

Life's Paradox

uncommon reflections of life matters

Doing it right

By Dr Yvonne Sum, BDS Hons, NLPTT, APMC
International Speaker & Personal Coach

Doing it right. Think of all the times when we hold out the expectations to do it right. It can be about others doing it right. It could be about me doing it right. If I were given a dollar for every time a thought like that crosses my mind, I will surely be a billionaire today.

The pattern is as old as time. As children, we are expected to do the right thing by our families. To save face. To honour the family name. Respect our elders. In school, we are taught the right way to read, to form our letters, to hold a pencil, to write. We are expected to do the right career, marry the right person, produce 2.3 offsprings, bring them up the right way, be a credit to society.

In society, we are expected to do the right thing by the norms dictated by that culture. To do the right thing is to belong. To do otherwise is to mean being cast out. There is a caveat to that. If one is extraordinarily successful by breaking the rules – then you are unique and worshipped for your talent to break away from the crowd!

Question is: Why do we not just break the rules, stand out and be counted for it?

There is no easy answer. My thoughts: perhaps this pattern of thinking is so ingrained in us over generations that so few of us break out of it. So we need to do it right.

So what does this really mean: “Doing it right?”

You probably reflected on this and replied: “It’s different for everybody.” I tend to think you are right there!

There may be a common set of global values that resonate with every one on this planet. Yet, in each culture, families and individuals: we express these through beliefs and behaviours that are markedly different.

Let’s take the example of the value of “respect”. We hold that as important all over the world. In the USA, respect of an individual means to support and challenge him/her to stand above the crowd: celebrating achievements of one over many. In Australia, respect means to give everybody a fair go: creating a level playing field so everybody can equally share in the spoils without any one tall poppy standing out over others. In Japan, respect is earned when one goes out to conquer and be crowned victorious in honour of tradition, way of life and the community one represents: be it country, corporate organization or genealogical family. When the Japanese hero wins, everybody he represents wins!

So can we really do wrong? It depends.

My husband Ken and I took the kids to watch Tim Burton’s remake of Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. It was Father’s Day. So very heightened was our awareness of family values as we were watching the movie.

For those of you who have watched the movie, think back to the underlying story of Willy Wonka, the chocolatier extraordinaire and sole proprietor of this amazing state-of-the-art chocolate factory: Dr Wonka DDS, Willy’s father, was extremely strict about Willy’s consumption of things sweet and chocolatey. Is this right or wrong? (Beware your answer: Let me remind you that Ken and I have a dental professional background!)

On one level, you could say that that is the only way Dr Wonka could have dealt with this confectionery dilemma – after all: it would go against his professional values to endorse processed sugar consumption in his home when he was telling his patients otherwise. On the other hand, some of you may have considered it extreme to make confectionery a total contraband as forbidden fruit is the sweetest. Which is exactly what Willy Wonka resorts to: the sugar vacuum created in his life drives his passion to indulge in chocolates in secret.

Despite his consistent and regular tastings of chocolates to educate his tastebuds over the years, you will note that Willy's orthodontically aligned teeth (credit to his dad) remain a smile centerpiece to be admired in his grown up incarnation. (Perhaps meticulous dental hygiene at least remains Dr Wonka's legacy to his chocolatier son? Some things do rub off after all!) The passion to manufacture the contraband chocolate estranges Willy from his father. He goes on a world wide search to find ways to make the trademark Wonka *Whipple Scrumptious Caramel Delight*, amongst other amazing cocoa based gustatory stimulants. Willy Wonka becomes extremely successful in his career, whilst he continues to have a distaste for Parents (he cannot even mention the word!)

Was it wrong or right to have been so dogmatic about eating chocolates and sweets? From one perspective, you could say that the one thing that was disallowed, forbidden and missing from his young life drove Willy to his passion. On the other hand, what if his father was totally encouraging of his passion for chocolates? Would that have driven him to another totally different path? Or could his destiny as a world-famous chocolatier be strengthened by his father's nurturance as the defining moment to drive his life's purpose?

Perhaps there is no right or wrong. Perhaps as parents, we can hold the space the best way we can for our children through our limited beliefs and lack of experience in universal wisdoms. Perhaps their destiny is set, regardless of what we do. Perhaps our children are here to teach us, to grow us, to help us reflect on where we are going on *our* journey of life. Perhaps our lives reflect on one another to facilitate each other's development.

In the case of Dr Wonka, there is a happy ending. Willy Wonka reunites with his father through the encouragement of Charlie. We see that Dr Wonka has a Wall of Honour in his office celebrating Willy Wonka's media covered success stories with his Chocolate Factory over the years. The audience realizes that the father is proud of his son – despite the initial disagreement over choice of life's pursuit.

So maybe Willy Wonka's betrayal helped open his fathers' eyes to the possibilities beyond the world of dentistry. That sugar was not necessarily all bad. We got to go for the sweet stuff in life. Willy went for his. It originally damaged the relationship with his father. Yet in the big picture of life, it brought father and son back together on a different level of relating. Respect for each other's passions. Forgiveness. Permission to live one's dreams. Celebrating life.

I wonder what your children could teach you? Are you ready? If so, open your hearts and minds, and who knows what will come about. The possibilities can only happen if we do not expect to have to do it right. Let us welcome the "what ifs" in our lives and watch miracles unfold.

As I give myself permission to be more flexible in my expectations, and open my eyes to what my children are about: I continue to be amazed every time. They have certainly given me the opportunity to experience the world from a different viewpoint. I used to offer: “Why don’t you try doing it this way?” as the default response of choice. Now I tend to say: “Before I show you how I may choose to solve this in a moment, I am curious to hear what you have thought about doing to get xyz result.” Works all the time. I learn from them and they are invited to see it from my perspective too.

Let me give away the billions of dollars from thinking about doing it right, just to be trying something different. That is priceless.

It could happen to you too. Why not give it a go?

About the Author: **Dr Yvonne Sum** is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other’s authentic best. She inspires parents to learn from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her series of **Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC)** programs, Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children’s potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit www.dryvonnsum.com for more information.