



Presence vs Presents

After my mother passed away six years ago, I didn't want anything to do with the holidays: no decorating, no Christmas music, no holiday cheer. She used to make a big deal about them and it was her favorite time of the year. However, as a mother to two little girls, I knew that I had to use my best compartmentalization skills and get into the holiday spirit, for THEM. Because that is what we do as parents, as leaders, we make sacrifices for our teammates. My husband and children are part of the most important team that I've been fortunate to have in my life.

Thankfully, I've reached a point in the grief process that I'm excited for the holidays again. So, this year I decided to do something that I've never done – I decided to decorate before Thanksgiving. My father and his wife were coming for Thanksgiving and we would not be together in December, so I thought “why not?”

As I prepared to work on our staircase banister, my oldest daughter asked me if she could help. The importance of her asking to help was not lost on me. This was the week of Thanksgiving break and she didn't have any homework. It was cold and wet outside, so in all likelihood if the



girls had asked to watch tv, I probably would have let them, even though it was during the week. My oldest is in middle school now, and I know that spending time with mama is getting further down on the priority list. I gratefully accepted her offer and the two of us got started on the staircase.

Last week she left her iPad at home. She called and asked if I could bring it to her before lunch, because she needed it for class that afternoon. (All her textbooks are on her iPad and many classes use apps and online software to submit classwork) Thinking to myself - there's a lesson here: *Do I let her deal with the consequences of not planning ahead and making sure she had all her stuff for school, when we left that morning? Do I race home and get it and bring it back?* It's about an hour round trip in the morning to get both girls to two different school campuses. I had a busy day ahead myself, without adding an extra round trip. I told her I would leave it in the middle school office prior to lunch and looked at my calendar to rearrange my morning.

Short story is I worked the trip in before her lunch. When I picked her up that afternoon, iPad in her hand, she got in and thanked me for bringing it to her. I responded, "you're welcome but you owe me an hour this weekend." She smiled and understood.

Teaching our children accountability and responsibility is important. We can't be so quick to solve all their problems and never let them learn. It doesn't mean we have to say "*you know when I was a kid...*" If my daughter was notorious about forgetting her iPad, I might be more inclined to make her learn the lesson the hard way - not bring it to her and have her deal with the consequences from her teachers. However, this was the last day of November and the first day she had forgotten it. It could also have been a day where I simply couldn't change my meeting schedule and she would be out of luck. Instead, I try to find a balance. Make her understand that she needs to be held accountable, but also know that I'm her mother, I love her and want to provide for her. Hence, she owed me an hour.

Saturday morning, she came to me and asked what chores she needed to do for me to work off her hour. I told her I wasn't going to have her do chores, she was instead going to help me with a project. The week prior she had given me the gift of her presence during my decorating and this day, I was going to give her my presence during her chores. We set off to put the lights on the tree. The accountability lesson was still learned, she was giving an hour to me that I had to use to get her iPad to school. But when she's a mother, or a teacher, or a coach, she will remember that giving your time to someone is one of the most cherished gifts you can give, and we hold our teammates (athletes, children, or colleagues) accountable because we care and out of love.



As you get ready to celebrate this holiday season, think about giving your presence instead of a present. It might turn into the best gift, for YOU.

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