

Modeling from Within

Every child needs guidance. They need someone to look up to, someone to emulate. As a sports-a-holic child I was always dressed like my favorite sports idol. I had a black bat like George Foster and a straight hockey stick like Dave Keon. I was intrigued by anything and everything they did.

Was this OK? Well, aside from the fact that I just dated myself by referencing these sports heroes, I'd have to say definitely maybe. I think it's all right to look up to some sports heroes and other public figures but when you think about it, it's pretty risky business.

Coming back to today's world, would I want my kids mimicking the actions of, say, Terrell Owens? I think not. If I wanted them to grow up to be arrogant, self centered and immature morons, then he would be my man.

Without any guidance from (you guessed it) parents, T.O. would be a prime candidate for any impressionable youth. He's always in the public eye, he is excellent at his chosen sport. It's just that he has all the character of a cardboard cutout.

It is inevitable that kids gravitate towards perceived role models that are in the public eye. The media inundates us with stories – some factual and some absurd – about all our modern day celebrities and it is impossible to escape.

Charles Barkley said it best when questioned about being a role model just after he had tossed a man out of a bar window. He said that any kid that looked at him as role model was a fool – they should be looking at home for that influence.

It seems so simple. Look inside the fishbowl instead of outside. Generalizing here, but many public figures get too much money too fast and the amount of money they make seems directly proportional to the number and size of the mistakes they create for themselves.

We see everything from DUI's to petty crimes to all sorts of other inappropriate behavior not suited for this publication. The term "role model" seems only to apply to them when they are "rolling" dice in Vegas while surrounding themselves with air-headed models.

It is up to us, as parents, to help influence them and to get them to accept us as their role models. I don't mean I want to see my kid copying how I make coffee or charging out of the house with a briefcase, but in terms of character, it all starts at home.

Think about it. Does it really make sense to look up to Eminem or the people who monitor your M&M's? Our kids are around us all the time, and we have an enormous influence on their lives. Rappers, movie stars and even other high profile neighborhood kids could care less about our children yet we would die for them.

Assuming we can get them to see us as their role model, it gets scary because we then have to live up to it. Our choices, actions and morals are now carefully scrutinized by our mini posse every minute of the day. I guess that means I can't come home with a cigarette in my mouth and pop my shirt when I make that big sale at work, or trash talk to the mailman as he runs his daily route.

A simple example – I am fixing my oldest child's bike and she is sitting watching me. As I twist the already stripped nut, my wrench slips and I slam my knuckles painfully into the chain ring. I could throw the wrench, kick the bike and call it every name I can think of...or, I can wince in silent agony and try again. While every ounce of my body wants to launch the bike to Wyoming, I know the right thing to do.

Don't get me wrong, I think it is OK to have other people as role models, but they must have solid character and they must come behind us. Look at a guy like Joe Sakic. He carries himself with dignity and is extremely humble. About the most controversial thing he has ever done is mismatch his pants and sports coat.

And the two older boys across the road can get in the game too. They are polite, they work hard and are always helping their parents or neighbors. I am OK if our girls look up to these guys – just never date them. But they are never dating boys anyway – ever (says the reasonable father!).

So accept it. We are it. As parents we have a tremendous responsibility to act like role models and to get our kids to accept us as such. We need to live up to this as best we can and to guide them as they look outside the home for other positive influences.

And next time you get a touchdown, act like you've been there before. Important (little) people are watching.