

# CDO

CHIEF DADDY OFFICER



*The*  
BUSINESS  
*of*  
FATHERHOOD

Christos Efessiou

With Contributions by Persephone Efessiou

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*Advantage*®

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*This book is loaded with practical lessons in personal growth, leadership and parenting. His entertaining stories will motivate you to be a better parent, leader and role model. I would recommend this book to all parents, CEOs, employees and college students entering the work force. You will be touched by this book – a truly great book!*

Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®  
President & CEO, Bernhardt Wealth Management, Inc.



*CDO is a thoughtful application of foundational business wisdom to the practice of parenting. It is eminently sensible in both HOW business fundamentals could be applied to parenting, but also WHICH business fundamentals should be applied. It resonated with me as an academic, but also with me as a father; it uses business principles legitimately but explains them in a genuinely warm and accessible way. I would recommend it to anyone on the journey that is parenting.*

Matthew A. Cronin, PhD  
School of Management, George Mason University

# CHAPTER 9



## BUILDING YOUR TEAM

**ALL SENSIBLE MANAGERS KNOW THAT THEY HAVE TO** cultivate some spirit of camaraderie and shared interests among their employees. Countless books have been written about building an effective team at the office, prompting managers to plan retreats, fund social activities, and craft mission statements. Why would we expect our children to require less effort?

### **Staying Close**

A truth I learned from running my company is that physical proximity does not necessarily translate into relational connectedness. Just because everyone works under the same roof doesn't mean they share the company's vision, goals and values. The same goes for families. We can all live together, but lead entirely separate lives.

On the other hand, physical distance does not have to mean a distant relationship. Only four of my employees live in the same metro region as our office. Everyone else works remotely, and we're connected electronically to other continents. Yet with consistent, quality communication, our tasks are completed on time as a team.

When I came to this country at 18, I left behind my parents, a 14-year-old sister and a 5-year-old brother. I never feared that the physical distance would damage our close relationship, and I am

happy to say that it did not. Living on different continents for 35 years, we are closer today than we have ever been, and our children share the same closeness. Of course, like everything worth cherishing, emotional intimacy requires effort to cultivate and maintain. We did the work, and as a result, our relationships have thrived even though we have not lived under the same roof for all these years.

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***“We cannot assume the kids feel like  
“part of a team” just because we  
are sharing living quarters.”***

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It should be clear from my examples in the last chapter that I am not suggesting parents spend long periods of time away from their children unless it is absolutely necessary. I am saying that no matter how often we are in the same room with our children, as parents we must pay special attention to the consistency and quality of our communication. We cannot assume the kids feel like “part of a team” just because we are sharing living quarters.

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***“We can never expect team members to invest in  
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heavily in the team, the members will follow suit.”***

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## Investing in the Team

We can never expect team members to invest in the team more than we do. On the other hand, when a team leader—CDO or CEO—invests heavily in the team, the members will follow suit. My silent commitment to both my employees and myself has always been that I will never dismiss anyone because I don't have enough work to support them. During a recent economic downturn that put many companies out of business, I invested heavily in the company and aggressively raised capital from investors to avoid layoffs.

Still, our company got to a difficult point, and my board concluded we could address this through layoffs, furloughs or salary deferments. I insisted we move forward with one salary deferment: mine. I didn't make a big deal about this; I simply told my team that I was putting good money into the company, and tangibly proved to them that I believed we would succeed.

Their response overwhelmed me. Though I had never asked for any concessions, employees came forward and offered part of their own salaries back to the company. I received a return on my investment in the company many times over by the loyalty, understanding, respect, and the undying commitment of my people. None of us welcomed that adversity, but in it I proved to them that I was fully committed to the company and the team, and they repaid me in kind.

Three months later, opportunities I had been cultivating came to fruition, and I was able to pay myself again. Years later, we are still in business and doing well. All of those people who went through that season with me are still with me today and will be with the company for as long as they desire.

How can we prove to our children that we are invested in our families? The answer may look different for different people. I have

already detailed many ways I demonstrated my investment in Persephone over the years. When I had to be at work, she knew that I was earning money to take care of her. The challenge presented by my divorce enabled me to prove my commitment to her at another level.

Even when Persephone was being punished, I made sure she understood that it was for her own good and it brought me no pleasure. Imposing our will on our children certainly keeps them under control in the short term, but it builds no loyalty. We must help them understand that part of being on a team is playing by the rules, and the same rules must apply to all appropriately.

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***“The value of a victory is always based on the quality of the competition. You can win a match with a weaker opponent, but that would be akin to a mature adult arm-wrestling a baby. There is no glory, satisfaction or self-respect when the match is over.”***

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## **Cultivating Win-Win Solutions**

Competition is a natural instinct at home and a work, but a good leader finds ways to cultivate win-win outcomes. Early in my career, I found myself in a two-week training course about new products our company was marketing to physicians. Marketing to such an educated group meant we were forced to learn reams of information practically overnight. One’s performance during such training could make or break a career, and naturally, some did better than others.

In this case, my classmates were my competition, and my roommate during this training period was particularly sharp. There were two ways I could have approached this reality. I could have worked to undermine my competitors by withholding information, trickery and deceit, or I could help create a higher tide that would raise all boats. The latter approach suited me best. My roommate and I supported one another. During group exercises, I chose to share information that helped the class as a whole. This was a risky strategy, but I wanted to succeed as a gentleman, not a scoundrel. After all, the value of a victory is always based on the quality of the competition. You can win a match with a weaker opponent, but that would be akin to a mature adult arm-wrestling a baby. There is no glory, satisfaction or self-respect when the match is over.

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***“Togetherness among family members does not come from sharing DNA. It is nurtured by hard work and leading by example.”***

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My gamble paid off. At the end of the two weeks, the trainers saw fit to award me the Outstanding Trainee award and the Outstanding Peer Influencer award. More than 25 years have passed since that day and as of this writing, I’m the only person to have received both awards from this course. The executives took notice, and that evening changed my career forever.

We can cultivate the same kind of win-win scenarios at home. While my parenting experience has been with an only child, I am blessed to be married to a woman who raised three daughters on her own before marrying me. I learned from her that the key to avoiding

unhealthy competition between family members is for all children to know that regardless of performance, they are equally loved.

Reward and affirm the behavior you want. When your children help one another and work together well, let them know that you notice. You don't have to give out an "Outstanding Sibling Influencer" award, but you can tell your daughter, "I really appreciate how you helped your brother with his homework. You are such a good example to him," or your son, "Good job teaching your sister to ride her bike. She wants to be just like you."

Siblings do not have to fight all the time. Some conflict is clearly inevitable, but their relationships will be modeled on what they see in you. If you are cold, selfish and competitive to a fault, they will follow suit or, worse, dismiss you. If they see you generous with your time and attention, they will help and encourage each other, even if they occasionally argue. Togetherness among family members does not come from sharing DNA. It is nurtured by hard work and leading by example.

## **Teaching Teamwork**

I learned extremely valuable teamwork lessons when I was a product manager. Early on, I realized that I was the hub of a very complicated wheel. My duties required that I interact with all different departments and specialists within those departments, from sales to manufacturing. There was no direct reporting responsibility with any of them, but if production didn't meet my desired schedule, I'd have nothing to market. In short, I wasn't in charge of anyone, but I needed everyone doing their jobs well in order to do mine.

This lesson in humility and interdependence served me, and later my wife Juliana, very well in our life together. All children tend to think they know more than they actually do. When Persephone was planning my 50th birthday party, she wanted to do it all by herself. Her stepmom-to-be didn't compete with her, but gently offered good suggestions. Persephone initially resisted, but soon realized the party was a bigger task than she originally anticipated. Why turn down good help?

While Juliana hadn't known me as long as my daughter, she was a mature adult with lots of wisdom and experience. She didn't care about getting credit for her ideas or suggestions; she just wanted to help her future stepdaughter reach her goal. As a team, they threw me the best birthday party anyone could have asked for, and in the process they grew closer together by supporting each other every step of the way and delighting in the outcome.

## **Building Trust**

No team can function effectively without trust. This is true between employees and management, companies and their customers, and definitely between parents and children. As parents, we are only as strong as our word. A wise man once said it is better not to promise than to break your promise. In business, we call it under-promising but over-delivering.

Children have amazing memories, especially for the things we promise. They experience profound disappointment when we don't follow through on our word. The best way to guard against broken promises is to think very carefully before you speak. A good salesperson wouldn't promise a valued customer something he couldn't deliver; treat your children with the same courtesy and respect.

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***“A good sales-person wouldn’t promise a valued customer something he couldn’t deliver; treat your children with the same courtesy and respect.”***

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When Persephone’s mother and I were divorcing, it was very important to her that I pick her up for our visits when I said I would. She would call me every time I was to get her and ask me what time I was going to be there. I made it a point to be punctual to the minute, oftentimes arriving in the neighborhood early and waiting in the car. It almost became our little game. Games aside, I was really proving to her that I was reliable, and that she could count on me. When Persephone was almost 9 years old, she acknowledged her trust in me in a note she wrote during Fathers’ Visiting Day at her school.

He loves Golf! 

My dad is my best friend in the whole wide world. I like when we go to fun places together. My dad has his own business called "Cogent" I think that is an awesome name. My dad's name is ~~Chris~~ ~~Jim~~. And for a living he teaches doctors and makes C.D. Romes. I also like him because I can trust him the most. He loves hot things to eat. He loves the Macarena even though he tells me "That is the stupidest song I think he is a cool dad."

Norwood  
School  
Visiting  
Day

 Paddy

11/8/96

Kids are also like customers in that they are really not interested in excuses. They don't care why you were late or what happened to prevent you from taking them to the baseball game. They just know you didn't do what you said you would. This doesn't mean you'll never break a promise; it just means you need to take it seriously and apologize sincerely when you do.

## **When the Team Breaks Up**

How hiring and firing is handled in a company sends a message to all the employees about what it means to be part of the team. In the same way, the way your marriage is handled will send strong messages to your children about what it means to be part of your family. This is why so many children of divorce struggle with fear and self-esteem issues. However, I am pleased to say that while divorce is never ideal, it does not have to destroy your family's team.

Disappointment—whether a failed marriage or a failed company—can feel debilitating. It is so easy to become paralyzed and rendered unable to ever give it another try. Once again, the business world had lessons for me in my home life. Early in my career an employer and I had an ethical disagreement. I was young and I needed the job, but I submitted a letter of resignation rather than sully my reputation by doing what my bosses wanted me to do. In my youthful naiveté, I thought he would understand, and even sympathize. Instead he reacted with rage, telling me in effect, “You can't quit—you're fired.”

I had my integrity, but I needed a job. So in the face of very pressing circumstances I started my first company. I had just mailed my first mortgage check for a new house. My family was depending on me to provide for them. Rather than yield to paralysis, I took responsibility

for my decision. I took everything I had learned at my previous job, combined it with the recent hard-learned lessons on ethics and morals, and poured it into making my own company all it could be.

Marriage is the ultimate partnership enterprise, and when it fails, it's never just one person's fault. It is very tempting to just gloss over the unfortunate occurrence in the name of "moving on," but I knew I had to accept responsibility for my part. Blaming Persephone's mother entirely would have not only been unfair, it would have been making excuses for my own shortcomings.

There are two dangers to avoid with divorce. If we treat it lightly, we send the message that family commitments are not a big deal. On the other hand, treating it like the end of the world is like telling our children our family is somehow incomplete or defective. For me, the key was to face the reality of my broken first marriage and show Persephone that better days lay ahead. My willingness to accept responsibility for my side also showed Persephone not to fear failure. When I was fortunate enough to meet Juliana, I was prepared to try anew, having learned from my past mistakes.

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***“Moral courage is one of the rarest commodities of our day. To be cohesive, a team must know what it stands for.”***

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## What Does Your Team Stand For?

“The darkest places in hell,” Dante said, “are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.” Moral courage is one of the rarest commodities of our day. To be cohesive, a team must know what it stands for. As a leader, if you do not have the courage of deep moral convictions, you have nothing to rally your family behind. Your children should know the values of your family and embrace them as their own.

Convictions come with a price. You must not be afraid to stick your neck out, lose friends, or even sacrifice financially. But when you have learned how to do this, the rewards you reap in your children are amazing. Persephone grew up knowing that one of my most treasured values was helping those less fortunate than I, without taking credit.

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***“Some people only give to be congratulated, but pure generosity never needs public recognition.”***

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She saw me giving money to homeless people, and questioned why I did it. I would explain. She knew that I gave money to certain projects without wanting my name attached to it. I explained some people only give to be congratulated, but pure generosity never needs public recognition. I had always sought to instill this value in her, but I never wanted to force her to participate, because coerced charity is no charity at all.

Persephone was a freshman in college when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast of the United States, and she was immediately moved to get involved. Without breathing much of a word to

anyone, she got permission from the dean of students to set up collection buckets on campus for donations. She recruited volunteers under the banner “Spare Change for Change,” and before the week was out she had collected more than \$1,000 for the Red Cross relief efforts. Although the event became the most high-profile student-generated relief effort at her college, her name was nowhere to be found. She organized it because it was in her heart, not to get credit or beef up her resume.

What I love about that kind of giving is that it takes authentic self-confidence. When you truly know who you are, you don’t need others to tell you you’re great. Ultimately, to raise independent and responsible adults, we must teach our children who they are. They are part of a team, a family and a community, all of which stand for certain values. Whatever your specific beliefs, they must guide you in times of moral challenge to do the good, honest and courageous thing. Then your team will have someone worthy to follow, because true leadership is built on a foundation of care and compassion for all.