

HomeBase 2011

The 21tiger guide to getting to know those who just want to help, in their own crazy way. All over again.

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Preface

In the last book we discussed our deep psyches and looked at all the things that were distracting you, and slowing you down. It's empowering and refreshing to get up everyday and not just exercise the body, but the mind. Not will this make you feel relaxed, and focused, but you'll stop clinging to people, money or attention just to feel good about yourself. Now, let's look at those immediately closest to you: your Family. Why should we devote an entire eBook to the Family? Because they're smarter than you.

Your Many Selves

Imagine someone who looks like you, but a little shorter, a little slower, maybe a little thinner. Although they look like you, they say things you would never say-- embarrassing, foolish, clumsy things. They fumble around, walk in a strange way, and interact with others awkwardly. Despite all their quirks and flaws, you hesitate to criticize them too much; after all, they are just a younger version of you.

Have you ever considered things you did in the past, several years ago, and chuckled at how foolish or ridiculous you seemed? You couldn't believe what you did or what you said? Of course, we all have. We all think of our childhoods, and laugh at our perception of the world then. What if you could talk to that "younger you"? If there was a time machine, would you want to get in it, and tell yourself all that you now know? Would you share advice about school, money, competition, and love? All the years of experience in your head, all the lessons, all the pain you learned from--would you want to tell your younger self and, in turn, make your current lifestyle so much better and easier?

There's just one problem. You can't really go back in time and tell yourself anything. The question is not, 'how can I build a time machine?', but rather 'can I take advice from someone just like myself, but with more experience?' so that the next 10, 20, 30 years are much better. It's the same exercise, but fast forwarded and 20 years.

We call this 'someone' your family: you all live together, largely share the same lifestyle, influence each other deeply, so you will probably turn into a combination of your brothers, sisters, and parents.

Besides my parents, I have two brothers. Have I taken on some of their traits? Of course. I see it the mostly in my sense of humor, which ranges from absurdly childish to offensively low brow--Ian and Colin, respectively. Since I grew up trying to make them laugh, it's no surprise that I developed that style. It's not perfect, and it sure isn't politically correct, but it fits. And yes, I know, it's no recipe for a career in Comedy. Since it's a very small audience!

So let's turn the original question around: Knowing that your parents and siblings are future selves of you, what should you ask them? Your family members are your coaches--a tremendous asset, and should be thanked and cherished everyday.

The idea of listening to your parents and following through on their advice, is not a new idea. Filial piety was clearly an ancient ideal going back to the times of Confucius (470 BCE). According to Confucian social structure, not only do you hold a deep love and respect for your parents and ancestors, but you actually listen to them. In the West we tend to cherish our parents, but not necessarily listen to them all the time, feeling that as we become young adults, we're ready to experiment and try something different. Many western heroes in pop culture and business ignored their parents in their ventures, only to be forgiven later as millionaires. In riches come vindication, I suppose. However, in many Asian cultures, the piety is much stronger, and parents wield much greater control: you generally listen to and obey those older than you, when the Older brother speaks, and the Younger brother listens, and the parents may even have the final say on who the younger daughter can marry. Traditional Pragmatism vs. Hollywood Romanticism? Fair enough. Then again, Confucius was nothing if not pragmatic.

Whether you speak Korean, Hindi or English, you've probably heard "Because I said so" about 4,000 times when you were growing up. What does that even mean? Sometimes it means, "in the greater context, which you, little Johnny, can't even begin to understand, the best move at this time is X, and please don't ask me to explain it, just trust me on this one." And sometimes it means, "I've had a long day, just do it already!" Just as you can look at your younger self and chuckle, young children and teens should be looking up to their older brothers, parents and grandparents with reverence. While ageism sounds like an overly simplistic way to settle disputes ("What? Because you had him first, he's always right?") when it comes to your parents, they have a ton more experience than you, so you should probably listen to them.

I have a friend that's been blessed with tremendous freedom and tremendous wealth. But as time went on, the liberty seemed to be a detriment to my friend. He grew more demanding of his parents, who, in turn, buckled to his demands. There was little

pressure to do well in school, and while my friend is doing very well, we'll never know what might have been, if his parents had said, "Because I said so" a few more times! After all, they were successful, and they *did* know. They seemed to placate him, rather than treat him as a younger version of themselves, looking for strong guidance.

When seeking advice from your parents and family members, its not an admission of failure, but rather, a testament to the great relationship you have with them. Not only does it let them know they are loved and needed, but they have a lifetime of wisdom to share. And one more thing: they're probably the only ones in the world that are 100% on your side. This is huge. When you grow up, you get your first job and you might have a shocking, jarring, almost painful realization: outside of your family, people in the real world don't go out of their way to help you.

Your first boss will probably try to take advantage of your inexperience, because for him, you're just a monthly expense (e.g.. your income). Your boss thinks you're a great guy, but if you start messing up, or coming in late to work, he'll throw you out, even if you have an excuse. My first work experience, following in my brothers' footsteps, was as a dishwasher in a swanky restaurant on the Beach. I had no idea what the rules were, but they told me I would be getting paid once a month (I later found out that twice a month was the minimum legal requirement in Canada). I'd work from 4 until closing up the place after midnight. It worked out to \$500 a month. Being about 14, I had no money.

So I worked like a slave that first job. I remember the intense heat, and the pace, like a furnace every night. About 15 staff, jammed into a closet, everyone bumping and shouting. The waitresses were almost serene; for them, this was a dream job. For the rest of us, it was brutal. I remember apologizing about three thousand times on my first day. Asking someone to move, or trying to get a plate from the big pile. Sorry. Sorry. Really Sorry. On the second day, the cook told me to cut it out. Just as I was getting used to the heat, my dishwashing career was abruptly cut short: it turned out the boss had a bit of a drug problem and snorted all the restaurants money. He left town. I basically worked a whole month for free, and went back to school in September empty-handed. My first brush with the real world, you might say.

Now your friends help you most of the time, but if you ask too much of them, they will say no. After all, they have limited time, funds, and they have other friends too. Your neighbors like you, but will only do you a favor if its a small thing, and not too much hassle. Your parents have your best interests (notice I didn't say 'fun') in mind. No matter what you think, they see you as a younger version of themselves. That's the dichotomy of parents and kids: only the parents see that relationship, because to them, you are both their past, and their future; children, look for reason that advice is unneeded: technology is different nowadays, culture is different, the world has gotten smaller, economies have gotten faster and more entwined. But at the end of the day, none of that stuff really affects what your parents see in their younger selves.

Habits

What advice would you give your 5 year old self, if you had a time machine? List at least three pieces of advice. How would you get your ideas across so that your young self would actually listen?

Looking Back

Before I get too crazy with the assumption that everyone has a perfect relationship with their parents and siblings, I want to talk about Childhood memories. It's common to think back to select events in our childhood that were

- *Exhilarating and Fun*
- *Tragic and Painful*

Why those extremes? Because your brain stores memories according to relative levels of emotional intensity. Just as the sound of cars driving past your office doesn't distract you from reading emails, the brain focuses its attention on anything *out of the ordinary*; emotional intensity is a good way to measure this kind of difference.

If you feel any emotional pain about your youth, much of it could have been quite minor, now that you're a little older and have the power to see it clearly. Some researchers say, looking back, you can't rely on those emotional memories¹. So any event in your life where you felt one of those three emotions, you will remember more in exaggerated form (think of a scary movie you might have watched as a child); highly emotional memories are distorted. So, according to their research, they're saying we'll remember emotional situations from long ago, but remember warped, exaggerated versions of them. So hitting your first home run as a child doesn't just feel good, it feels amazing and world changing! And that moment will be burned into your mind, for probably the next 40-50 years. Amazing.

Not only do you remember all the happy memories, you also remember events that were tragic. Not just when you're a child, but throughout your life. Many people graduate University and go on to live happy successful lives, but dread going to their High School reunions because they don't want to see certain people, and don't want to relive High School drama again, despite all the happy memories that originated there also. And your first scary movie probably did serious damage to your for at least a few years after seeing it. It's just a movie, but to you, it was a mirror into the unknown world of haunted

attics, and spooky basements. For me it was this totally twisted low-budget homegrown Canadian movie (ostensibly a heartwarming family movie!) called “The Peanut Butter Solution.” To sum up: the movie follows two young friends, who live in a neighborhood where a house has just burned down, with an old married couple tragically still caught inside the blaze. When one friend dares the other to go into the house, he accepts, and is terrified when he actually encounters a ghost. The scene where our hero is walking through the pitch black house will stick with me forever. The music, the lighting, everything about that movie is creepy. Surely my memory is playing tricks on me.

Beyond the great Canadian film, there are a lot more painful things in life. What about in your own life? What if hurtful things were said? What if you can still remember being abandoned in a shopping mall at the age of 7, or didn’t get the sneakers you wanted for your birthday? The mistake is to interpret *intent* where it there was none. Remembering life through the eyes of a Child is always risky. Children always misinterpret intent, because they are by nature, totally self-interested--they lack context. And those things that they do intend (e.g. intending to not buy you a snowboard for Christmas) should not be taken as an act of cruelty when it was probably an act of *financial prudence*. Or, like my friend, they love of their younger selves.

“But then,” you ask, “what proof do I have that they really care about me or love me?”

Because you’re alive. And they sent you to school. And made sure you had clothes, and good food (not junk food). And because they told you a million times.

Look back even further, have you ever explored your family’s history? As a New Worlder, I was curious at a very young age where my family actually came from. It turns out my family name, Robson, dates back to a clan of Scotsmen in the fourteenth century--the Gunn Clan, and even dates back to Vikings before that (much of this can be found on the internet). There is even evidence that at the end of the fourteenth century Sir James Gunn accompanied Sir Henry Sinclair, Earl of Orkney, to North America, *nearly one hundred years before Christopher Columbus*. True or not, it’s a great story, and gives context to just how lucky I am and we all are to be part of

something, and to have a history. Don't just look back at the last couple years. Look back a long way, and you'll see that you're standing on the shoulders of those who came before you, whether that's your Great Grandparents, or Seafaring Explorers from Centuries before.

Habits

Rather than think about what your parents said when you were 5, what did they say to your last week? In the Last month? Since you're memory's not that reliable, better to live in the present and just move forward.

Independence Day

Your parents did everything they could to keep you healthy and happy. But there was a point where we started to push back, wasn't there? For me it was around the age 13, when I started Eighth Grade. Ever since then I've been looking at the world as a place I can really explore. And around that time, advice from the parents started getting less 'helpful' and more of a 'nag.' Maybe I thought my parents didn't get my generation, so I often ignored their advice.

After all, going out and trying my own thing felt like a rite of passage. In your early teens, you might have gotten a part time job babysitting, or working at the burger joint down the street. You had the unbeatable combination of *wits and money* (maybe you had money, I volunteered to wash dishes for a month)! Of course, the more confident you got, the more proud you got. The chance of taking Mom's advice kept getting smaller and smaller. Pride can do that.

But we shouldn't ignore our parents' counsel for the sake of pride: even if we take their advice on career, on money, on friends, on dating, *that's not the hard part*. The hard part about school isn't talking about studying, it's studying and writing the actual exams. Just because your parents have suggested this career or that investment, doesn't mean they're going to be *doing it for you*. Take pride in your work, and your actions, not the source of the "tip".

At the end of the day, it all comes from them anyway. Admit it: You came from them, they spent untold sums of money to clothe, and feed you. And everyday since you were born, they've been helping you out. And now, fifteen years later, you want to claim total independence? That's convenient.

I remember years ago, at a dinner party, I was talking to a family friend, who was giving me great advice for my career. By this point I was already a few years into University, and of course, confident in my direction. He told me I was too obsessed with money, and kids my age were obsessed with taking a Banking or Real Estate job (I was majoring in Economics/Business), just for the cash, not for the passion. While slightly

miffed that he was generalizing about my whole generation, I noted that I already knew what it was like to be a millionaire, and wasn't that obsessed with the prospect. He looked at me sideways. I then explained to him that millionaires have chauffeurs and private chefs, and are going to fancy parties, and dinners every night. They get their clothes paid for by someone else (often given to them by designers). The lap of luxury is a life where someone else (on salary) arranges everything for you. He concurred, but asked, 'and you're telling me you don't want that?' I told him that for the first 10 years of my life, I was treated like a millionaire, while making absolutely no income. And you were too. We all were. We all had "chauffeurs" and "private chefs". And what did we do? Kick and scream most of the time, overdosing on Candy, and counting the days until we could be grown-ups.

Eventually you'll move away from your parents, get married and have your own kids. Where does the hand-holding end? Basically it's your parents job to bring you up to an age when you're not only able to handle yourself financially and socially, but that by that age, you've tried enough stuff, that you find something you're passionate about. Money is nice, and of course your 100% health is first priority to any parent, but once those are handled, they want you to be happy. And finding something passionate in your life is the only way to do that. Not fame. Not buying a hot car. Passion.

Habits

What are you 5 biggest moments before the age of 20? Maybe it was your first big win in a sports arena, maybe it was making enough money to buy your first car. Find 5 of them. For each of the five, how did your parents help out?

Raising you

Cereal. Candy. Popcorn. Chocolate. Donuts. Burgers. Hot Dogs. McDonald's. Wendy's. Arby's. Grandma's Homemade Pie. Cake. Ice Cream. Cereal again. Coca cola. Orange Crush. Milkshake. Slurpee. Mr. Freeze. Dairy Queen. Burger King.

It's funny(scary) to be 29 and think about eating all this amazing(horrendous) food. One the biggest breakthroughs I had was when a few years back I was living in a big city, and caught a bad cold (maybe on the subway, or on the plane). No big deal, right? Well, I was 'out of commission' for about a month because of it. It wasn't just a cough, it was Bronchitis, and it meant I couldn't breathe without coughing. Not only was I sick, but in a polluted city, recovery from any kind of respiratory problem takes much long. Now I couldn't sleep, my appetite was off, and I definitely couldn't exercise, so my body started turning into mush! When I'd fully recovered, I took a long hard look at my diet: fast food, fast food, and more fast food. And beer every night. When I went out with friends, the beer and vodka would flow.

My arms and legs felt like jelly, and I thought, 'I can never have 3 weeks off again,' so I redid my whole diet: no beer, no fast food. If I went to a club, I could have alcohol, but no beer. I later discovered that even sweetened juices and sodas were just as bad (adios, Rum and Coke).

Being a little older now I understand how that stuff affects my body. Junk Food containing a lot of sugar makes us energetic and 'buzzed' for short period of time, then we'll crash. Suddenly we're tired, and need something, like a coffee, to keep us going. As an alternative, I found that eating healthy snacks every few hours keeps me energized throughout the day.

When you were young your parents tried to foist AllBran upon you, get you to drink lots of milk, eat your vegetables, etc. Obviously, they were right. And obviously, knowing what you know now, you'll do the same for your kids one day.

Not only do you want them to be healthy and strong, you want your kids to be super smart. When I was a kid, I lived out in the countryside, sometimes there was nothing to do except read. I read everything I could get my hands on. And like any normal kid, I had a wild imagination. I even started enjoying writing at a very early age, coming up with fantastic tales about magic and sorcery, and relishing in the characters, and interwoven stories. And whenever we went out, I begged my mom for another book. Either a mystery book, or some ghost story or magical thing. It was all about escaping reality and letting my imagination run wild. In school I didn't really get financial motivations to do well, but always loved the praise I got for good grades. It was my thing. My brothers were great at sports and art, respectively, and I could always bring down the house whenever I got my latest report card.

Of all the gifts that I wanted when I was young, of all the things I wanted to do, like most kids, I usually got a "no" and a "because I said so," but when I wanted books, my Mom let it slide. I just loved everything about bookstores, the smell, the freshness. There were always cool new stories, and cool new covers coming out.

And when we got older, the pressure to do well in school and later in College, was huge. They gave me the advice from picking the right courses, writing tests, to dealing with haughty University Professors. It was a stressful time back then but I managed to make it through. I'll do the same for my kids one day too. There are countless MBA's and Lawyers out there who despise the work. I guess their advice was more about getting rich than happy.

I mentioned my brothers. As you might expect, we fought all the time. Looking back, there were clearly attempts by my parents for us three brothers to bond. We often worked out in the yard together, hacking down trees, cutting firewood, picking weeds, carrying untold wobbly wheelbarrows of rocks up and down the backyard slope. We might have resented our parents somewhat for putting us through hard labour, but we grew to respect each other for the hard work and long hours all three of us were putting in. By the time I had finished High School the fighting had mostly stopped, and we began helping each other out: helping each other get jobs, helping each other

understand women, helping each other with money. I can remember a brief period of time where I was working lots of temporary jobs (just a few days of work, then switch to a new job). My middle brother Ian is the one who first got into this temporary work agency, and then I followed, thinking a few extra bucks on top of my actual job, would be great. Sometimes I would work with Ian, sometimes I would work with other guys, but it was the same effect: hard work brings people together, whether its sports, cooking, or building a barn in the back yard.

Our closeness is now built on a foundation of respect. From fighting and bickering to healthy competition and respect. Our parents encouraged us to check stuff out, try a bunch of different games and sports. They knew that if they let us 'decide' we'd rather be napping, eating candy and watching cartoons. So they pushed us to play soccer and rugby, or join activities like the painting class or writing classes in the summer, which were both fun and competitive, broadening our horizons.

As an adult, you push yourself to try new things, you try new nightclubs, new restaurants, for variety. You might join a salsa class for a couple weeks then decide it's not your thing. Your parents pushed you to try new things, so you know what you actually liked. Of all the things that you liked, were you really crazy about any of them? Were you passionate about any of them? There's a difference between being good at something, and being passionate about it.

At any rate, hopefully your parents supported you in your passion and your hobbies, and asked you how they could help, and improve your already great ideas. This is critically important. The passion we have in our young lives can push us to higher and better goals, attract friends and lovers, and ultimately it will give us the fire in the belly to change the world. Luckily, I had great support when I was young. The first bit of real writing I did was a short fantasy story, probably a copy of the first 10 pages of Lord of the Rings I had read.

My third grade teacher was bowled over. She was so impressed with what I'd done she brought me to see the Principal, and read her some of the story. It felt great. And I guess

I had a knack for it. In the summer I joined a writing course--once a week, where we'd try crazy writing styles, and would find ideas for stories in strange places. For me, it was a blast. Not only was I doing something fun, I was getting tons of positive feedback from parents, teachers and friends. So I kept writing.

Some people have a ton of energy, and some people have very low energy. Some people are very laid back, and passive, and others are a bit more intense, and aggressive. We typically say, 'Adam is a very mild, peaceful quiet person,' or, 'Sherry is very bold and confident. She's a real firecracker.' I've felt dramatic shifts in my own personality, and I'll say this: people perceive you to be the person you are when you first met them. If you met someone when you were 8 years old, and you were very quiet and shy. They'll always see you that way. And any deviation from that, they'll perceive to be 'acting' or 'forced' or 'not the real you.' On the other hand, start talking to a few people in a mall, or walking down the street in a big city, and they'll say you're really 'confident, assertive, open-minded, funny.' You're both these things. You're the same person you were when you were eight years old. You just have a different energy level. That energy comes not from financial success, or being "happy" necessarily, it is cultivated from doing something you love, something you're passionate about.

Habits

Of all the things you loved to do as a kid (eat candy, watch movies, ride your bike), sometimes you had to be reined in. Which of those did your parents rein you in on, and looking back now, are you glad they did?

Dealing with Pressure.

If we didn't have pressure we wouldn't know who are parents were, right? They're the ones nagging us to bring a girl to Sunday dinner, they're the ones nagging us to practice the Piano/Cello/Trumpet. They're the ones dismayed at your latest report card, and lecturing you on the pitfalls of teen pregnancy. Your parents will pressure you to do things you *absolutely must not* screw up; unfortunately, it's a long list. Imagine how they feel. What a pain in the butt.

My first year out of High School, I studied Industrial Design for a year. I was a creative type and I thought naturally my interests and modest abilities would lend themselves nicely to designing Nike basketball shoes. Near the end of my first year, I was called into the department head's office. We talked about my future, and my goals. When he told me the financial prospects for the job we abysmal, I was gone (only several years later, did I realize that might have been a trap--his way of weeding out the 'fake' artists!) Changing programs was not cool with Mom and Dad, and there was no avoiding it: they expected me to be registered for a new college program immediately. This is the absolute worst pressure there is, not because its annoying, and your pride is hurt, but because I thought *it was the most important decision in my whole life*. I went to the local library several times, researching my options, looking for programs that interested me. Here's the problem: I'd left a very creative and interesting program for financial reasons (e.g.. supposedly bad prospects) which meant I was going to be looking for majors that had great prospects (medicine, law, business, computers). Guess what? Other than an Economics class in high school that I particularly enjoyed, I had zero interest in any of those, despite my father being a highly respected Physician and Medicine being an obvious choice. The next Autumn I was registered for Economics.

Other than things you simply cannot mess up, your parents don't really pressure you. That's kinda their thing; they're protecting you. In the West, once you graduate College, you've pretty much made it (in many Asian cultures, the pressure doesn't let up until after marriage!). The pressure turns into 'advice' or counsel. Besides, you're probably not living with your parents at that point anyway, so they're more likely to be nice to you.

Remember, when you graduate High School, and later, College, not only is it a proud moment for your parents, it's also a turning point in the relationship. They know (especially if you have older brothers and sisters) that they don't have to nag so much anymore. So it's a weight off their shoulders! Tears of Joy, indeed. Just as your parents have mistakes in their own lives, and huge successes, they want to transfer all of that experience over to you.

Habits

Pressure is a drag for everyone: its a choice between the lesser of two evils. Either you parents do nothing, and watch you fail, or nag you, and at least get you in the right direction, the latter is an obvious choice. Cut them some slack. They cut you some. ;)

Goals

Take out a sheet of paper and think about your goals for your family. Is there something you always wanted to ask them? Something you always wanted to tell them?

Write down 2 super ambitious goals, and add them to the Mind goals from the previous book...Stumped? Here's one I wrote, ages ago:

"My relationship with my family is a source of endless comfort and love."

Make a point to take 15 minutes to email your parents and siblings now and then and get them on the phone for a good 20-30 minutes every weekend. You'd be surprised how much interest they take in your what you're up to, and how much fun you have finding out what they're up to. Also, with today's modern convenience it doesn't matter where you are, remembering that they're right behind you no matter what is an amazing feeling.

Habits

These goals-turned-affirmations are brilliant because you can control them. Notice how strange they feel the first time you say them, and how natural it feels in the coming weeks. Get into the habit of reading these a couple times, after your morning meditation. As the weeks go by, your behavior will change. From time to time, consider the wording and revise it, as your goals evolve.

Closing Words

I couldn't go right from PureMind to the next subject without spending some time to focus on one of our greatest (and most taken for granted, if not neglected) assets: our family. No matter what your family looks like, big or small, spread around the world, or on the same address you've had since you were a born, they mean everything. As coaches through every aspect of your life, they never stop needing you and you never stop needing them. You might be surprised how good it feels to tell them that now and then.

We now turn to Passion. When people talk about having Purpose in your life, or Drive, this is it. It's not about your favorite movie, or your political party, its about the thing that gets you out of bed every morning. It'd not going to be money, or your job. It's not going to be something you dread, it's going to be something you absolutely love; you're finally ready to go after it!

Notes

1 “Cornell Chronicle: A Challenge to Prevailing Memory Theories”. <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/July10/EmotionStudy.html>. September 2010