

4 Steps to Engaged Fatherhood

By DeVonte Bennett Bey

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Dedications

I dedicate this book to my Mother, Fathers and family. To

Mom I love you with all my heart, thank you for your sacrifices. To Isaac for all that you taught me, it's because of your knowledge that I was able to overcome all obstacles. To Michael, I exist because of you, what I can do so can you. To my Grandfather, I am who I am because of your early guidance. To my children thank you for all you have taught me. To my Empress thank you for encouraging and believing in me always.

Preface

Growing up, I had a very interesting childhood. I experienced a lot of events that shaped my development at an early age and continued to expand upon early life lessons as I got older. My parents, like many others, worked long hours to provide food and shelter. Although my parents were always busy working, they still found time to come to sports games and take me to practices. They did everything in their power to raise me right, but like all parents, they weren't perfect. Like all children, neither was I, and I took advantage of the freedoms I had as I searched to find myself. Eventually, this path led me to join the military, meet my Consort and have three children with her. That led me to confront and deal with some childhood traumas, generational curses, and miseducation. Which overall led me to write this book. What I learned and the information I received turned me into a better father and a better man all

around. I hope you enjoy this book, and I hope it changes your life the way the information has changed mine.

Thank you

Devonte Bey

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Hey, what's going on? I'm DeVonte. Before we get into this most excellent story, I'd like to formally thank you for picking up this book. Being that this is the first book I have ever written and the first real project I've been able to give my heart and soul to. It means so much to me that you have chosen to read this particular piece of literature. So, thank you from the bottom of my heart. That being said, I'd like to introduce myself; like I said, I'm DeVonte Bennett Bey, most people know me as Papa Bennett. I'm 27 years young; I have an amazing wife and have three wonderful children. I've been married for going to 9 years this year, and my oldest son is 8. I served 5 years in the Marine Corps, where I spent countless hours away from my family and developed a survival mindset like no other. During that time of my life, I struggled to overcome several generational curses, which made me a better father. After getting honorably discharged from the military, I worked for 2 more years doing more work that felt absolutely meaningless. With my wife's

business picking up and me simultaneously deciding that I didn't want to be away from my family for long periods of time anymore. I relieved myself of my job and became a full-time stay-at-home dad. That's when the real work began.

Shortly after becoming a stay-at-home father, my ideas of parenthood were instantly shaken up. One might say it was a culture shock, but we will dive into that later. The point is I wasn't ready for the challenges of being a stay-at-home father. So I had to prepare myself. With having our 3rd child on the way, my wife running a full-time business, and me not having a job, life got tough pretty quick. Not to mention that my son almost didn't make it through the pregnancy (or so we were told). I was forced into a position where I had to completely change my mindset, values, and lifestyle. Needless to say, it was one of the most challenging times in my life, but I pulled through with the power of The Most High. After bringing me through the storm, I was gifted with a new understanding of the power of a father. This book is the final form of the collection of my thoughts, knowledge,

and experiences gained on my journey to becoming a more engaged father. I hope they help you as they have helped me.

It All Started Way Back When

Every father started out as a son. I am, of course, no exception to this fact. However, this very fact means that every father has a level of previous experience being under the care of another person. Bearing that in mind, it's only natural that a father would want to be as good or a better father than his predecessor. My biological father was absent for his own personal reasons. I do not blame him for reasons as I understand from my own experience that life doesn't always deal with the best of hands. No shot to him, but I believe God had a greater plan than having him raise me. Luckily for me, Allah graced me with a new Father who was more than willing to step up and guide me. It is because of the man who stepped up that I am confident and capable enough to write this book. That is why I dedicate this book being my first of many to my Father Isaac, as I am ever

grateful for the sacrifices he made when he didn't have to for me growing up.

Although today I have a decent relationship with both of them, as you can imagine, in my youth, I was a bit rebellious. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but the influence of knowing my biological father intentionally left my mother and me, caused me to experience depression and anxiety at a young age. My self-confidence was not the best, even though from the outside, looking in, you couldn't tell. I excelled in all areas, from sports to academics, in my early years. I was a straight-A student, a great athlete, yet I had trouble making friends in school. I often didn't fit in; I was socially awkward to a degree, and I often dealt with bullies. By the time I became a teenager, I had an impression that the world was against me. So I decided to go against the world. Why? Nobody would listen to what I was going through. I recall feeling alone and abandoned when it came to dealing with emotions or hardships. The thing is, though, it wasn't something that could be blamed on anyone. See,

my parents had me young, and although they rarely showed it, they often struggled. They both worked about 60 miles away and commuted in morning traffic during my entire Middle School and High School Career. As a matter of fact, they still commute to this day (help spread my book so I can buy my mom her house). They didn't have the time, resources, or know-how to change or overcome previous misinformation taught to them from experience or other ways.

I am saying all that to say that my parents did the best they could with the knowledge and ability they had. They weren't perfect, nobody is, and to that degree, we all fall short. But due to their imperfections, I was able to solve problems previously unannounced and learn the special values needed to improve my own parenting when the time came. Furthermore, my duty as their child is to advance to a higher level to bring the knowledge back down for us all to grow.

One thing my parents did right to a high degree was being involved. My parents were at every game, took me to every practice, and encouraged me as best they could. However, a major piece was missing, and I didn't realize what it was until I myself became a parent. We never engaged each other emotionally or as "friends" (for all those with the "I'm not my child's friend" mindset, we will get to that later). We rarely spent one on one time together because they had to work so much. They also had to take care of 2 children, who were 7 and 9 years younger than me. By the time I was 10 years old, I could handle all of my basic needs, except maybe waking up on time (I still have trouble doing that). This had a lot of benefits and a lot of pitfalls. On the one hand, I was very independent, and because of that, I am very successful in my own right. However, due to not having their much-needed guidance because, again, they were working to PROVIDE for me, I was left with an emotional void that I filled with bad habits and unnecessary risks. Risks like actively putting myself in harm's way to save

someone else instead of thinking of what could happen to me.

As I said, though, it wasn't my parent's fault. They did the best they could with what knowledge they had. Now that I am an adult, I have taken it upon myself to fix anything that may have been messed up in order to guarantee that it doesn't get passed down to future generations. My upbringing played a key part in showing me the type of parent I wanted to be and the type I didn't want to become. Most of my fathering career has been doing away with misinformation to make room for new updated information. Through the renewal of my mind by taking in new information, I was able to replace old, outdated ideas about parenting and form new conclusions. This not only allowed me to become a better father but a better person overall.

My Fathering Experience

So that leads me to my journey of fatherhood. Like I said, I had bad habits and took unnecessary risks; I got my wife of 9 years pregnant shortly before I turned 18. I wasn't

particularly worried about it, though, for two reasons. First, my wife has been my best friend for something like 12 years, and I believe that's an underestimation; the second is that I was in the military. I had fiat, I had a place to stay, I had healthcare, and I had a steady job. As far as I was concerned, I had the perfect setup to allow me to be a good father. To a degree, I was right, but on a deeper level, a nonphysical level. A level we don't normally talk about, and I'm not just speaking about mentally but emotionally; I had no clue what I was getting into.

What do I mean? Well, for starters, I wasn't prepared to deal with the emotions that my wife was going through after the pregnancy. Not only that, but I wasn't prepared to be away from her and my newborn son for so long on a regular basis. I happen to be 200 miles away from home because I was stationed in a different state at the time. I was late and missed the birth of my first son because of that. That factor caused quite a bit of problem in both my marriage and my relationship with my son. At the time, my

wife and I were going through our own issues, which led to her living in a different location from me. As you can imagine traveling 200 miles a weekend to see your family can begin to wear on you. There were many moments in which I felt very disconnected from my family. I recall feeling like a weekend parent, not really knowing how to take care of my son when I would visit. Not only that, but it gave me constant anxiety at the thought of him not remembering me.

At the time, I was very inexperienced as a parent; I had never really taken care of children. My own experience came solely from being a son. The only thing I knew was that I wanted to be as best a father as I could be. I used to worry heavily about my lack of ability to be there, so I tried to make every visit a positive one, although it didn't always happen like that. By the time my son and my wife came to live with me full time, I believe he had just turned 2. I was extremely excited, but again I was still unknowledgeable; I struggled with figuring out how to properly discipline as well as properly engage. My son and I were much different, or so

I thought. I couldn't imagine myself playing some of the ridiculous games he would make up, and often times I didn't know what I could do to play with him. I remember I used to read to him when I had the chance, and I would take him everywhere with me. But it still felt like I wasn't as close as I would have like to have been.

Around the time my wife got pregnant with my second son, an incident landed me in some trouble. I won't be too specific, but I had a life-changing moment while in a jail cell. I realized that I had certain issues that were a direct product of certain parenting and environmental elements that I wasn't aware of until it was too late. Luckily for me, this landed me into some counseling classes that taught a new meaning of parenting that changed my outlook on life and my outlook on parenting forever.

Chapter 2: What is Engaged Fatherhood

What is engaged fatherhood

So like I said, I ended up in counseling and parenting classes with my wife after the whole arresting situation. It was in these classes that I began a mental metamorphosis. I started taking loads of new information regarding parenting that I had never heard of. I learned strategies like 123 Magic which worked quite well as well as other techniques to help guide my disciplinary choices. While in the class, the teacher spoke of a concept that I still thoroughly remember; she told us we are to train our children to survive without us. She expressed that as adults, our mission was to make sure our children were capable of taking on the world's challenges. I had never heard it put so eloquently; when said like that, it instantly changed my thinking of parenting. I went from the thought process that discipline meant demanding my children's respect and demanding them to act how I deemed the best fit to realizing that offering opportunities and options would better guide them. I always assumed

discipline meant “spare not the rod” and that if I needed to pop my children to get their attention, that would be the best way to do it. I was wrong, dead wrong, to be quite honest. My mindset was not only destructive; it wouldn’t actually allow my sons to learn anything on their own. It would cause them to only obey and respond out of fear of the consequences. Once I overstood that, it made sense for me to change my parenting style.

My goal as a father has always been from jump to make my children better than me. As well as afford them the opportunities that I didn’t have, the typical things any father would want. But after hearing those words, “training my children to survive without me,” the things I wanted for them grew exponentially. The biggest dilemma was I had no idea of how to accomplish the task. I went on with this question and mindset for at least 2 years, maybe even 3. I began to realize that in order to achieve my goal of teaching them how to survive, I would need to first be able to spend enough time with them to influence them. One problem that

I had while I was in the military and working full time was that I was far too tired to try to play with my children. After a long day of work, I would come home worn out to be bombarded with the energy of my family that missed me. At the time, it was very easy to become overwhelmed, which led to becoming irritated or not engaging as much as they and I would have liked. Ultimately, I wasn't the type of father I had hoped to be. I remember my wife telling me that my son had asked something along the lines of did I like him because I wouldn't hang out with him. I was crushed; I told myself I had to make a change. I just wasn't sure where to start, but I needed to change.

The Story of Daddy Power

That's when an opportunity presented itself; one night, both of my sons weren't able to sleep. They were a bit scared because they had been having trouble adjusting to their new sleeping situation. After a meditation on what I could do to help them, I concluded that it might be possible to transfer some of my courage to them if I created some

sort of bedtime ceremony. Thus “Daddy Power” was born; I figured the ceremony would serve as somewhat of a placebo to help them conquer their fears. I was right, but I would come to realize it was so much more than that. Daddy Power itself was intended to transfer my energy to them so they could feel more powerful to conquer any bad dreams.

Almost as if I was with them at all times. That first night we tried it, it worked like a charm. The boys went to sleep right away, and from what I could tell, the next sunrise, they had a great night's sleep. Not only that but all of a sudden, our connection grew tremendously. My middle son literally went from not wanting anything to do with me during bedtime to needing it every night before bed (it's been 3 years). My oldest son and I built an even stronger bond and have even evolved our meaning of Daddy Power. That was the first time I saw the power of Engaged Fatherhood and realized the true power I had as a father

Why Dads Matter

Around the time I first started using Daddy Power, I had got fired from my job. Fortunately, I was already planning on quitting, so it came to my relief instead of my dismay when it happened. This little hiccup in life happened to be one of the greatest moments of freedom for me. I finally had time to spend with my sons, as much time as I chose because I no longer had the time restraints of a job. Immediately, I realized this was my chance to really engage my children and father them how I wanted. It didn't take long for me to begin getting more involved. I started by continuing Daddy Power, which eventually turned into me taking over the night routine altogether. Bedtime went from a stressful situation to a fun new experience where I found myself deeply engaged with my children. We would brush our teeth together; I would bathe them and get them in their jammies. We would read a story, do Daddy Power and super dap, and we would be off to bed. What I started to see was a change in their behavior when I was around. They

wanted to talk to me more, be around their mother less, and most importantly, their respect for me grew. So much so that I would be able to utilize the daddy stare in order to achieve desired discipline.

This showed me just how powerful a father's presence really was. Not only did all of the above happen, but my children became more disciplined overall. They were giving their mother less of a hard time. They were listening to instructions the first time, and their development was clearly increasing. My middle son, at this time, started to increase his speech and his communication skills grew. My oldest started to gain more self-confidence as we spent more time playing, and I spent more time teaching him. The overall benefits of just a simple night routine were tremendous. I was told that I could influence and teach any behavior as long as I got more involved. It started to look like it was more than possible to train my children to not only survive but thrive. It was soon after that I decided to go to school and learn more about child development and psychology. It

was there that I learned the truth about fatherhood and came to the realization that fathers played a key role in child development.

Now, something this obvious should be a well-known fact, right? Wrong, as I would surely find out with research, my suspicions were, in fact, true. Fathers were unaware of how much of an impact they actually had on their children. If we take a look at today's model of what the male role is in the house, we will find more often than not that fathers view themselves as breadwinners and problem solvers. Even more so, disciplinarians (with little guidance on that word), they hardly ever see themselves as nurturers or teachers. Yet, the impact of a father's involvement with their child can be the deciding factor on whether or not a child will grow up to be successful or not. Research shows consistently that children whose fathers interact with them on a regular basis have higher IQs, better behavior, and show fewer signs of behavior disorders. Not to mention, they are also seen to have more success in school and life overall. Of course, this

isn't saying that single mothers aren't getting the job done; it's simply saying that fathers play a far larger role than society leads us to believe. Bearing that in mind, it becomes painfully obvious why it is imperative that fathers of all ages and experience step up to the plate and engage their children

Since I've explained how important being a father truly is, I want to touch back on the concept of "training our children to survive". As mentioned before, our goal as parents is to train our children to survive, but I find that especially important for fathers. Why? Simple, because fathers bring about a different life experience than mothers do. Parenting is all about creating successful children. In order to be successful in life, everyone can attest that having balance is key. The same thing goes with raising children; they need balance, it takes 2 energies to create them. It takes 2 energies to balance them out as well, so what does that mean? Well, it means that a father's love is necessary; it's absolutely critical. When I began to contemplate what I

would need to teach my children for them to survive, I was amazed at how many unique situations being a male had put me in. I had a completely different set of skills from my wife simply because of my upbringing as a man. Not discrediting women by any means; men just have a different perspective to bring what's needed.

Purposeful Parenting

Alright, so now, keeping with the concept of “training children to survive” in order to train someone, one must have some sort of path laid out for the trainee to follow. That being said, every path should lead somewhere, every road has a destination, so all training should have a purpose. I ask outrightly, what is the purpose of the training you provide your child? Is it simply to allow them to survive? If so, what does that mean to you? What milestones will they hit that will allow you to know they are on the right path? These are just a few of the questions I offer when thinking of what purpose your parenting serves. No matter what, though, it is **IMPORTANT** that you have a purpose for

your parenting. That way, you can stay true to the path you want for your child, and your child can see and understand the goal.

When I started to understand this, I crafted a purpose that ended up becoming more complex than I could have imagined. My purpose, in words very simple, is to teach them to always pursue becoming their best selves. But as the saying goes, “it’s easier said than done”. In order for them to understand this purpose, they would have to see it in action. Being that I am their father, the example MUST come from me, meaning I MUST also always be in pursuit of my best self. My overstanding of this grew over time; as it grew, so did theirs, and let's just say, my sons, hold me 150% accountable at all times. It’s become one of my greatest joys and my greatest challenges.

Enter the 4 Steps

This finally brings me to the point of this book. In order to create the proper environment for my children to grow in, I had to do some growing myself like I said earlier.

In order for them to properly understand these concepts, I would have to set the example. The issue was how to set the example, what areas needed an example set, and the best way to go about it. Over a long process of studying myself, my children, and psychology, I came to my conclusions and created my plan for success. In hindsight, this formula might be the main source of my own personal growth and development, although, at the time, I only wanted to have better-behaving children. That being said, I created 4 steps of what I thought would allow me to better understand my children and raise them.

Assuming that the research and experience I had were all true, my children learned all good and bad behaviors from me. So to me, it meant all I had to do was adjust my own behaviors to indicate the behaviors I wanted to see in them. So the first obvious step was to grow more intimate with myself, evaluate my own flaws, and then find solutions for myself. The next steps, as you'll soon find out, just build upon the foundation of the first and repeat. These steps are

designed to allow you to directly engage with your children in an effective way so both you and your child will grow from interaction. Bear in mind that it all starts and ends with YOU; the apple doesn't fall far from the tree unless someone picks it up and tosses it in the right direction. Too often, we blame our children for our own shortcomings, and in order to change society, we must first change ourselves. So without further ado, I introduce to you my 4 Steps to Engaged Fatherhood.

Chapter 3: Step 1: Self Evaluation

Man Know Thyself

“Man Know Thyself” this ancient yet completely relevant proverb, is where our process of Fatherhood engagement begins. Man is to know himself in order to overcome his trials and tribulations while on this earth. The reason being that man is the creator and source of all of his woes and sorrows, as well as all of his happiness. Without getting too philosophical, man has the ability to shape his reality completely. With that ability comes responsibility, the responsibility to properly care for whatever man creates. That being said, when a man comes together with a woman to create another living being, Man has a RESPONSIBILITY, yet a DEBT to his creation to properly care for it. Now how should one care for what he has created? As he cares for himself!

What we may fail to realize is just like how the Great Creator created us, he placed his attributes into us; we as

parents place our attributes into our children. When you take 1 plus 1 and get 2, you don't lose the attributes of either 1; they are just added together! Meaning your children are literally YOU plus the other person you created them with. If you learn how to master you in the flesh as you are, then you can train the younger version of you to master themselves. Now imagine a younger you receiving the guidance needed to navigate your own inner world successfully and avoid all pitfalls stumbled on by previous generations. Wouldn't you have been so much better off? Personally, I know that had I known of my father's experience with women, I would have been able to better navigate my own.

I'm sure you can understand why it's so important that we as fathers know ourselves and being completely honest, that's just a surface-level look. A deeper one (still surface) is the fact that you cannot expect someone you are training to do anything that you're not doing. As a leader, your followers are far more likely to do something if they see you do it first and with MASTERY. That word in itself lies a

key; to be considered a master of something is outstanding. Whether it be Martial Arts or Scholarship, to be a master in your craft or passion means something. So much more does mastery over one's self. Doing the “shadow work” and uncovering by either integrating or doing away with the old allows your child to see the example of growth and self-mastery. As you guide them, they will learn not only from your words but from your actions. Which if you didn't already know, it's one of the main ways children learn, OBSERVATION and MIMICRY.

Apple and the Tree

But why? Well, let's start at the root. You are the life-giver to a child. It is from your seed that the child will grow and take its form. As a father, your DNA is a major factor in the creation of a child. That being said, your child has your DNA; your CELF is inserted into an egg and then grows. That CELF, if you didn't guess, are your cells, and what do your cells contain? Your genetic code, your genetic makeup, your experience, traumas, abilities, etc., all wrapped up into a

memory card called sperm. So when that CELF that you let fertilize that egg grows up, why are we so baffled when it has all of our behaviors? Both good and bad ones!

This leads me to my next point “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” There’s an old-time argument known as Nature vs. Nurture, but what if I told you that both are contributors to how our children behave? We being for this reference the tree, and our children being the apple. If that apple falls off the tree and doesn’t fall far, it is most likely to grow up into the same tree as its parent. Rotten tree, rotten apple, repeat the cycle. Now for this reference, you are the apple, and your parent is the tree, same cycle. So if you come from a not-so-amazing upbringing, you might only have some not-so-amazing parenting skills. So what does that mean for the apples you produce? Well, we can safely assume you’ll produce not-so-amazing apples, and the cycle continues.

So how do you change what you produce? By changing what you take in, information-wise, that is. Like I

said earlier, let's start from the root; the information you take in is the nutrients that grow your tree, that's your soil. If you've ever taken a kindergarten science class, then you know how important soil is for any type of plant to grow. If your soil lacks nutrients, you have to add outside nutrients to better the quality of your plant. Meaning if you grew up in a household lacking in positive parental know-how, you might want to take a good look at your own parental knowledge to see where you might be lacking.

Self SWOT

In business, there's a common method of deducing one's strengths and weaknesses known as the SWOT analysis. I think this method best suits us when talking about improving ourselves as fathers. SWOT is an acronym that stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In business, they use these 4 categories to break down the good and bad about the business in order to devise a success plan. The same method can be used if we adjust opportunities to Interests and write down what things

we find ourselves truly passionate about. The goal is to gather a detailed information chart of our own self, then use that chart as a guide to understanding our children. For example, let's say that in our strengths category, we know that we are really good learners and have several different learning styles. If we are trying to teach our children something new, it would be wise for us to utilize the learning methods best suited to us FIRST. Why? Because there's a good chance that method might be effective for teaching your children. If, of course, it doesn't work, then you continue down the list. The point is you have a guide, and you're not going in blind.

Another example of using this as a guide is for disciplinary methods. Let's say you have in your weaknesses that you don't care too much for authority, you like autonomy, and you get upset if anyone tries to control you. Chances are, your child might have that same mentality and behavioral pattern. If you know that, then you have the opportunity to enlighten your child to a different way of

handling situations that upset them. Like when you say no, they cannot have the 3rd snack, and they throw a tantrum because they feel controlled. Instead of yelling, you might be able to empathize and understand the true reason they are upset. Then calmly discipline (it means to guide, but that's another book) them accordingly. You might find that what works to calm you down during these stressful situations might also calm them.

Setting the Example

Keeping all of this in mind will allow you to see the big picture of why you are a key component in your children's lives. We will use one more example to really drive this home; imagine on your Self SWOT in the Threats section you have anxiety and some of your triggers listed. We can again use this as a guide, allowing us to look for any signs of mental health problems that look familiar to us in them. Not only that, but more importantly, we can see clearly what our triggers are and either avoid them or confront, conquer and connect them back to their source and solve them. The

latter is a better way of fighting and ending the generational curses.

This brings me to my next point in full. We as Fathers MUST set the example for our sons to model and our daughters to look for in a husband. As I stated earlier, our children learn at a young age from observation and mimicry. These behaviors they learn in their youngest years 1-4 will carry on into their adulthood, whether negative or positive. Most of the time, these behaviors are learned from watching how we behave and interact with others. No surprise, our example is a key factor in their behavior, so then once a bad behavior is developed, how do we change it? The easiest answer is changing the example we are setting, but being completely honest and speaking from personal experience, is not an easy feat. But then again, neither is Fatherhood, so we do what we have to do. It starts by changing ourselves, going back to our Self SWOT; if we know we have an issue being lazy, then we should change it, less we pass it on to our children.

Furthermore, it is imperative that when we become fathers, we embark on a journey of self-development to properly prepare ourselves to prepare our children. We cannot afford to allow ourselves to stay at the same level from whence you first had children. We must remain a positive example of what is possible so that our children can and will believe in their own power. By becoming an exemplary example of what you want your child to become as far as morals and values, you will have a higher chance of succeeding in your parental goals. Fatherhood by no means is for the weak; it is intended to make you strong by setting you up to trial against yourself. “Upon thee also it dependeth whether the child of thy bosom be a blessing or a curse to thyself; a useful or a worthless member to the community” MHK 23:2

There’s no such thing as a bad student; there are only bad teachers.

Be the Best You can be

Like I said earlier, we as Fathers must set the example; therefore, we should always always always I can't stress this enough, strive to be the best version of ourselves, for no other reason than our children look up to us. You can be a super dad and change the world or be a turd and create a menace to the world. The power is in your hands and in your effort; the first step only requires taking accountability for the duty you owe the child you created. After that, with a little bit of effort, everything will fall into line, and you will build a bond with your child like no other.

Chapter 4: Step 2 Observe & Plan

Child SWOT

In Chapter 3, I brought up how I use the business analysis tool known as the SWOT method to identify my own strengths and weaknesses. What's awesome about the tool is that it can also be used to identify the same things in your children. If you recall, from the last chapter, I said that your Self SWOT could be used as a guide when dealing with your children. That same concept works here; the only difference is it's not your guide that you're using as a reference; it's the one you created for your child. By utilizing the Self SWOT technique on our children, we can observe and identify what strengths, weaknesses, and behavioral issues, etc., they might have. Then COMPARE and CONTRAST our chart to theirs and PLAN accordingly. Whether that's planning how to play with them for daddy day or planning how to properly and purposefully parent them to your best ability.

But why? Why would it matter for us to know the characteristics of our children? Well, for starters, we as Fathers are LEADERS, and simply put, the best leaders know their followers. While I was in the Marines, I did quite a bit of leadership development training and actively engaged in leadership opportunities. I worked as a work center supervisor for two and half years of my five-year contract. During that time, I learned to manage 10-15 Marines at a time. I quickly realized that my best option for successfully achieving our daily missions came when I employed the use of the 11 leadership principles. Specifically, “Know your people and look out for their welfare” and “Set the example”; however, every other principle came in handy at some point. Those two, however, allowed me to optimally keep my team moving efficiently and effectively. As a leader, it made no sense for me to put someone with no experience on a high-level job; it wouldn’t get done in time or right. I could only make those wise decisions if I knew who was where in their training.

The same thing goes when we are talking about planning for children. It would make no sense to take your child who has no interest in sports to a baseball game to bond or force your auditory learning child to play with blocks to learn. As we said in the Marines, there's a proper tool for every job, but you must have a knowledge of the tools available to you and the job you're going to work on. For children, by observing and taking note of key parts of who they are, you can better parent them to their best selves.

You Like They Like Meet in the Middle

After you've completed a good week of observation and you've taken the time to create a SWOT chart for your child, you can begin to plan. At this point, you should now have two reference guides that showcase you and your child's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and threats. Having these two guides will make this next portion super simple, so make sure you have them. What you're going to do is compare the interests sections of both you and your child, then go online; I strongly recommend Pinterest. Then do a

little digging and find activities that might work. Using keywords related to your interests and words like “Kids” “Children” etc., will help you find activities you and your child can try together.

That’s where the meet in the middle part comes in; you want to find activities that will peek both of your interests. This is very important; if either of you are not interested, it will lead to both of you getting bored very quickly. That or it will make the activity drag on, which ultimately will lead to a low energy experience instead of a powerful interactive one that will generate amazing new memories. One thing I’ve found very powerful when I think of activities is asking myself these questions; can I teach them something from this activity? Will this take at least 30 min for us to do? Will this allow us to engage together? Using these 3 questions has allowed me to find activities that are fun for us and allow us to have an amazing bonding experience.

Identify Plan and Gather

The next step is where we begin to start planning. This part is very important; as the saying goes, “Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.” In order to ensure that you have an amazing time, you first need to identify what times you have available. When we consider our playtime with our children, we want to make sure that we are picking times where we have enough energy to actually engage. It’s a defeated purpose to choose Friday evening as your “daddy time”. In Friday evening, your mind and body want nothing more than to relax from a long week of work. You'll find that you’re just too tired to truly enjoy the time and energy of your child. When I first started spending time with my children, I noticed that there were certain times when I was more excited to play than others. Most of the time, it depended on what time of day it was or what activity came before playtime.

When deciding on a time, I’ve found it best to play before dinner or before lunch. But personally, that works for

me; you should pick whatever works best for your schedule. The following questions you can consider when picking a time; Do I have enough energy to spend 30 min engaged? Will my time be clear of distractions? Will I be able to focus on my child/children? Will they be able to focus on me? Using these questions as a guide should help you identify the best possible times for you to play with your child.

After you have planned out your playtimes, the next part, which is often the most difficult, is to stick with the time and be consistent. It will be hard at first as it's not always easy to immediately bond with your children during play, but stick with and complete the full time; it will get easier as you go. Each time you play, you will feel more and more connected until you play with your children out of pure habit. After you've gotten to that point, well, you'll see the relationship growth for yourself. Part of being a parent is being a friend to your child, especially in this day and age, where we find ourselves having to be more involved. You have to remember that they come into this world knowing

only their immediate family; they form bonds and trust us with their lives and secrets. We might not always realize it, but we are their best and only friends, and that relationship must be nurtured. If for no other reason than this, once they are out of our care and no longer our responsibility, we may never hear from them again if we don't have a friendship with them.

For me personally, not being able to have a good friendship with my sons after they have grown up would devastate me. I imagine the conversations and opportunities I would miss out on already if we didn't stay close and they are all younger than 10. Lastly, when it comes to planning out "daddy time" activities, it's always best to gather any and all materials needed ahead of time. Try that or plan on picking up the materials as a part of your time. Take it from my past experiences; being without the materials you need makes you look bad in front of your children, which might make it look like you didn't care enough about the time being spent. Remember, "daddy time" doesn't have to be

extravagant; it just needs to be a time when you are PRESENT, which means no phones, no electronics, no distractions, just you and your child/children.

Chapter 5: Step 3 Implementation and Review

Review Adjust & Implement

Before one goes into a battle, one must ensure his armor is properly strapped, his weapon is sharp, and his mind clear. Going on a play date with your child is no different. Before the day of your planned “daddy time,” you should take time to ensure all of your plans are good to go. You should make sure you have all necessary equipment or materials, any plans or instructions, snacks, etc. Like I said earlier, you should also make sure you have no distractions in your play area. Take it seriously and make sure you are properly prepared for play.

When you begin to play, make sure to explain the plan to your child, this will open up communication between you two and make them feel more involved. If you can, you might want to consider involving them in the planning phase, as this will make implementation easier. Once things have been explained, commence spending time doing the

activity. While participating, it is super important that you are paying attention to yourself and your child. Be sure to observe and take note of any positive or negative comments about the activity. Pay attention to how interested your child is and how much you are actually engaging them. Do your best to open lines of communication by talking to them and asking open-ended questions either about the activity or about them in general. This will allow you to engage them on multiple levels, not just the physical but also the intellectual. By inviting more conversation, you will, in turn, find that your child is more open to talking to you about things big and small.

If during the activity you find your child to be completely uninterested, find a new activity. It's always better to make a change and be happy than to continue doing something that's making you suffer. Bear in mind that the activity is only a medium for you and your child to interact; by no means is it absolutely necessary. Sometimes

a good conversation can be far more impactful to your relationship with your child.

Once you have finished the activity, have your child rate the activity and the amount of fun they had. If they like it, you have just succeeded in finding an activity that can be done to spend time; if not, then go back to the drawing board. Either way, be sure to write down and keep track of how you and your child felt during the playtime. This will allow you to come back later on, to review and make changes. Never forget when planning “daddy time,” the key is to be consistent and be engaged. Keep that in mind and never stop trying to engage them, and you’ll find that your bond will grow regardless of the activity. I once read children spell Love T I M E; it's absolutely correct. Our children want our time and energy, and it's our job to feed it to them.

Chapter 6: Step 4 Self-Care

The Importance of Self-Care

At this point, we have covered 3 out of 4 of my steps to engaged fatherhood. We started with self-evaluation; we talked about setting the example and why that's so important. We also spoke about being the best you can be; then we jumped into step 2, which was to observe and plan; finally, we got to step 3, implementation and review, which leaves us with our last step, Self-Care. Self-Care, in my personal opinion, is by far the most important step. YOU CANNOT, and I cannot stress this enough, pour from an empty cup. If you're not taking care of yourself, you're of no use to anyone else. A car cannot run if it is not properly maintained; it will eventually fall apart. Are you not getting the picture yet? Let me further explain.

Our health is directly tied to our children's health in the present and in the future. They will pick up whatever self-care habits we have, good or bad. As the saying goes,

the sins of the father are the sons to bear; that goes both ways as so are the father's blessings. By taking the time to properly take care of ourselves, we are not only making time to nourish and maintain our temples but teaching our children to do the same. Why does this matter? Because we are in the business of making well-rounded, fully functioning adults, that add benefit to our society. How can either them or us be a useful member of society without self-care?

Too often, as Fathers do, we allow outside influences to affect the way we take care of ourselves. For instance, the well-known “dad bod” that every father happens to pick up around the time their children are being begotten. That happens because we get wrapped up in providing, working, changing diapers, making meals; the list goes on forever. Who could blame us though, I mean, we are just trying to be the best we can be. We are only doing what society tells us to do, right? Well, what if society has been wrong the whole time, and because we have put everything before ourselves, we have actually hindered ours and society's growth. That

seems to be the case if you take a look at the current state of society. Fathers have been in a cycle of work, discipline, eat, sleep repeat for so long that men are scared to be fathers and fathers are too tired to engage their children. This leads to unhealthy and unbalanced children, who eventually become unhealthy, unbalanced adults who then repeat the cycle.

Now I know that was a bit of a tangent, but it was necessary to show what fathers not taking care of themselves first has done. To be quite honest, you could say that about 70% of youth & young adult issues come from having little to no fatherhood engagement. But let's be honest, WHO CAN YOU BLAME? Can you place blame on the father who worked 16 hours a day to build an empire for his children but only spent 10 minutes a week with them because he was tired? Can you really blame the father on the corner who's dealing on drugs to provide basic human necessities to his children but gets locked up in the process? In both cases, the children are the ones most affected, but

society had us convinced that fathers only mattered as providers for so long that fathers only saw their own value in how much money they could bring in. So they were just trying to be good fathers; they just didn't quite understand the mission.

So what's the mission? To raise healthy, wholesome adults who can impact, change and develop this world into a utopia. Where do we start? By re-raising our inner selves to be healthy and wholesome adults who can impact, change and develop this world into a utopia. As someone once said, "It all starts with the Man in the Mirror," it all starts with you. How well can you heal yourself to prevent yourself from damaging them? This is the true importance of Self-Care, and why it's almost a completely separate step on its own, the only reason it's not is that it's something you need to do constantly to refresh and recharge and be at your best.

Setting up Routines for Self Care

So it's so important, right, but really what is self-care? So let's define it, and then let's talk about how to actually do

it. We will define Self-Care using the K.I.S.S (keep it stupid simple) method.

Self-care: The process of taking care of one's PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL, MENTAL, and EMOTIONAL self.

This definition will lead to the questions of what your process is and what do you need to complete it. That is where the power of routines comes into play. Keeping with the car analogy, cars typically have routine maintenance that takes place every certain amount of miles. As Fathers, we should apply the same concept to our self-care. By creating routines, we allow ourselves to have a predetermined plan that constantly keeps our stress and emotions in check. For instance, an example of my own routine is what I call M4Y or MY for short. It consists of Meditation, Martial Arts, Music, Mary Jane, and Yoga. These 5 elements make up my rise and bedtime routines and help to allow me to stay focused and refreshed as I go about my weeks. I don't always do the full routine; some days, only part of it gets done. The point is that I have a plan to combat feelings of being overwhelmed

or any negative feelings for that matter.

When contemplating the creation of your routine, you should keep the following questions in your mind:

What am I passionate about?

What relaxes me?

How do I get my mind to unwind?

What do I do when I get overwhelmed?

How would I like to feel each day?

What tools do I have already that help me to feel good about myself and my day?

These 6 questions will give you a good baseline for understanding what you need in order to take care of self. After you have answered the questions, you need to figure out the best times you have to take for yourself and take them. In a way, after you have answered these questions,

you should implement the 4 steps on yourself. Evaluate yourself and your needs with step 1, observe your behaviors and stressors, and plan to counter them with step 2. Then implement your self-care plan and review it periodically to make adjustments. Again the goal of this is to heal your inner child. We all deal with some damage from our past that we did not cause, but as the saying goes, “you're not responsible for what happens to you; you're only responsible for fixing in you what is broken and not break someone else.” If we can accomplish this within ourselves, we have a greater chance of accomplishing this for our children.

Once again, the key is to remember to be flexible; your self-care system doesn't need to be perfect, and it can be adjusted at any time. The goal is to make sure that the routine helps keep you in a calm state of mind so you can tackle the stressors of the day without falling victim to them. Also, without causing harm to your children.

Impact of your health on Child

I briefly touched earlier on the impact of our health on our children, but I feel this topic needs more depth so we can fully understand why. We will start back with the concept the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. If we instill in our children at a young age by them seeing us take care of ourselves. They will follow suit without a doubt. Our children learn best from watching us; that's why our example is so damn important. Your child will become you essentially, so you have no choice but to improve upon yourself. Let's say you had asthma growing up, and your child develops asthma as well. If you begin to utilize deep breathing techniques to calm yourself during an asthma attack and your child happens to see, he/she will be more likely to believe that they have control over their asthma and not the other way around. By you setting the example you open up their mind to new possibilities they didn't know existed.

Let's take anger since this is a common one amongst men. If you've ever taken an anger management class or

observed yourself while you're angry, you'll see that your body has a physiological response to your anger. Meaning just as your mind feels angry, your body feels it as well, causing it to shake up your body's atomic structure, setting you into an unbalanced version of you. This can be detrimental to health; excessive anger is known to cause health issues in the long term, it can even lead to an early death. If you have no control of your anger, it spirals to control and sends you to the hospital that may negatively impact your child. Chances are, somewhere down the line, they will deal with a similar problem. All of that can be avoided, however, if we take the time to address our own anger issues correctly and fix them. This will, in turn, set the example for our children to follow and hopefully prevent them from dealing with the problems in the future. That which we can handle in our lives to prevent it from leaking over into theirs we should.

Setting The Example

As I've repeated over and over in this book, you are the example. So set the best one you can and bring your children up to speed on anything that you change. What do I mean by that? Well, a perfect example would be when I started to use affirmations in my daily routines. After I felt I was comfortable enough with using affirmations, I taught the method to my children; I even gave them the science behind affirmations, so they knew WHY we were doing them. I also started to invite them to participate in my self-care routine in the early rise. On some days, I would even hold off on doing my routine so that they could do it with me. By giving them these opportunities to participate in my self-care routine, they can start to feel and see the benefits for themselves. Not only that, but it allowed us more bonding time. Recently, I've even decided to take out 1 day a week to dedicate it to family self-care. In our household, we practice mindfulness on these days as we've found mindfulness practices to be extremely beneficial for our

parenting and self-care. These are mostly weekend days, my Consort and I dedicate time to do yoga, meditation and spend time outdoors as a family to help teach them about self-care.

As a final example, I'll give you the details of a recent outdoor adventure we took. In one of our recent self-care trips, we went to the mountainside, brought food, and had a family outing. While we were in nature, we talked about the trees, breathed in fresh air, and even meditated a little bit. We went on a nice hike along a trail, and that's where my oldest son decided to take it upon himself to find a rock and meditate on it. I asked him why he did that when he was finished, and his response was he was enjoying the fresh air and working on his superpowers. As a child, I don't recall my parents ever taking time for self-care; to this day, I still don't. I saw the problems not taking care of self caused them, and I felt those same problems myself. I vowed to teach my children the value of self-care in order to break the cycles

caused by self-neglect. I've never for once regretted that decision.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Final Thoughts

First and foremost, I applaud and appreciate you for choosing to pick up this book and take this journey of improving upon your fathering skills. As we all know, none of us are perfect, myself included. I find myself falling off of being an engaged father at times or find myself too overwhelmed by children. Sometimes I yell, get upset and make mistakes in my parenting, but I keep pushing forward with the goal of having children that become greater than me. Our children have so much potential to change this world for the better. All we have to do is give them the right environment and plenty of love, and they will successfully do all they can imagine. As the world continues to turn, I hope we continue to grow and evolve our definition of fatherhood, what it takes and what it really means.

I thank you once again for picking up this book, and I wish you well on your journey to becoming a more engaged father.

Peace and Love