. And yes, if you teach your child how to pitch ideas and negotiate, you may soon hear something like:

"Mom, if I stay up just 30 more minutes, I can read one more chapter—and reading is good for my brain, right?"

That's not manipulation. That's practice.

And with the right guardrails, it can be both respectful and developmental. We're not teaching our kids to argue—we're teaching them to present ideas, listen to feedback, and look for win-win solutions. These aren't just selling skills. They're life skills.

So let's look at four simple and effective ways to build these abilities at home.

**1. Let Them Pitch You an Idea**

Next time your child wants something—a new toy, a later bedtime, or even dessert before dinner—don't just say yes or no. Invite them to make a pitch.

Ask:

- "Why do you think that's a good idea?"
- "What's in it for the family?"
- "Can you draw a plan or write a short note explaining your case?"

They'll learn to organize their thoughts, explain their reasoning, and tailor their message to their "audience." It might start with silly requests, but the skill grows into serious confidence. This kind of playful structure helps develop what psychologists call *executive functioning*—the ability to plan, prioritize, and problem-solve. All of which are essential for young leaders.

**2. Role-Play Real-Life Selling Scenarios**

One of the best ways to teach persuasive communication is through role-play. Pretend you're a store owner and your child is trying to convince you to stock their homemade cookies. Or flip the roles and let them be the customer.

Here's what this does:

- Boosts creativity
- Builds confidence in public speaking
- Teaches empathy (by thinking through what the “buyer” needs)

Add a reward system for effective communication—praise strong arguments, good listening, and respectful tone. Keep it light and fun, but also intentional. Dr. Robert Cialdini, author of *Influence*, found that persuasion isn't just about pressure—it's about understanding, connection, and timing. These role-plays are mini-workshops in all three.

**3. Set Up a Lemonade Stand (or Equivalent)**

Nothing teaches selling like actual selling. The classic lemonade stand still works, but you can also expand it to crafts, used toys, or snacks during a garage sale. Let your child:

- Make signs
- Set prices
- Greet customers
- Handle money
- Problem-solve when things don’t go as planned

Our granddaughters have done this, and I reached out to my oldest son to ask what their experience has taught them. He said, “It wasn’t about the money—it was about confidence. The girls loved making the pitch and figuring out how to connect with people.”

That’s the win. Your child may not become an entrepreneur, but they will walk away with stronger people skills and a better understanding of how value is communicated and exchanged.

**4. Teach the Basics of Negotiation**

Negotiation is a foundational part of leadership. It teaches flexibility, empathy, and strategic thinking.

Instead of shutting down every request with a "no," try this:

- "What would you be willing to do in exchange for that?"
- "How can we make this fair for both of us?"
- "What's your best offer?"

You're not surrendering authority—you're guiding them in understanding trade-offs, collaboration, and compromise. A Harvard Business Review article on youth leadership training highlights negotiation as a critical skill for bridging differences and solving group conflicts—something every leader must face.

**Selling Builds Self-Belief**

At its heart, selling is about believing in something enough to share it with others. When kids learn to sell, they also learn:

- How to handle rejection without crumbling
- How to speak up with clarity
- How to understand different perspectives
- How to persist when things don't go their way

These are character-building experiences. They teach children that their ideas matter—and that with the right tools, they can bring others on board. As motivational speaker Zig Ziglar once said, "Every sale has five basic obstacles: no need, no money, no hurry, no desire, no trust. Overcome those, and you'll succeed." That lesson applies well beyond business—it applies to life, friendship, influence, and leadership.

**Final Thoughts: Every Pitch Is a Step Toward Leadership**

Whether your child ends up leading a classroom, a company, or a community, they'll need the ability to communicate clearly and confidently. Selling is not just a business skill—it's a leadership skill. And the earlier they practice, the more natural it becomes.

So the next time your child makes a pitch—whether it's for dessert before dinner or a big idea for school—smile and lean in. You're not just listening to a request. You're listening to a leader in the making.

Want to raise a problem-solver? Teach them to pitch.
Want to raise a confident communicator? Let them persuade.
Want to raise a thoughtful leader? Show them how to negotiate.

You're not just saying yes or no. You're shaping someone who will one day shape the world.





Chapter 15

# Trading Pixels for Potential

## *How Screen Time Can Hinder Your Child's Leadership Development*

**Gimme a Second**

*Hi there—hang on a second, just replying to a text.* Sound familiar? If you've ever caught yourself trying to multitask with your smartphone, you're not alone. These little devices are incredible—we text, reply to emails, check the weather, find restaurants, book travel, track steps, and scroll endlessly on social media. But for all their power, they come with a serious hidden cost—especially for our kids.

The average teen spends more than 7 hours per day on screens related to entertainment. Preteens average over 5 hours. That doesn't even

include school-related screen time. In this chapter we're talking about an overlooked concept that has everything to do with your child's leadership potential: **opportunity cost**.

**What Is Opportunity Cost?**

Opportunity cost is the value of what you *give up* when you choose one thing over another. For our kids, this often means giving up time they could be using to build life and leadership skills. Every hour spent gaming, scrolling, or watching YouTube is an hour *not* spent developing social skills, leading a project, reading, creating, or practicing problem-solving. And over time, those hours really add up.

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot." – Michael Altshuler

**Hidden Costs in the Age of Screens**

We often calculate the obvious costs—money, logistics, time. But we ignore what we're missing out on by defaulting to screen use. Let's look at some compelling statistics and why this matters for leadership development.

- **Preteens** (ages 8–12) average **5 hours and 33 minutes per day** on screens for entertainment purposes.
- **Teens** (13–18) average **8 hours and 39 minutes daily**—with **4.5 hours** of that spent on phones using social media and messaging apps.
- **35%** of teens say they use social media **"constantly."**

Now let's break down the opportunity costs:

**1. Impact on Mental Health**

Too much screen time, especially social media, is linked to **higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem**. A *JAMA Pediatrics* study showed that adolescents who spent more time on screens were more

likely to experience depressive symptoms and sleep issues.

These mental health struggles don't just impact well-being—they impact confidence, motivation, and the ability to take initiative. In other words, screen saturation can weaken the very foundation of leadership.

**2. Sleep Disruption**

Blue light from screens suppresses melatonin, making it harder to fall asleep and reducing sleep quality. Poor sleep leads to irritability, poor concentration, and lower academic performance. A tired teen isn't thinking about leading—they're just trying to get through the day.

**3. Academic Performance Suffers**

According to *Frontiers in Psychology*, students who spend more time on screens perform worse academically. Screens don't just distract; they also consume the hours that could be spent studying, asking questions, or applying knowledge through critical thinking—all of which build future leadership capacity.

"Every choice you make has an end result." – Zig Ziglar

**4. Physical Health Takes a Hit**

More screen time = less movement. The World Health Organization warns that sedentary behavior in childhood leads to obesity, type 2 diabetes, and long-term cardiovascular issues. Kids who move less are also less likely to develop the stamina and confidence needed for leadership roles.

**5. Stunted Social-Emotional Growth**

Leadership isn't just about vision—it's about connecting with people. Kids who spend more time online and less time in face-to-face interaction have fewer chances to learn empathy, conflict resolution, and communication. These "soft skills" are actually *core* leadership traits.

As Dr. Wendy Mogel says in *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, "Our job is not to prepare the road for the child, but to prepare the child for the road."

**Screens Steal Time from Leadership Growth**

Middle and high schoolers average:

- **6–7 hours/day** on screens
- **2.7 hours/day** on homework
- **7.6 hours/day** (38%) of 13–17-year-olds in sports
- **4.5 hours/week** on arts training (30%)

With packed schedules and rising screen time, there's little bandwidth left for leadership development.

"You may delay, but time will not, and lost time is never found again." – Benjamin Franklin

**Real-Life Lessons from Books Worth Reading**

Two excellent resources:

- **The Anxious Generation** by Dr. Jonathan Haidt explores the mental health consequences of digital overload.
- **Free-Range Kids** by Lenore Skenazy highlights how overprotective parenting (including digital coddling) ironically increases risk by reducing resilience.

Both books point to a vital truth: kids need freedom and real-world experience to grow into confident leaders. But digital addiction robs them of that opportunity.

**Practical Ideas to Reclaim Time and Build Leaders**

Let's move from awareness to action. Here are three ways to shift screen time into leadership time:

**1. Create “Tech-Free” Zones or Times**
Designate zones (like the dinner table) or times (like the hour before bed) as screen-free. Use that time to:

- Talk about current events
- Play board games
- Plan a family project

**2. Encourage Real-World Leadership Opportunities**
Guide your child toward roles that require them to influence others:

- Organize a neighborhood clean-up
- Lead a family discussion night
- Take responsibility for planning part of a trip or family event

**3. Schedule Leadership Time Weekly**
Just like sports practice or music lessons, leadership needs time on the calendar. Try:

- A weekly leadership dinner where they lead discussion
- Sunday afternoon family “projects” they manage
- Taking turns facilitating game night

The key here is consistency. These small investments compound over time.

**Final Thoughts**

Leadership won’t develop on its own—it requires space, intention, and training. Every hour your child spends passively consuming entertainment is an hour they’re not building confidence, creativity, and influence. Help your child understand that time is a currency. How they spend it shapes who they become. You don’t need to ban screens entirely. Instead, balance their use with real-world experiences that help them lead.

“The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.” – C.S. Lewis. Let’s make sure our kids are using those minutes well.

For more tools to help your family raise confident, capable leaders, check out our course at www.kidlead.com/kla or reach out to us at info@kidlead.com.





# Chapter 16

# *Carpe Occasio*

## *Seize the Opportunity—Or Watch It Pass You By*

**Darn It!**

We've all experienced moments in life when we knew we missed something important—a relationship not pursued, a career opportunity turned down, a bold step we were too hesitant to take. Whether it's the winning lottery ticket tossed out with the junk mail, the call we meant to return, or the "someday" dream that turned into never, missed opportunities are more common than we care to admit.

Maybe it was the last-minute decision not to study abroad, and now decades later, you still wonder what you missed. Maybe it was the time you were encouraged to apply for a leadership position but convinced yourself you weren't qualified. Or maybe it was something smaller: the soccer game you skipped because work ran late, or the family dinner you postponed, never realizing it would've been your child's only chance to share something meaningful.

In most of these cases, we didn't miss out because we were lazy or careless—we simply didn't realize the window was closing. That's the

tragedy of lost opportunity: you often don't feel it until it's gone. The same holds true for developing your child's leadership potential. You don't feel the urgency until they're already halfway out the door. What felt like plenty of time shrinks rapidly, and suddenly, the child who once looked to you for every answer is leaning into peers, media, and the wider world for direction. That's why this chapter is titled *Carpe Occasio*, Latin for "seize the opportunity." Because if you wait too long, you might miss it entirely.

**No Regrets Parenting**

Most parents genuinely want the best for their kids. We sacrifice sleep, time, and money to help them succeed. But sometimes, what we fail to give them is just as important as what we do. One of the greatest oversights in modern parenting is waiting too long to develop a child's leadership potential.

Leadership is not simply a professional skill for adults in the workplace. It's a personal competency rooted in social-emotional development, and it begins in childhood. When parents delay or disregard leadership development, they don't just postpone a strength—they risk losing key opportunities that may never fully return. The consequences may not be immediate, but over time, they stack up. And for many parents, these missed chances become quiet regrets.

This is where the idea of "No Regrets Parenting" comes in. It's not about being perfect or getting everything right—it's about being intentional. It's about making the most of the small, everyday moments that shape who our children become. And one of the most valuable gifts we can give them during these moments is the foundation of leadership. Let's look at what children and families stand to lose when we wait too long.

**1. Confidence—and the Courage to Stand Tall**

Leadership breeds confidence, not because it teaches kids to dominate, but because it equips them to navigate social dynamics with a sense of purpose. When children aren't given chances to influence their

environment in positive ways, they often internalize doubt or rely too heavily on others for approval. The result? A higher likelihood of becoming targets for bullying.

Research from the *Journal of Child Development* suggests that children with poor social leadership skills are more likely to be marginalized by peers or struggle to stand up for themselves. Bullies often sense vulnerability, and children who lack assertiveness and self-assurance become easier targets. As Dr. Michele Borba, author of *UnSelfie*, notes, "Empowered kids with strong moral compasses are far less likely to be bullied—or to become bullies themselves." Leadership, when nurtured early, builds that inner compass.

**2. Social Intelligence—The Foundation of Leadership**

Leadership is primarily a social skill. It involves understanding people, managing emotions, resolving conflicts, and motivating others. These are not just corporate buzzwords; they are daily realities in the life of a child. When leadership is neglected, kids may struggle with communication, teamwork, and emotional regulation. The longer we wait, the harder these skills are to develop.

In fact, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has found that social-emotional learning (SEL) improves students' ability to manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions. These are the core competencies of leadership. The loss of social intelligence often manifests subtly: a child avoids group activities, struggles to form friendships, or gives up when conflict arises. Without leadership training, these everyday situations become sources of stress instead of growth.

**3. Academic Success—More Than Just IQ**

It might surprise some parents to know that academic performance isn't just about intelligence. It's also about self-awareness, goal setting, and perseverance—all of which fall under the umbrella of emotional intelligence. A meta-analysis of over 213 school-based SEL programs

involving more than 270,000 students found that those who participated in SEL programs showed an 11-percentile-point gain in academic performance compared to their peers. That's a powerful return on investment.

When we delay leadership development, we miss the opportunity to improve not only a child's confidence and character, but also their grades. The ability to focus, communicate with teachers, collaborate with peers, and bounce back from setbacks is essential to school success. As psychologist Dr. Daniel Goleman explains, "Emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them."

**4. Peace in the Home—and the Cost of Rebellion**

Natural leaders want to lead. If they're not allowed to express influence in constructive ways, they often find other outlets—and those outlets aren't always productive. Teen rebellion isn't just about hormones or peer pressure. Sometimes it's the result of a child wired for leadership who feels chronically over-controlled or stifled at home.

When kids don't learn how to channel their influence, they may begin asserting power through conflict. They push boundaries, not because they're trying to be defiant, but because they don't feel heard or respected as capable contributors to family life. This is why leadership development in the home is so important. It doesn't mean letting kids run the show. It means involving them in decisions, modeling mutual respect, and teaching them how to influence through responsibility rather than resistance. When families ignore this process, the home becomes a battlefield instead of a training ground. We lose peace, connection, and the joy of watching our kids rise to the occasion.

**5. College Admissions and Future Opportunities**

In today's competitive world, top-tier universities and scholarship committees are looking for more than just GPAs and test scores. They want leaders. They want young people who can work in teams, launch

initiatives, serve their communities, and solve real-world problems. A survey by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) revealed that over 50% of colleges view “demonstrated leadership” as either moderately or considerably important in admissions decisions.

By waiting to build leadership until the late teen years, many students miss the opportunity to compile a meaningful track record of impact. The result? Missed scholarships, limited college options, and fewer doors opening after graduation. As leadership consultant John C. Maxwell puts it, “Leadership develops daily, not in a day.” And universities are well aware of that truth. They’re not just asking what a student knows—they’re asking what a student has done.

**A Window That Won’t Stay Open Forever**

The ages of 5 to 15 represent a critical developmental window for cultivating leadership potential. During these years, children are forming identity, character, and habits that will carry into adulthood. Wait too long, and the moment passes.

That’s why KidLead Academy exists. It’s a framework designed to help parents intentionally develop leadership in their children, starting now—not later. We don’t just help kids act confident. We help them become confident through purpose, practice, and progress.

Because every day we delay is a day of leadership lost. And that’s a cost no parent wants to pay. As Frederick Douglass once said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

If you believe your child has leadership potential—and every child does—don’t wait. Embrace the idea of No Regrets Parenting. Start now. Every day you spend focused on other priorities is another grain of sand through the hourglass. Time won’t come back.

Start now. You’ve got what it takes.

# A Closing Note from the Author



Before we wrap up, I wanted to share something personal. Here's a picture of our three sons when they were young. These were such special years, full of growth, discovery, and the beautiful unpredictability of family life. We're incredibly grateful that all three are now thriving in their careers and personal lives. We also know that, as parents, we can never guarantee outcomes—but we can be intentional. And for that, we feel deeply blessed.

Below that photo, nearly 30 years later, is another image: our oldest son's daughters, now just slightly older than their future dad and uncle in the earlier picture. Time flies. And if three decades can pass in the blink of an eye, imagine how quickly the one decade you have to develop your child's leadership potential—the 5 to 15 Portal—will go.



It's an amazing feeling to look back and know you invested in something that lasts.

I hope you've enjoyed this short book of practical, motivating ideas on developing

your child's leadership potential. While each chapter touches on a different angle, they're all based on training episodes we've shared on the KidLead Academy YouTube channel. I invite you to check them out and share them with friends and family.

I also encourage you to enroll in KidLead Academy, the world's most comprehensive parent training course for those who want to raise leaders. You'll be glad you invested in these parenting skills—tools designed not only to support your child's growth but to expand their influence in the world.

Please share these resources and let others know about the 5–15 Portal. There's strength in numbers. Creating synergy is what leaders do best.

And remember,

***If you want your child to succeed, develop them to lead!***

—Alan E. Nelson, Ed.D.




Don't Waste
this Opportunity

# About the Author



Alan E. Nelson is family man, leader, professor, and social entrepreneur. Most of his life he's led. After earning a doctorate in leadership from the University of San Diego, he began writing and teaching other leaders. Then at midlife he changed gears, focusing on identifying and developing leaders while they're most pliable, between the ages of 3 and 23. He's the founder of KidLead Inc. (non-profit) and LeadYoung Training Systems, making an impact internationally.

Alan has taught leadership, organizational behavior, and human capital performance and motivation courses at USC Marshall School of Business, Pepperdine, and the University of California Irvine's Merage School of Business. Since 2010, he's been a lecturer of management at the Naval Postgraduate School. He's the author of over 40 books and 200 articles, plus training videos and podcasts. He designed LeadYoung Training Systems age-n-stage, project-based leadership training curricula for ages 3-23. In 2024, Dr. Nelson launched KidLead Academy, an online course to train parents on developing their children's leadership potential.

Married to Nancy for over 40 years, the Nelsons have three grown sons and two wonderful granddaughters. They live in Thousand Oaks, California, just north of Los Angeles.

For more info on Alan and his speaking, go to www.AlanENelson.com or via LinkedIn. He's available for training on this book and related leadership topics. For info on his young leader resources, go to www.kidlead.com and www.LeadYoungTraining.com.




# More resources like this:

- **YouTube Channel** (free training videos): www.youtube.com/@kidleadacademy
- **Free webina**r: www.kidlead.com/webinar
- **Free parenting assessment**: www.kidlead.com/free-assessment
- **Free podcasts & assessments on children**: www.leadyoungtraining.com
- **KidLead Academy** the world's greatest parent training IF you want to raise leaders: kidlead.com/kla

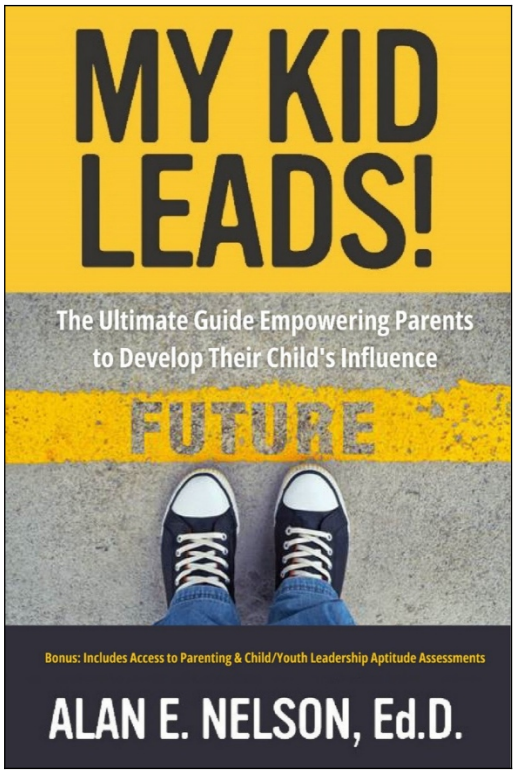
**As a mother and young leader trainer, I've seen firsthand, the amazing benefits of Dr. Nelson's KidLead program. - Jenni Colwell**



**Hands down, KidLead is the finest young leader development program. I've witnessed it over and over for years in Canada.**

**Nicki Straza**
*-children's consultant, author, trainer, mother*



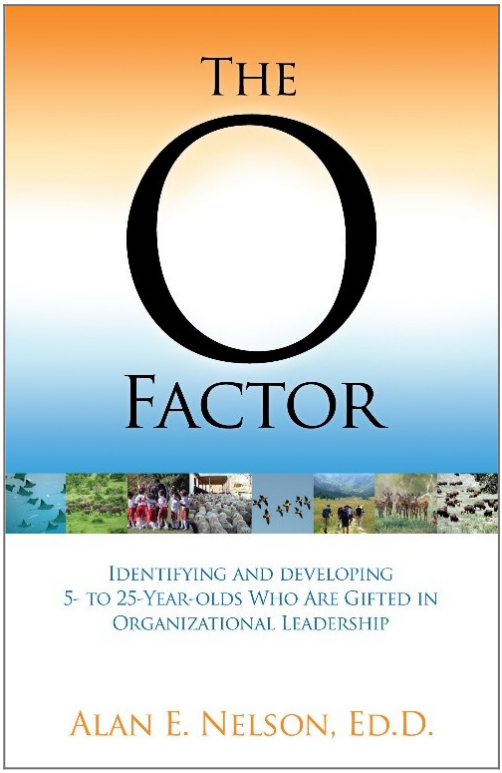



**Like Raising Leaders?** You'll love My Kid Leads! Since 2005, Dr. Nelson has studied how leaders emerge and how to develop them, to be effective and ethical. This how-to book for parents, with kids between the ages of 3 and 18, is loaded with 44 bite-sized lessons, along with activities to do at home and the community. The book was first published in 2020 and updated in 2025.

My Kid Leads! is the companion book for an online course Dr. Nelson teaches with videos, assessments, and other resources, titled KidLead Academy. The course comes highly recommended by experts such as Dr. John C. Maxwell, Dr. Tim Elmore, Dr. Sandra Mashihi, and Dr. Robert Epstein.

The book as available on Amazon.com and Audible.com. For more info on the 7-hour course, go to [www.kidlead.com/kla](www.kidlead.com/kla).

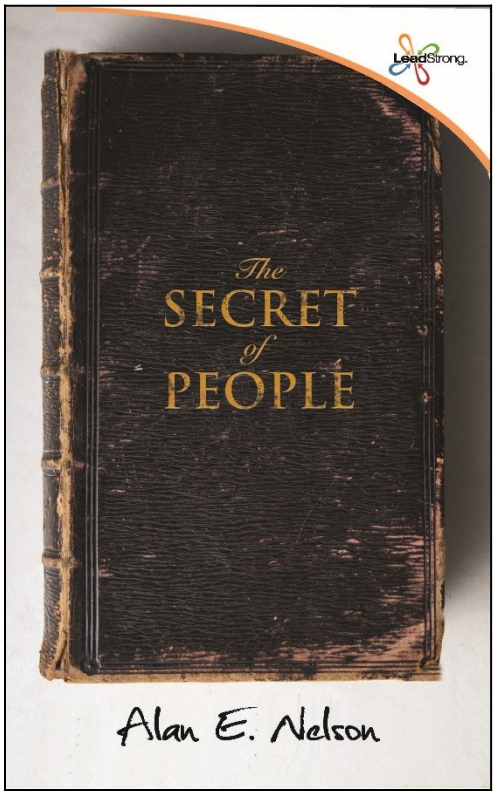
## Other books by Dr. Nelson:




**The *Organizational* Factor** represents a significant amount of Dr. Nelson's research and work with emerging leaders internationally, between the ages of 3-23. In it he looks at the role of genetics and ways to identify future leaders by observing behaviors in social settings. In addition, there are an array of practical suggestions for developing children, preteens and teens as leaders, designed for parents, educators and those who work with youth.

Although similar in content to *My Kid Leads!*, this book is a great read for educators, those who work with children and youth in organizations, and for parents desiring a bit deeper look into those possessing a predisposition to organize others, the *O Factor*. By influencing the influencers, we can leverage our resources on leadership while they're moldable, not moldy.

Available on Amazon.com




**The Secret's Out**

In this engaging, fun-to-read narrative, Alan focuses on how to target the most important single relationship key: treating people with honor. When people behave in a dishonoring manner, it's usually an indicator of what's going on inside of them, not so much a reflection of others. Instead of reacting negatively, we can refocus our attention to address their real need, a desire to be valued.

The narrative takes place in various coffee shops in Monterey and Carmel, California, as the author interacts with a peculiar sage named Paul. It's an engaging story, but all the while explaining some of the most practical ideas to help you succeed in your relationships.

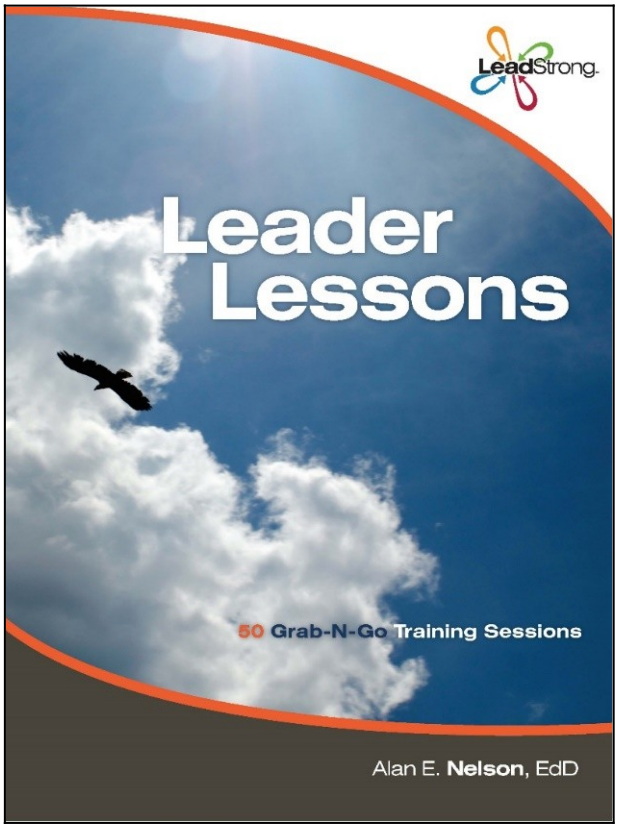
Available on Amazon.com




**Make Moments Count!** In this short, easy-to-read book, Dr. Nelson communicates very practical ways to make a difference in the lives of those we meet on a daily basis. In an intriguing story line, similar in style to *The Secret of People*, the author engages with a sage "tourist" visiting Malibu. The conversations and mysterious meetings result in discovering powerful insights for influencing others in five minutes or less. By recognizing these fertile, open windows, we can sow seeds of hope that in turn fulfill us as well. The busyness of life need not limit the impact we make with others.

This is a great book for families, organizations, and individuals who want to take advantage of increasing their impact in short bites.

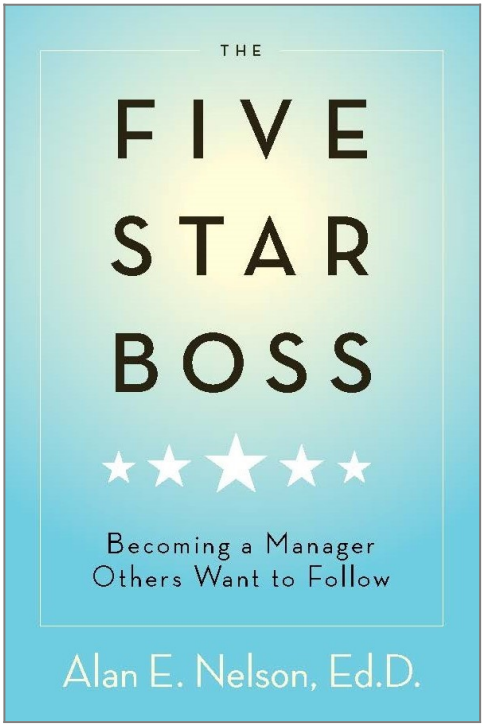
Available on Amazon.com




**Leaders Develop Leaders**

Some of the most overlooked resources for leaders are handy tools for training others how to lead. This is not so much a book as it is a training manual, providing leaders and managers with 50 leadership lessons covering an array of sub-topics. Forty-five of the lessons include a 1-page handout (8x11 format) that can be copied for team members. There's also a 1-page Trainer section with suggestions on how to use the lesson, whether you have 5 or 35 minutes. The variety of topics allows you to select the ones that fit your situation, helping you train your team.

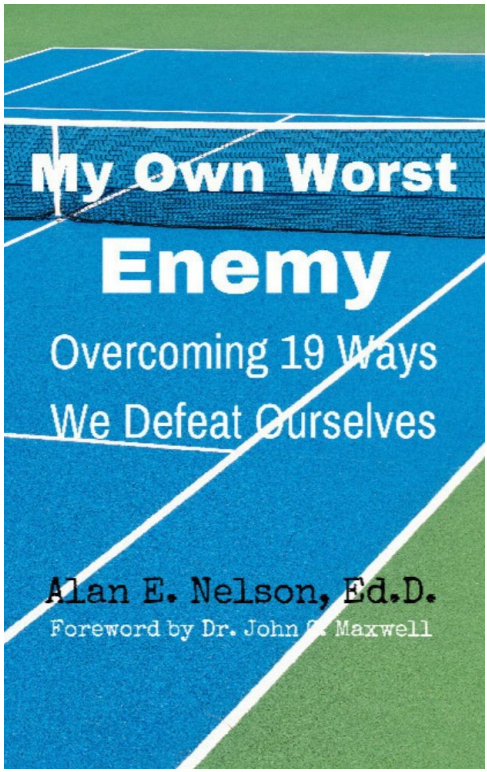
The final five lessons are discussion guides for movies with leadership themes. These make fun team-building opportunities but with a purpose. Various aspects of leading can be coached out via strategic questions, offered in the lessons.




**People don't quit jobs, they quit bosses.** It's the number one reason exit-seekers give for leaving employment. Gallup research shows that managers are the single most important element of why companies thrive or not. There's a lot riding on being effective as a boss. In The Five-Star Boss, Alan E. Nelson shows you under the hood of organizations, what you need to know when you oversee a team, facility, or division. These short, quick-read chapters allow you to jump around, gleaning content from the author's popular classes at highly ranked business schools.

Over half of new bosses wash out within the first year, primarily because we promote individuals based on their technical skills. But leading people is a whole different mindset, for which few are ever trained. This book is conversational in tone and practical in content. It's a go-to resource for the newbie boss as well as the veteran wanting to brush up on his or her game.

Available on Amazon.com




**What If Your Biggest Obstacle... Is You?**

We all have dreams, intelligence, and drive—but sometimes, despite our best efforts, we still find ourselves stuck. **My Own Worst Enemy** takes a deep dive into the hidden patterns of self-sabotage that hold us back from success, no matter how hard we work or how smart we are.

Dr. Alan E. Nelson, Ed.D., has spent over 40 years studying human behavior and working with high achievers. Through his research, he's uncovered 19 self-defeating "behavitudes"—the habits and attitudes that quietly undermine our potential. In this book, he helps you identify, understand, and break free from these self-imposed barriers so you can finally move forward.