

Chapter 10

***B*uilding a Bridge to
an Even Brighter Tomorrow**

*The person who tends his garden
reaps a never ending harvest.*

- Stanley Phillips

It was my eighth birthday, but the scene was no different than any one before. “Steve, here open this next,” my dad said, thrusting a wrapped package into my hands.

That was always the tip-off. Whenever my dad got excited about a gift he bought for me, it meant only one thing—this was Steve’s present that Dad would be playing with. Oh sure, he’d include me in his fun—I got to watch while he played with whatever new gadget he discovered. But there was no mistaking who the intended recipient of the gift was. In the end, it always worked out great—he got to play with my gadgets and I got to play with my dad—which is all I ever cared about anyway.

As he handed me the package, I looked at my mom and rolled my eyes. She smiled back and shrugged her shoulders. In that brief moment, my dad grabbed the package out of my hands, tore away the wrapping and began opening the box.

As he worked on getting it open, I peered over his shoulder to peek at my present. It actually was pretty impressive. An engine powered model airplane. Now, I didn’t give two hoots about flying airplanes, but my dad, no surprise here, was a pilot. At least I knew how I would be spending my Saturday mornings for the next few months.

Without fail, every Saturday, he’d wake me out of my deep slumber so that we could fly my plane. We’d drive over to the school and set everything up on the playground. It was quite a production. He’d bring a can of gasoline for the engine. Next to the gasoline, he’d lay out his tools. Next to the tools was a thermos of hot coffee and his favorite donuts. And next to all of that was my stool, where I would sit and watch him fly my plane.

Although we flew the plane every Saturday, it was actually Thursday nights when we spent the most time together with the plane we had christened *Sandy’s Shrek*. You see Thursday nights was maintenance night. Now it was one thing getting out of a warm bed every Saturday to watch my dad fly my plane. It was something else to spend every Thursday night going through his boring maintenance routine. So one Thursday night I actually mustered up the courage to ask him if we could cut back on our Thursday activity.

“Dad, why do we have to take the engine apart every week?” I asked.

“You have to keep the engine clean so that all the parts work smoothly on Saturday,” he said.

“What are you doing now?” I asked.

“I’m cleaning out the fuel line with this pipe cleaner. You don’t want any dirt in there, do you?”

“No,” I said with all the conviction of not really knowing what it was I was saying no to.

“If any dirt gets in the fuel line, the engine will sputter and the plane will crash onto the pavement. You don’t want that to happen, do you?”

“No, Dad, I wouldn’t want that to happen. But why do we have to do this every week? Isn’t once in awhile good enough? How much dirt can get on this little ole’ plane?” I asked.

“Think about it,” Dad said.

“I have thought about it. Every week, we do the same thing. Tighten every last screw in place. Check each wire to see if it’s snugly attached. The belts get changed every week, whether or not they need to be. How many times can you test the wing flaps?”

“That’s good. I’m glad to see you’re learning all that goes into keeping this bird flying. Next week, I’m going to start letting you do some of the maintenance yourself.”

“Oh great,” I thought. That’s not exactly what I was shooting for here. This maintenance stuff was cutting into my *Batman* hour on television. Here I was actually angling to cut back on our Thursday night sessions, and he was assigning me more work.

“Dad, I was thinking, maybe we can do this every other week. I’m sure the plane will fly fine just the same,” I said somewhat hopefully.

“Steven, haven’t you learned anything yet? What’s the most important part of flying an airplane?”

“Sure I have, Dad. Being a good pilot is the most important part. And believe me, Dad, you’re one of the best! That’s why I was thinking, we only need...”

Dad saw where I was going with this and cut me off.

He began talking to me in that tone, you know the one parents reserve for the times they’re teaching their child a lesson about life more than responding to the question you actually asked.

“Steve, thank you for that vote of confidence, but that’s not exactly the point I had in mind. It helps to be a good pilot, but being the best pilot in the world is absolutely useless without a plane that is well maintained.

“A good pilot never wants to wait till they’re in mid-air to discover a problem. A good pilot knows that their skills in flying a plane are merely the icing on the cake.

“A truly skillful pilot is one who does all the prep work prior to flying the plane. Afterall, a well maintained plane is a plane that flies well.”

Well, I guess that line, *a well maintained plane is a*

plane that flies well, is a keeper. It plays in my head every-time I think about taking a short-cut. It’s a lesson I’ve tried to pass on to the people in my life. If you stop and think about it, I guess that’s really the message I’ve tried to convey to you in this book.

There are no short-cuts to developing a loving emotional connection with your child. It’s a lot of hard work that oftentimes leaves you questioning its payoff. But there is a payoff—by creating a sense of connectiveness *today* you’ll *head off* problems down the road. And the secret to creating a safe, loving emotional connection is doing the work day after day.

Let’s face it, the love and respect that you and your child believe is due the both of you isn’t a birthright. It evolves out of you both doing the necessary maintenance on your relationship. The tools to perform that maintenance have been laid out for you in this book. Creating an emotionally safe climate, your offering spirit connecting with your child’s seeking spirit, validating your child’s feelings, speaking to your child’s feelings, encouraging your child to express rather than act out their feelings, and effectively resolving conflict are but a few of the tools we have discussed that will keep your emotional connection fine tuned.

Try to keep in mind the goal of this hard work even when there seems to be very little appreciation for all of your effort. Your child needs to be connected to you. Your child *needs* you to be *actively* involved in their life. Your child *needs* you to *understand* them through the way *they* see, feel, and experience their world.

It bears repeating one last time what the payoff is for honoring your child’s need for emotional connectiveness.

An emotional connection embodies the miracle that the love for your child can create in her life. This bond is a protective salve for your child's emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. The connection you create with your child is the means by which the two of you can express and experience the essence of the love and respect you feel for each other.

I trust that you believe as I do that kindness and understanding is what your child will respond to most. And hopefully you have begun to experience the impact that your kindness and understanding can have on your child. Quite simply, kindness and understanding is the password that will unlock the barriers your child erects when you attempt to create an emotional connection by entering their world.

So take it slow. Take it easy. Don't expect miracles overnight. Though there will be plenty of times you'll question the value of what you're doing, learn to trust yourself and believe in your child. Don't buy into all the ways your child devises to shut you out. At the core of who they are is an oftentimes frightened, vulnerable being who needs your love and acceptance. As for your end of things, all it takes is your courage and love, plus the magical formula for how best to enter the world of your child.

G.B.U.

Steve

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