

Professor Randel Carlock describes some new techniques for managing the world's hardest job.

Parents as coaches & leaders

Executive-level person needed for challenging assignment: After having worked a full day, applicant must be willing to give 110% to the task of helping and enriching a direct report who is often hostile or uncommunicative, and can never be fired. Compensation: None. Training: None. If you're a self-starter with a healthy taste for endless work, CALL US TODAY!

The INSEAD professor who wrote this job description grins when he reads it aloud to audiences of business leaders. A father of three teenagers and a family therapist, he has first-hand knowledge of what many consider the world's hardest job – parenting a teenager. But Professor Randel Carlock's experiences as a CEO and teacher have given him some of the most interesting insights into parenting, particularly of teenagers. The Berghmans Lhoist Chaired Professor of Entrepreneurial Leadership and Director of the school's Initiative for Family Enterprise, Carlock has found parenting inspiration in an unlikely place: leadership and management theory. According to him, most parents know what makes a good leader; they have seen the qualities demonstrated either at work or in their communities. These same skills, he believes, can be adapted to the process of raising successful, independent young adults. His ideas on this have been compiled in a book that focuses on strategies for improved parenting. *Strategic Parenting*, due out early next year, is not meant to minimise the importance of love and emotions in creating positive family

relationships; rather, it is about thinking ahead about how to address parenting challenges in order to create more space for the fun part of parent-child relationships.

What can management teach us about parenting?

"Plenty," says Carlock, who

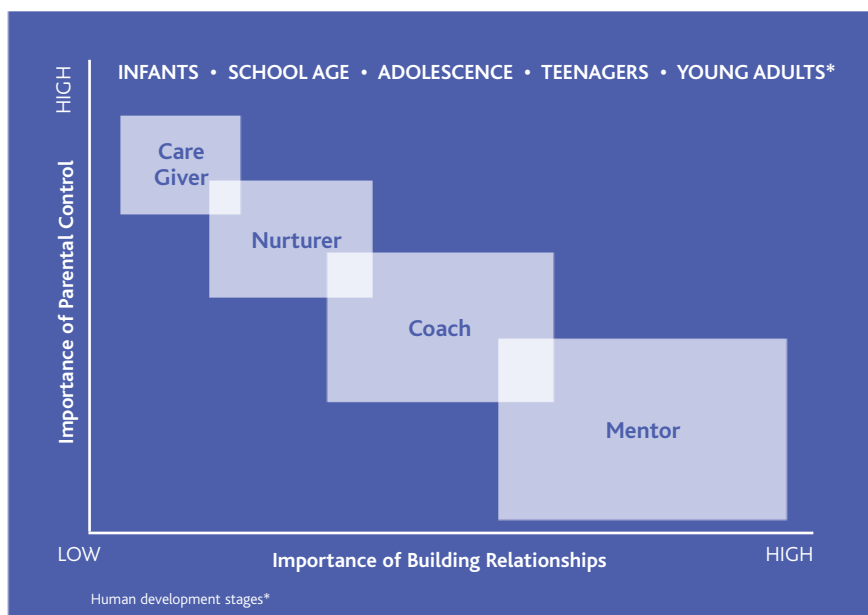
establishes this caveat up front:

"This is not to say you should treat your teenager like an employee. In fact, enlightened managers have come to understand that if they are to achieve their highest level of performance, not even employees should be treated like employees." He believes that a leadership strategy focused on building a respectful environment that empowers each individual is essential to inspire successful performance, whether at home or at work.

Examples from leadership theory

Modern leadership theories tend to focus not on leaders themselves, but on their interaction with employees. Previously, management theory suggested that employees should adapt their work styles to the style of the boss. This "because I'm the boss" approach has been replaced by a new focus on the manager's ability to adjust his or her own leadership style to the employee's situation.

Carlock suggests that parents, like today's managers, would do well to shift from the "because I'm the parent and I said so" style to one that seeks to understand their children's developmental path and what it will take for them to become capable, independent adults.



The evolution of parenting roles

Becoming a coach and mentor to your teen

Management thinking in the last 10 years has focused on how bosses need to learn to become coaches and mentors to their employees. Here's how some of those skills can be adapted to the process of parenting teenagers.

Offer positive feedback

Leaders of successful organisations know that effective feedback is critical to sound decisions, employee development and improved performance. Unfortunately, traditional management and parenting style is often based on catching employees or teens doing something wrong. They receive feedback only when they have screwed up (or misbehaved) or failed to meet expectations. Modern management thinkers, however, believe it is a more effective tactic, from a motivation perspective, to catch the employee doing something right so that you can reinforce it. Concludes Carlock, "Teenagers are even more surprised when you catch them doing something right, and this surprise effect itself can make the reinforcement more powerful."

Empower your teenager

If we want teenagers to become satisfied and capable adults, the first step is to help them develop a sense of personal power, the feeling that they have influence over their own lives. The parent's role in this process is very important, because it's the gradual transfer of responsibility from parent to teenager that builds a teenager's sense of empowerment. The idea that teenage girls or boys could empower themselves is not realistic, because children are shaped by their parents' perception of them while they're growing up. It's the responsibility of parents to provide an environment and even specific experiences that help their children to mature and develop a sense of personal capability.

Empowering your teenagers means demonstrating your trust by giving them an opportunity to test themselves and allowing them to succeed or fail. A little parental guidance is helpful as long as it supports the teens' efforts. Your challenge is to help your teenagers develop their self-confidence and judgment and learn how to plan, make decisions and solve increasingly complex problems.

A fundamental challenge facing all parents is trying to negotiate a new role for themselves in their relationship to their children. As children grow they change, and their need for parenting also changes. Parents need to be ready – parenting techniques that work when a child is 10 will be hopelessly out of sync with a teenager. (See "What the situation dictates" sidebar, page 32.)

Your first parental role, **caregiver**, is natural for most parents because newborns and infants need complete attention and protection in order to survive. Communication takes place on a "call-and-response" level – the infant or toddler cries, and the parent attends to what probably is a very obvious problem.

A parent becomes more of a **nurturer** as a child begins to talk and interact with people outside the immediate family – friends, babysitters, other parents and teachers. Throughout the primary grades and middle-school years, parents begin to teach their children to function in the world. In many ways these years are an ideal time for parents, because their children are capable at times of functioning on their own and yet remain totally dependent upon their parents. During this period, children idolise and even imitate their parents. But a five-year-old or an 11-year-old who tells you "I want to be just like you" soon turns into a 12-year-old who yells, "You're a stupid idiot" (or worse).

A parent becomes a **coach** at the start of the adolescent years, when "hands-off" participation in the child's significant physical, emotional and intellectual development is necessary. It is necessary because the parent has very little choice – the child's separation process has clearly begun. At this stage, many parents would argue that their role more closely resembles that of a traffic officer, a school principal or a drill

sergeant, but a parent's job at this stage is to support a dramatic leap in a teenager's physical, emotional and intellectual development. This can be a particularly painful time, since teenagers test their limits through conflict.

As a coach, a parent should create a safe space with clear expectations where a teenager can test himself or herself in both failure and success. Ideally, this should be a time of shared control, when the parents continually shift more and more responsibility to the teenager as the teenager demonstrates a capability for sound judgment and decision-making.

The key skills you'll need during the coaching phase are the ability to listen, to control your own emotions and to watch for the teachable moments that create a learning opportunity. Teenagers are experts at creating highly charged emotional situations to avoid dealing with the real problems that are confronting them. They are also expert at using conflict as a tool to distract their parents from discussing important issues. A teenager knows that she has won the

fight the minute her mother says, "You can't talk to me like that!" because then she doesn't have to deal with the real problem she has created and can instead



wrestle with the ongoing and unanswerable issue of showing her parents respect.

A parent's transition to **mentor** indicates that the emotional storm clouds have lifted and that the really tough teenage years are finally ending. But a very important adjustment still needs to be made: parents need to learn to treat their teens as adults. By this time a son or daughter should be quite

independent in social and emotional terms, but the mentor stage represents the final cutting of the apron strings. This is the beginning of an adult-to-adult relationship that will continue in some form for the rest of the parent's and the child's lives.

Thinking about parenting in terms of managing – rather than controlling – relationships demands a different parenting model built on new parenting

skills and behaviours. It suggests an important change in thinking about how parents view themselves and their role in supporting the development of their teens into capable young adults. A fundamental concept of psychology is that we cannot change another person: nowhere is this truer than in raising teenagers. **IQ**



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What the situation dictates

Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), proposed in 1969 by Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, was something of a revolutionary idea: unlike previous models of leadership, where subordinates were expected to adapt to the style of their leader, this theory suggests that leaders should adapt their styles to the needs of subordinates. More specifically, the SLT states that leaders must be aware of their subordinates' willingness and ability to perform a task. This theory offers interesting insights to parents, who must be flexible enough to change their parenting style as their teen moves in and out of different life phases. A simplified version of the SLT shows that people generally fall within one of four categories, based on their willingness and ability to perform a task (see table). According to this theory, leaders should adjust their styles to where each individual falls within this matrix.

Adapting this theory to parenting, you can easily see parallels that help define which parenting style works best in specific situations.

Willingness	Ability to perform task	Leadership Style
Low	Low	Directing Style
Low	High	Motivating Style
High	Low	Instructing Style
High	High	Clarifying Style



Endnote

Adapted from Robert J. Schemel Jr, "Rethinking Popular Theories", Vol. 1, No. 1 (98), *Management Development Forum*.

Directing Style (Care giver)

(Appropriate when teen has low willingness and low ability.)

1. Explain importance of the specific task.
2. Clearly describe the ultimate goal of the task.
3. Clearly describe how to achieve the goal, step by step.
4. Set dates for frequent progress checks.
5. Provide extra help when needed.
6. Explain how the teen will benefit from doing well on the specific task.

Motivating Style (Nurturer)

(Appropriate when teen has low willingness and high ability.)

1. Explain the importance of the task.
2. Clearly describe the ultimate goal of the task.
3. Explain how the teen will benefit from doing well on the task.
4. Come to agreement with the teen on how to achieve the task's goals.
5. Set dates for frequent progress checks.

Instructing Style (Coach)

(Appropriate when teen has high willingness and low ability.)

1. Clearly describe the ultimate goal of the task.
2. Clearly describe how to achieve the task, step by step.
3. Set dates for progress checks.
4. Allow time for learning the task and provide extra help when needed.

Clarifying Style (Mentor)

(Appropriate when teen has high willingness and high ability.)

1. Clearly describe the ultimate goal of the task and agree on time frames.
2. Ask the teen how to achieve the goal and come to agreement.
3. Check with the teen on progress as needed.