

Abraham Whaley: Five Things My Mother Taught Me About Working for a Living (and everything else)



It's easy to think of your mother of Mother's Day. Reminders are everywhere as we are nudged to think of her on the day everyone else does. Commercials, calendars and signage on jewelry shops beckon: "Mother's Day is Next Sunday!" Of course we think about our Mothers more than just one day a year, but maybe we don't always make the connection between the things we do everyday: our habits and customs, our values – and the people that guided us into becoming who we are.

I probably have as close a working relationship with my Mother as anyone in the world: we are partners in a corporation, and I work with her and her practice closely. We talk at least once a day about the business, our customers, her recent experiences at work, things we've read or heard, and our future plans. It's a vital connection, to know someone as both Mother and business partner – full of incredible opportunities for growth (and for difficulty), and it's one of the most rewarding parts of my job. Working with Mary Pat side by side, it has been remarkable to me to notice how many of the things that are ingrained in me are habits she taught me long ago.

So on this Mother's Day, I'd like to take this time to be mindful of some of the things my mother has taught me over the years that still inform how I go about being in business with her, my clients, and the rest of the world every single day.

1. “Do the right thing. And for the right reasons.”

As a businesswoman, Mary Pat is never hesitant to point out the financial benefits of a particular choice or action – but that isn't always the driver of her decision making process. The right thing to do is usually the best business decision- but more importantly, it's the right thing to do.

I remember working on an IT inventory system for my mother one summer, and having her walk up to my desk at about 5 minutes to 5PM one afternoon and saying “Are you almost done for the day?” I told her I was almost finished, but that the clock hadn't quite hit 5, so I was going to work for a few more minutes.

“That's great Abraham. Get into the habit of never cheating the clock. Make it a habit to be honest and do the right thing.”

To this day I hear her voice when I wonder if I should cut a corner, or treat even a little bit of someone else's time capriciously.

2. “Never let them see you sweat.”

Unfortunately, things don't always go as planned, and people don't always behave nicely. But how you handle it is up to you. The pressure, obstacles, and people who are giving you trouble should nonetheless be met with a smile, and the calm and composed demeanor that you are still in control of yourself- even if you aren't fully in control of the situation.

3. “Always ask a question first.”

A natural extension of her advice in #2. When you are upset at a person or a situation, you should begin any critical conversations about the problem by asking a question. “Can you tell me what happened”? “Did you understand when I told you to...”? “Am I understanding this situation correctly...?”

Asking a question starts the conversation, ensures that you get the critical information straight from the source, and if done in a direct, dispassionate manner, sets a professional tone for the conversation.

4. “Forget ‘em!”

You can’t please everyone, and trying to usually just makes everyone hate you equally. So you have to have a strong reflex for the people in the world that just won’t be satisfied (or reasonable, mature, realistic etc...) about a situation. Forget ‘em! The more time you spend thinking about how crazy or rude someone has been, the worse the damage is to you – in time and effort wasted. Actually, mom’s full expression is closer to “Forget ‘em and feed ‘em fishheads!”, and employs more colorful language, but the point remains – you’re going to have to forget a lot of goofy people in this life. So do it quickly, and get back to the people worth focusing on. Forget ‘em!

5. “Do your best”

Maybe the most quintessential piece of Mom advice for everybody, “Do your best” can seem nebulous and idealistic at times – but not when you have strong role models. It’s one thing to have someone suggest that you do your best – they are inspiring words, but the message sometimes comes from so many different places and people that it can get lost. People need to be inspired for those words to really take effect on them,

and growing up, the inspiration to do my best came not only from my Parents' words, but also their actions. My Mom and Dad lived the words "Do your best" to my Sister and I, and not only told us, but showed us the value and practice of that idea – and they taught us to show other people too.

Mary Pat is still, and always will be more of a Mother to me than a partner. She is not only an inspiration to me in terms of the things she taught me as a child, but for things she still teaches me everyday.

To have a Mother that continues to teach and inspire me everyday is a blessing that I have the pleasure of celebrating 365 days a year.

Thanks Mom. Happy Mother's Day!