

## **When the Tables Turn** **By Gail Kauranen Jones**

**Transitions: The Gifts of Change**  
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*"While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about."*

*--Angela Schwindt*

Parenting teenagers who are blossoming into their unique selves is teaching me a lot about life these days. As I listen to their political opinions or ways they choose to entertain themselves, I am in awe of their unfolding wisdom and joy for life.

Recently, I have been observing skills in my kids that exceed my own. My daughter is a better writer than me, easily crafting sentences for her school reports that may have taken me hours longer to develop. My son is a technical genius, which I am grateful for as my computer aptitude is quite low. He has saved me hundreds of dollars in "tech support" when my e-mail goes down or I think I have lost a document.

Appreciating our differences is helping me grow as I observe my highly extroverted daughter move with grace and ease through a room full of strangers where I as a more introverted person often stand back initially in observance of a situation. Often direct, and sometimes even bold, she unknowingly lives by the principles below described in Don Miguel Ruiz's book, *The Four Agreements*:

### **1. Be Impeccable With Your Word**

Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

### **2. Don't Take Anything Personally**

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

### **3. Don't Make Assumptions**

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform

your life.

#### **4. Always Do Your Best**

Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.

Watching my daughter work hard to get accepted early decision to her first (and only choice) college, I saw her determination not only to do her best, but more importantly to avoid listening to any naysayers who said she could not accomplish her dream. I have witnessed the same attitude when she applied for part-time jobs and got every one she ever wanted. She has truly learned to stand in her own power, sometimes a bit stubbornly, but always with conviction of her strengths.

When I hit frustration or disappointment, my son is quick to share gems of wisdom with me, particularly “quotes of the day” which his world cultures teacher Mr. Mahoney places on the board each day. Here are two of my favorites. The first he uttered to me one day when I was questioning my livelihood in this recession. He said, “Don’t go where the path may lead. Instead go where there is no path and leave a trail.” The second he offered upon returning from school one day. “Hey, Mom, What's the difference between school life and regular life? In school you are taught a lesson and given a test on it. In life you are given a test that teaches a lesson.”

Unlike us adults who sometimes get stuck in “analysis-paralysis” where we ruminate over every choice we make, children have the ability to stay in the moment longer, and often bounce back quicker when an outcome differs from their expectations.

When either of my children has been defeated (like cut from a team) or hurt, I have seen them rebound, learning one of the most important lessons it takes many adults a long time to get: “Deal, don’t dwell.” Then, they innately go for the joy, fun or next challenge.

I share these stories about my children not to boast-- because in truth it is quite humbling to see them outpace me in many areas of life--but to show that as parents we are both teachers and students. Just as we share our life wisdom with our children, our kids bring us fresh perspective from their innocence and their own truths.

Honoring their unique gifts is part of our job. Listening to our children, versus always directing them, is a way we all expand.

Choosing to grow and thrive in life means we accept the moments of learning, whether we gain a new insight from a child, an elder, a client, a colleague or even from a moment alone in nature when we gain wisdom from silence.

We do not have to know everything. We can delight in the gifts of each encounter. Today, perhaps take a moment to look into the eyes of each of your children (or friends,

colleagues, parents, or other acquaintances) and ask, “What may I learn from them?” Then, with openness and gratitude, accept the lesson.

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