

# The Power of 'We'

## Part 1

The word "We..." is a powerful force in family life. It's what anchors children's loyalty to their parents and brothers and sisters--and forges a lifelong bond to their parents' convictions of right and wrong. It empowers children's inner voice of conscience for life.

Family loyalty saves many teens and young adults from disaster. Well raised young people will shun drugs and drunkenness and reckless driving, not only because these are wrong, but because, if caught, the teens would disgrace their family. Fear of causing their family shame can steel the will of young people, lead them to shrug off peer pressures, say "no" to selfish impulses, and live rightly.

How does this loyalty come about? Through the power of "We...."

Every healthy family lives by a set of rules in the home, some high standards for attitudes and conduct directed toward the welfare of others. When children live by these standards every day for years, they gradually--with fits and starts along the way--internalize powers of judgment, ethical responsibility, gutsy perseverance, and consideration for others. Active family rules form the framework for their growth in character.

Why does a healthy family have rules? For one reason: because it has a *job* to do, a *service mission* to carry out. A consumerist family, by contrast, has no job at all--for consumption is a static pastime, not an achievement--and so it has no reason to lay down standards for performance.

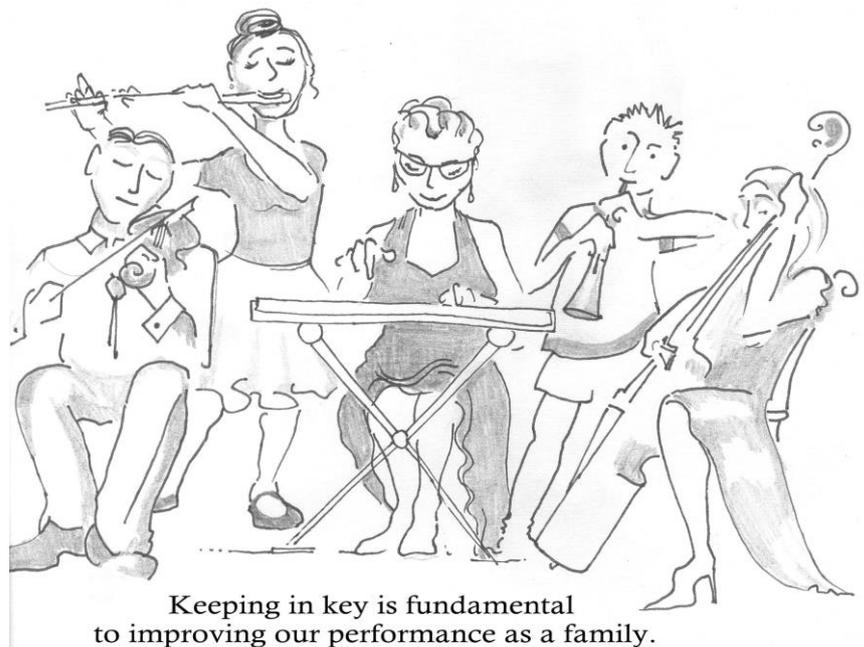
If we look at the parental job from a professional point of view--that is, the way things work in any serious business enterprise--here's what we see....

Every serious enterprise--whether a business, a non-profit service, a society and its government, or a family--has three basic elements that distinguish it from a loose and pointless or amateurish operation, :

 First, a *mission*. This is some long-term goal of service, a task carried out for the betterment of others.

 Secondly, a *responsible chain of command*. In any group, some people assume the burden of responsibility and consequently hold the authority to lead; they teach and direct others to carry out the institution's mission and deliver its service. In this way, responsible leaders direct those who work with them, not just under them--for, as we've seen before, a real leader has joiners, not followers.

 Third, a *set of performance standards*. These are clear directional rules by which those in charge show others what's expected of them, the ways they most effectively contribute to the overall mission. In business this includes a job description and some sort of protocol that sets standards for acceptable performance--office rules, by-laws, contractual obligations, and the like.



Keeping in key is fundamental to improving our performance as a family.

Here's the point. Because every healthy family is a serious service enterprise, it displays all three elements outlined here: mission, leadership, and performance standards.

On the other hand, since the consumerist family is going no place--has no real directed mission--then the parents are weak leaders (lead where?) and the family's rules, if any, act only as *ad hoc* bandages to keep hassles and damage to a minimum.

Obviously a father and mother take on a serious mission in family life. Since they assume this huge responsibility, Dad and Mom have the right and duty to lead. All children need leadership, and if both parents do not lead them to do right, then someone else may lead them to do wrong.

In my many conversations with great parents and their children, I used to probe from time to time to learn what rules each healthy family lived by. Here is what I noticed....



All the rules, directly or implicitly, began with the word "We...," not "You..." For instance, the rule for chores was not "*You kids* must clean your room," but rather "*We* all pitch in to keep this house in decent shape." Not "*You* must call if you're late," but instead "*We* call if we're going to be late." It wasn't "*You* have to put toys away," but "*We* all return things where they belong."



In other words, *the parents lived by the rules themselves, the same ones they imposed on their children*. The parents lived at home like responsible, considerate adults, and they insisted their kids do the same. Like any other real leaders, Dad and Mom demanded as much of themselves as of their children. They practised what they preached and led the way by their personal example. Consequently, every day, their children witnessed the parents' convictions alive in ongoing action. (And so, later as teenagers, they could never justly accuse their parents of hypocrisy.)



Abiding by these rules led the children--or forced them--to practice each of the virtues. Repeatedly, every day, Dad and Mom encouraged their children to live rightly: to take responsibility, manage their own affairs, work conscientiously, discern right from wrong, respect their parents' authority, and consider the needs and rights of others. Right living permeated the whole spirit of the family--and seeped its way inside the kids little by little, day by day. An old maxim says, "As the day goes, so goes one's life." Whatever the children practice every day--for good or for ill--will be the way they live later. In a sense, the dynamic by which children learned the virtues through these rules seemed to follow the wise adage: What children *hear*, they mostly forget. What they *see*, they mostly remember. What they *do*, they understand and internalize.



All the rules seemed to fall into five distinct but interconnected categories:

- We respect the rights and sensibilities of others.
- We all contribute to making our home a clean, orderly, civilized place to live.
- We give people information they need to carry out their responsibilities.
- We use electronic media only to promote family welfare, never to work against it.
- We love and honour our Creator above all things; we thank Him for His blessings and ask His help for our needs and those of others.

For whatever use they may be to you, I list these rules for you here. Once again let me stress, what I lay out below is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. That is, I am describing what I've seen work in one great family after another. I do not presume to dogmatize about details here, or insist that every family should adopt these standards wholesale. I couldn't rightly do that even if I wanted to.

Let me stress, too, that practically no family lives by each and every one of these rules. I have simply listed all of them here for your thoughtful judgment.

It's up to you to weigh each one and judge what's best for you and your children. It's your family, and therefore your call.

**Next Month: Part 2.**

## Sources

[www.parentleadership.com](http://www.parentleadership.com) the website of James Stenson, author of *Upbringing* and other excellent parenting resources