

Are our students ready to tackle the world?

Mark Pavilons



From the time our ancestors created language, to today's high-tech world, parenting has remained largely unchanged.

Sure, we have ample tools, techniques and a vast array of knowledge to help us navigate the parenting maze. But as a species, we really haven't evolved to the point where we really know what we're doing.

I consider myself fairly intelligent and my wife and I did all we could to prepare ourselves for the parenting journey. Kim read countless books and scoured the Internet to find resources. We managed and we learned a lot, knowledge that was extended to each child.

Asking our parents was out of the question, since we questioned their techniques. I wonder how we made it out alive! My first toys were electrical tape, a toaster and various sharp kitchen utensils!

At times, I feel my wife and I are running a B&B or quaint little sandwich shop. My kids place their orders for their lunches, and provide input into weekly dinners. I still have trouble dealing with this and often tell them I'm not a short-order cook or their waiter. I get nothing, not even a raised eyebrow or two. Kids today!

I tell them a tale from my childhood in hopes it hits home. My mom gave me unsweetened marmalade sandwiches every day for an entire semester! I can't look at the stuff to this very day. In those days, we wouldn't dare complain because we knew what the response would be.

Yes, our kids have it pretty good.

And I'm partially to blame. I tell my wife that a less-coddling, more kick-in-the-pants approach to parenting will yield positive results. My single vote, in a family council of three females, carries little weight. I've been voted off the island more times than I can count.

I am reduced to simply mumbling to myself, with the occasional outburst, as a symbolic gesture of putting my foot down! I may as well just beat my chest like the great apes.

Our kids are generally very good in all regards. They're bright, outgoing and, I'm happy to report, quite witty and sarcastic. These two qualities alone, which I fully encouraged, will take them far in life.

Without any formal training, parents are given the most monumental task of all - giving our kids all they need to tackle the world. Wow. Most parents I know are still working out the kinks in their own lives, let alone providing ultimate, surefire guidance to the next generation of young adults.

We taught our kids morals, ethics, basic human truths and encouraged them in everything they tried.

My 18-year-old daughter Lexie has become a world traveller and humanitarian. She really wants to help save the world. Just the other night, after watching a movie, she told us she wanted to work in India, helping the less fortunate. There are very few Mother Teresas in the world today.

Instead of discouraging her and reading her the riot act on practical career choices, we've let her explore the world and its cultures. Really, how can you tell a young person to stop caring about the planet and her fellow human beings?

Her path may not lead her to fame and fortune, but boy she's in for a heck of a journey!

And we know she will change lives. She already has. And she's changed ours, too.

Her world experiences and relative wisdom have yet to give her all she needs to venture out into this harsh, cruel world. The university application process has been a bit of a challenge and eye-opener.

Apparently, we're not alone.

A new survey finds that while students have a clear idea of what they are looking for from college or university, they have a tough time making the transition to the new life and academic expectations of higher education. A survey done by Academica Group for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) found that students' motivations for attending higher education were primarily career-driven, both in selecting the institution with the best reputation and in taking part in activities like work-integrated learning to gain hands-on knowledge and experience in their field.

However, making informed decisions on these issues was a challenge with many students expressing frustration on being unable to find useful information on institutions, their programs of interest, financial aid and the application process.

Students also expressed having difficulty adjusting to the changing lifestyle of living away from home and the new academic expectations around workload and grades.

Neither my wife nor I lived away from home during our post-secondary education. Campus life is new to us. There's no way to know how she will adjust. She's looking at studying humanities at Western, and perhaps one day working for the UN, Red Cross or some other NGO.

Again, all we can do as parents is try to give help foster common sense, responsibility and all other traits that will keep them safe, out of harm's way, and on a path to enlightenment. Sounds a lot like Kwai Chang Caine in the 1970s TV series Kung Fu.

Grasshopper, if you can snatch this pebble from my hand ...?

No one prepared us for the cost. While we have RESPs, the cost of a four-year program will ding us for roughly \$80,000. I could be speeding along in a Porsche, with bumper sticker that reads "I frittered away my kid's education money for this."

We've applied for scholarships and there are some government grants available, starting in 2017. As for the rest, well, it's fingers crossed.

Doesn't sound like a perfect plan, does it?

Ready to tackle the world? Who is?