

A speech given by Tony Steven to Toastmasters in 2001

STRONG PARENTING

Being responsible for our own actions.

Responsibility

What does a man feel when he is in the heat of battle? What is he thinking when he brings down a hurtful blow upon the enemy? How does he rationalise this act to his beliefs?

Surely he must close off a pattern of reasoning that would otherwise restore self-responsibility. I guess we have all experienced this at one level or another.

When we give up responsible and reasonable thought for a cause or for a leader we abrogate our responsibility for ourselves and give it to another.

This is done over and over again at an individual level, however it becomes dangerous when it happens at a religious or national level. This is where the societies of the world breakdown and why democracy is so important, because it goes some way towards handing the responsibility for a Nation back to the individual people, where it belongs.

The responsibility lies with each of us to behave responsibly and respectfully of others. It takes self-control and a willingness to make an effort to compromise. This is easier when you have been taught to do this as a child.

If you have been taught this self control it impacts on the way you view the community and your role in it. We are in charge of our own destiny regardless of our current circumstances.

I am disturbed that so many court decisions and so much legislation is now focusing on recompense for the lot in life we have inherited. Instead of making the way forward clear they encourage us to blame others and look for reasons.

Our society tends to allow, even teach, people to lean on others, instead of being strong and self-reliant and responsible. Every successful person has become so because, in one field or another, they have taken charge of their own life.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating a totally individualised community intent on selfish outcomes at the expense of others, I'm looking for a society of people helping themselves as well as others.

Parenting

I am trying to teach my children that they have the power to choose to be good or bad it is not something that happens to them.

There's been a lot of talk lately about boys and the way they grow up in a "culture of cruelty", bullying and violence at school. I have experienced this culture myself. Boys are fearful and do become incapable of

expressing themselves, unable to defend or even justify the way they feel. They find it impossible to communicate freely with anyone.

Adult men today are the result of yesterday's boys and their limitations are now impacting on the social fabric of our community. We need to overcome these problems in order to over-come the crime against business and the community generally.

Being able to connect with others and feeling able to be in touch with your own emotions are the skills we need to teach all our generations of men.

Women also need to be understood. Being able to talk with friends is one thing but being able to discuss openly the issues that are really hurting them is totally another.

It is with all these limitations that we start on the path of parenting as young adults.

Governments

Research from the US and the UK suggests that a significant amount of learning that makes us who and what we are as adults, is learnt in the first 5 years of life. The way we are treated as infants has a dramatic influence on how we act as parents.

There is an organisation called "Good Beginnings" in Tasmania that is specifically set up, and partially Government funded, to educate us in better parenting skills. The need has already been recognised!

The Glenorchy City Council recently ran a programme that featured a family intervention process to help family's communicate. Usually in times of crisis involving teenagers and their Mum's and Dad's.

As I said before these problems are best tackled during early childhood and it will take a gigantic effort by all parents and the community generally to teach, then use these communication skills to overt these problems for the next generation.

Further to what is already being done, Governments around the nation need to take the lead, implementing programmes that help parents with their problems in communicating with their children in their infancy and through to their adolescence.

Most will agree that parenting is the most important job anyone will take on in the lifetime, yet parenting is one of the few jobs where there is little or no training and very little support. It is also one of the hardest jobs to do well.

The prospects of a bright future lie with our parents of today, we need to ensure that our children learn respect for others and self-responsibility. If we fail, crime rates will continue to climb, social cohesion will be lost and we will be assigned to repeating the mistakes of the past.

Strong and connected parenting is the answer, it won't be easy but it is our responsibility.

Tony Steven