

## Family Buy-In

by Melissa d'Arabian

Even on my family's best days, our house is far from quiet. With four kids very close in age, even a small problem multiplies with an exponential speed that can blindside and overwhelm me. My solution is in the prevention. As a parent, I am most effective when I am deliberate, proactive and process-oriented.



If that sounds like I'm talking about a business, not a family, you wouldn't be too far off. Years ago I was a consultant in a large firm, and I learned a powerful lesson from a managing partner, a hugely successful and intimidating guy with notoriously exacting standards. But he had an interesting employee development philosophy. When a worker didn't perform to standards, he chose to operate from what he called "a presumption of talent." According to him, most cases of underperformance stemmed from either lack of buy-in or lack of training, not lack of ability. This partner's perspective not only changed the way I managed people over my own career, but it changed how I parent.

As a mom, I am my daughters' mentor, showing them their way in this world, teaching them to talk, feed themselves, or get dressed. When my kids don't "perform" to my standards (for instance, they have been lackadaisical with making their beds lately), I think of that project manager. Instead of getting frustrated, I ask myself two questions: 1. Do I have their buy-in? 2. Is this a training issue? The stuff that is so obvious to me (why would you head to school without your shoes on?!) isn't as obvious to a little girl whose head is a whirlwind of excitement at the very prospect of being in school at all, details be darned.

Here's my two-pronged strategy to ensure smoother family routines:

### Step 1: Get the Buy-In

I get the family on board by using the family meeting. I keep the meeting short (especially with younger kids), so we can get through it quickly before the kids get crabby. We sit around the dinner table or on the floor (criss-cross applesauce!), passing a stuffed pig, which indicates you have the floor. We talk about whatever the trouble zone is - the morning routine, for instance - and everyone gets to give input. Not only are the kids more likely to buy-in to a process they've helped create (basic laws of

efficacy), but having everyone in on the agreement means that you as a parent can say later if someone breaches the plan: “We had an agreement, remember?” My kids are surprisingly much more likely to hold up their own word than they are to follow my rules.

### **Step 2: A Simple Training Session**

I hold a training session for any activity I expect them to execute. I want my kids to pick up their toys? I show them step-by-step how to do it. I physically walk everyone through each activity in a routine. I write up the routine on a sheet of paper or draw pictures for non-readers if the routine is lengthy enough that they need a reminder. My daughters have all been making their beds (if more sporadically than I'd like) for years. Yet, when I asked them the other night who needed me to give them a lesson on bed-making, all four said yes. I had a training issue, and didn't even know it! The girls had been winging it when they were making their beds, so no wonder they were sporadic about the activity. No one likes to do something they are unsure about. One training session fixed that overnight. Even little ones can get a quick training session on how to put on their Velcro shoes or pick up their toys.

Thanks to the buy-in/training two-step approach, this morning, the girls were dressed (including shoes!), beds made, breakfast eaten, teeth brushed and backpacks on with over five minutes to spare. They got to school early, without stress or rushing. But before I congratulate myself too much, I refer to the first sentence of this post: Even the best days can be a bit messy.