

A Lesson in Getting What You Want

I saw a commercial on television a while ago for some school or program—it honestly didn't register until it was over—that was attempting to convince adult listeners that we could indeed learn to get what we want in life. Soon after I was looking at a print add on the subway in New York City with basically the same message. I reflected on all the self-help books and seminars that are out there basically telling us the same thing—set your intentions on what you want and you can get it. Even my own book focuses on how to become aware of old belief patterns and their affect on our expectations and present thinking in order to change those old patterns to be more effective.

It struck me that as adults, we need to be convinced, taught, indeed reprogrammed, to change what we were brought up to believe—that we can't have what we want—in order to lead happy, productive lives and know that we actually do deserve what we want in life. Wouldn't it save us millions of dollars in self-help, therapy, medications—both legal and illegal—not mention the anxiety and stress we suffer, not to have to go through all this reprogramming? What if we taught our children from the start that they can get what they want. What a concept!

"Stop badgering me! You know you can't have that!" "You have to learn that you can't always get what you want?" "Stop with the begging, you're being a pain." "Money doesn't grow on trees, you know." My goodness, we do a good job of teaching our children how small there are, that they can't have what they want, and that they are selfish, rude, and spoiled if they try.

Years ago, I heard a speaker talking about a book she had written interviewing a number of very successful people. I don't remember much, but one fact stuck out in my memory. The common thread she found with all of them was that as children, they always go the message from their parents that they could get what they wanted if they put their mind to it. If one of them said, "I want to build a rocket," instead of hearing, "Don't be silly. You can't do that," he or she heard, "How can you make that happen?"

We are so focused on teaching our children to be satisfied with what they have, to stop begging, to be appreciative, to stop bothering us about everything

they want, that we end up sending the message that they don't deserve what they want and they might as well stop trying. These childhood messages translate to adult experiences of lack, complacency, hopelessness, resentment, unhappiness, depression. When we don't believe we can have what we want, we don't get what we want. Then we find solace in substance abuse, binges, gambling, addictions—feel good substitutes. If you think this is an exaggeration, look around. Pay attention to what we teach our children. "You're not good enough," "Why can't you do better?" "Who do you think you are?" "Stop being such a brat."

We are so afraid of "giving in" to our children, spoiling them, having to spend our hard-earned money on them, that we inadvertently create either greedy, power-hungry, monsters out to prove that they can own the world or passive, resentful, unfulfilled pawns. We mustn't hand over what our children ask for because we want don't want to hear their complaining or we think it's our job to make them happy. Then we create a sense of entitlement and a belief that they don't have to work for anything. But we can say with genuine encouragement and curiosity, "How can you do that? How can you make that happen?"

Instead of rushing your children away from what they want in a store with an attitude of *I don't have time for this*, try paying attention. Get them to explain why they want it and how it works. Be mindful of what they find interesting, even if you don't. And let them know that their minds are wondrous creators that have the potential to make anything happen they can dream up. Watch your language. Are you sending messages that are full of *don't, stop it, how many times have I told you, you can't, all you think of is yourself?*

Put more focus on what you want your child to develop rather than on what you don't. The next time your child is being demanding and outspoken, try pointing out the quality you want him to develop. "Well, you certainly know what you want. That's a good quality to have. It will serve you well. Now, go back, rephrase it and use a different tone so you get your point across rather than attacking me?" Problem solve, don't put down. Then when it is clear what he wants, offer, "What can you do to get that? I am not going to buy it for you, but I

bet you can figure out how to make that happen if you really want it. See if you can come up with a plan." Not only are you teaching your child to be creative and imaginative, but you are giving him a valuable lesson in knowing that he deserves what he wants and can make it happen with ingenuity, determination, and work.