

PERSONAL BUSINESS

Trying to be a better father than your dad

By Avrum Geurin Weiss, Ph.D.
Special to Atlanta Business Chronicle

Ed is a 41-year-old executive with a major corporation. He's worked hard, dedicating his youth to be able to provide his family with the things his father was unable to provide.

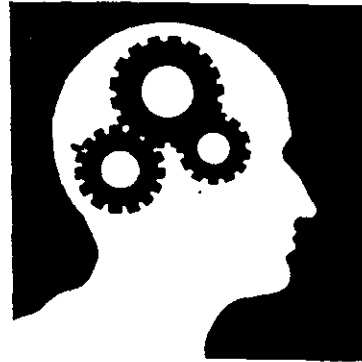
He arrives home after a typically exhausting day at work and is looking forward to sharing a little "quality" time with his children. As soon as Ed hits the door his exhausted wife unceremoniously turns the children over to him, reciting the litany of tasks that need to be accomplished; bathing, brushing teeth, and then the struggle of wills that is bedtime.

The children are cranky and irritable. Ed is privately hurt at the lack of a "Father Knows Best" greeting. As he begins to get the children ready for bed, he is unaware of a deep anger and resentment that is building within him. Without warning his temper erupts. He looks down in horror to see his son crying hysterically, and running away from him, frightened.

Perhaps you recognize just a little bit of Ed in yourself. Many men today struggle to meet the demands of what they see as the needs of their families, while often being largely unaware of their needs. Without understanding why, they may begin to experience a sense of emptiness, a feeling of inadequacy, and like Ed, a growing sense of anger and resentment.

Ed's father was a child of the Depression who sought to provide the material things for his family that he didn't have growing up. Like his father, Ed wants to give his family what he didn't have as a child. He wants to be more of a father to his children than his father was to him. Ed wonders now what went wrong, and how he found himself in the same trap as his father, with that same hidden rage.

Robert Bly, one of the leading figures in the area of men's issues, suggests that the reason men now experience feelings of emptiness, inadequacy and



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place unconsciously in daily interactions; watching, listening, working together, just being together.

In the absence of such personal modeling, men turn toward the models that are available. In our culture what young men find are stereotypes of men who devote themselves slavishly to their careers, and only secondarily to their families or themselves. The man who is reluctant to work overtime or accept another transfer because of his personal needs or the needs of his family is seen as not sufficiently dedicated to his work or not a "team player."

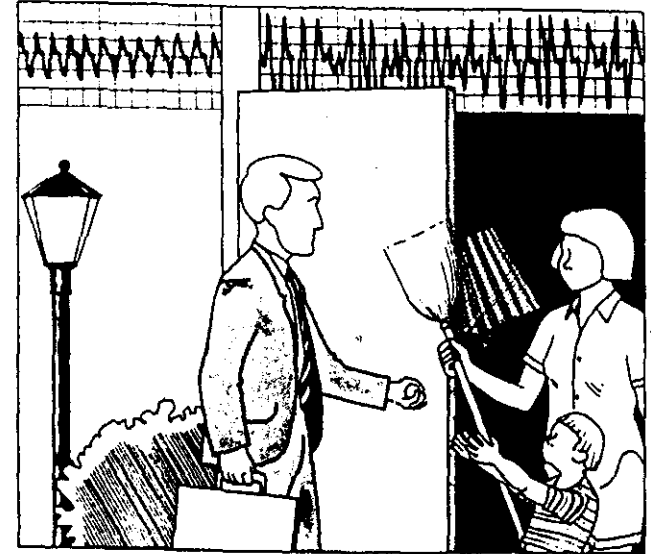
When we see a man in the park on a Saturday alone with his children, we assume that he must be divorced, since one so rarely sees fathers from intact families spending time alone with their kids.

In business, when faced with a situation like this, the first step would be to complete a thorough assessment. Let me suggest the same to you. Carry a small notebook with you and record how you actually spend your time during a typical week.

Try using the following categories: (a) time spent meeting the demands of people outside of your family (work, civic commitments); (b) time spent with your family that is task-oriented (preparing meals, cleaning house); (c) time spent with your family that

hidden rage is that we have never really come to terms with the absence of our own fathers.

He quotes statistics suggesting that the average father now spends approximately 10 minutes a day with his son. What is lost is the opportunity to learn from one's father what it means to be a man, the kind of learning that takes



is not task-oriented (you might want to note what percentage of this time is filled by television!); (d) time spent alone with your children; (e) time spent alone with your wife; (f) time spent doing just what you want to do. (If you find the idea of doing this disconcerting, all the more reason to do it!)

These figures represent what your priorities actually are. Now, compare them to what you would like your priorities to be, and begin looking for a more satisfying balance.

If you get stuck somewhere along the way and don't feel like you have the resources you need, do what you would do at work; call in a consultant. ■

Thought Process is a twice-monthly column from the Georgia Psychological Association.

Due to our error, the authors of previous Thought Process columns were misstated. The July 16 article, entitled "Find a focus to escape from life's wild jungle," was written by John R. Paddock, Ph.D. The July 30 column, entitled "Affair with your spouse improves marriage," was authored by Jeanne Shaw, Ph.D. The Chronicle regrets the error.