

Raising Children Who Love Their Lives

BY PAMELA AWAD

In the end, “the love you take is equal to the love you make.” So says Susie Case, channeling Paul McCartney while speaking about “Raising Children Who Love their Lives,” at the PIA Mother’s Day Benefit luncheon on May 8th. According to Ms. Case, the 200 or so attendees at the Cosmopolitan Club were all designing women, who, by designing a life for their kids, were sculptors of a most innovative sort.

Raising children is a kind of design project and good design “is all about the new next thing.” Children are constantly in transition, and with each one comes the challenge of facing that new next thing. The parallels between good design and effective parenting follow the three principles of good design—identifying a goal, removing the unnecessary, and understanding it’s a process—and are as applicable to raising children as they are to more traditional projects. In this way, says Ms. Case, we are like Michelangelo designing David.

Clear goals, the first principle, are important to define if hard to track and measure. The goal of raising happy kids can be as measurable as, say, the goal of getting into college, if we take into account the traits happy people have in common. Four of the most measurable are:

1. **Self-knowledge:** Happy people “know what they do well and know what they naturally don’t do well”. They are aware of their likes, dislikes and what works for them.
2. **Resilience:** When happy people fail, “their expectation is they will recover” because they have failed and recovered from difficulty before.
3. **Positive habits:** These include perseverance, a willingness to work hard and not procrastinating (e.g., dragging your feet, dawdling, or postponing until tomorrow what you can do today).

4. **Groups:** That is, the ability to work in groups.

Case says, “effective people study in groups, practice in groups and travel in teams.”

“Good design removes the unnecessary so our kids can enjoy the important things.” Case applies this second principle to activities, technology and expectations, meaning, “less is more when it comes to designing lives for happy kids.” She advises paring down scheduled activities to give a child “breathing room”; “portion controlling” technology by scheduling specific times for texting and tech interaction; and depressurizing expectations. Case suggests finding innovative ways to make technology a “creative activity.” For example, alternating museum based drawing classes with tech art classes can further a child’s artistic interests. And citing the Dutch proverb, “women blame themselves when it rains,” Case urges mothers to ease up on their expectations of themselves. By sharing stories with their children about their own imperfections, mothers can depressurize their children’s expectations of themselves.

Finally, good design is a process that takes time and is due in no small part to trial and error. Children should be encouraged to try new experiences and parents should “remember that the things that don’t work teach them as much as the things that do.” Ask questions in an open-ended way to encourage feedback—kids’ impressions are rich in information. Be intentional in your efforts and ask for help when you need it (it takes a village), said Ms. Case, and know that designing a life for your children will help you love your life too. ●

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