What Children Get Right About Entrepreneurship That Adults Screw Up

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Like any parent, I want to teach my kids to learn, grow and flourish in a world of countless possibilities. Paradoxically, my seven-and-a-half-year-old son, Matthew, seems to teach me these concepts as well. He reminds me of what I already know — but have unfortunately forgotten.

Thanks to Matthew, I realize that children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity coupled with extraordinary problem-solving skills. As my wife, Maria, and I talk about parenting, we keep reminding each other that our primary job is just not to screw things up. After all, the way that children learn and adopt new solutions is incredible. Initially in life, they solve problems creatively and rely on their own thought process completely without fear or limits.

Fearlessness

I've flown over a million miles and every time the plane hits turbulence, my heart skips a beat. Yet, each time we fly in an airplane, Matthew is excited. What does he like the most? The turbulence. He admits that it's one thing he looks forward to when flying. He's never afraid.

On our last trip, after carefully studying the safety card, he asked, "How will we swim if the plane runs out of gas?" It never occurred to him that the situation might be hopeless and perhaps we would have no way out.

When I reflect on kids' fearlessness, I find that organizations equally act without fear or self-imposed boundaries when they are first establishing themselves. Ironically, every stagnant organization was once a startup and lived from a vortex of childlike fearless innovation. As the organization matures, somehow the fearlessness subsides, employees and leaders become less engaged and barriers that were never entertained seem to arise and become insurmountable conflicts.

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Technology

Matthew continues to enlighten me on how technology will shape the lives of future generations. If I say, "Matthew, give me two minutes," he will say, "Alexa, set the timer for two minutes." He holds me accountable for the promises I make and uses technology to enable the process. If I truly thought about my words, I would have never promised him I'd be available in 120 seconds if it was not a realistic promise I could keep.

At work, with all of the competing demands we face, it's easy to unintentionally create barriers that do not exist. Kids, with their literal interpretations and laser-like focus on needs-based problem-solving, remind us of the simple power of being authentic. They master the universe by finding solutions. Matthew once mentioned to me that he would like to make cupcakes for his half birthday. I didn't want to bake cupcakes at that very moment, so I told him, "I'm not sure we have the ingredients." Matthew called me on my evasiveness by asking, "Alexa, what are the ingredients in cupcakes?"

Foolishly thinking I could outwit my son after he confirmed we had all the ingredients, I told him, "We need to find the best recipe." Matthew, knowing he can challenge me and there will be no negative repercussions for doing so, asked, "Alexa, open

WikiHow.” My son did not accept false barriers. We spent the afternoon making cupcakes because we had the ingredients and we now had arguably the best recipe to do so. After all, there were no barriers or logical reasons that would inhibit our task.

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Getting in touch with my inner child

I keep reminding myself that I need to be in touch with my “inner child” and take that wisdom with me when I am faced with false barriers and rash communication. Truly no one in any organization should be inhibited from asking a sincere question or offering a plausible solution to potential problems. If they don’t feel secure in doing so, it’s important to pinpoint, “Why not?”

Where and when do we lose our sense of wonder? When did we become afraid of our parents or our colleagues and leaders? There’s no doubt in my mind that if we act from a sense of authenticity, with a focus on creating and finding solutions, the results will astound us.

Access to information is changing; neither our children nor company employees need to rely on others to disseminate information hierarchically. This democratization of knowledge has shifted the power dynamic in every aspect of our lives. Matthew was not tall enough to hit a light switch, however, he could instruct Alexa to turn on the lights. He didn’t know how to read or write, but he could access data and act on it with surprising wisdom. Information is power and now everyone has it.

Children remind me that there are aspects of growing up that I need to reclaim. I believe we must not abandon our sense of

play – at home, or at work. It’s our sense of play that opens us up to possibilities and allows us to create. My kids prompt me to recognize there is no need to submit to the internalized oppression that we are “better off” if we behave in a certain way, meeting someone else’s expectations.

The same is true for startups as they expand. When they begin to take themselves too seriously and abandon speaking in plain language, the sense of possibility begins to erode. As we become more in touch with our inner children and aware of this risk, we can influence our organizations to remain fluid, adapt and innovate. The oppression of thought can be consciously reversed.

We can incorporate a system of “re-learning” into our organizations by integrating a sense of play and wonder in all we do. Who wouldn’t want to wake up and be a part of that organization every day? I know I do.

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