

# The Natural Born Leaders

PARENTING

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JUL 24, 2020

Are leaders born or made? Zaid Mohamad, Certified Parental Coach and bestselling author, tells us what makes a child a leader and how parents and teachers can help them take on responsibilities early.

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Over the weekend, I have had the pleasure of giving a one-hour talk on the “7L Smart Parenting Strategies” at an international bookstore chain branch in the Klang Valley. Some of the parents stayed back after the talk for a short discussion on how our parenting skill is affecting our kids. One of the hot topics we talked about was on “leadership for kids” – the fifth “L” of the strategy.

The inevitable questions that always pop out during such discussions are, “Can my child be a leader?” or “This is an area I am struggling. Is there a way I can train them to be leaders?” The bottom line – all parents want to know if leaders are naturally born or can they be created?

Leadership, unfortunately, is not a subject you can find in school. Yet, it is probably a single most important asset anybody can have. Good leaders pave the way for a better tomorrow. Kids with strong leadership traits are usually able to withstand and fight the negative elements and emerge as a winner. Therefore, it is little wonder why smart parents strive to ensure that their kids possess these qualities as much as they can.



Contrary to the popular beliefs, leaders come from all walks of life and in various shapes and forms. Leadership is not confined to just being the head of an organization or the most popular kid in school. Everyone can be a leader in his or own respective areas. A gardener can envision a fresh new look for the garden. A teacher can find a new way to make learning fun. An employee can make the work exciting again by looking at the job in a different perspective. Even a poor kampong boy can start planning for a better future.

The opportunities are endless. The changes are possible because each individual above is the leader in his or her own area. All they need are a vision for a brighter future, the ability to create the steps to get there and the motivations to execute the plans. Sounds like a daunting task but the good news is that all these can be trained by parents onto their kids!



Leadership begins at home. For a start, we must inculcate personal responsibility for all their actions. It does not have to be a complex one. All it means is that they must do things for themselves and not rely on others to get things done. Even if you have a maid at home, ask each kid to take personal responsibility to wash their school shoes, tidying up their rooms and chip in to carry out household chores. Even the little ones must be trained to pick up their own toys from as early as two years old.

Once personal accountability becomes a habit, we can move on to bigger things. Once a year, celebrate their birthdays the smart parents' way – the do-it-yourself way. The birthday boy or girl can be the project leader while the rest of the family can be the project team members. Not only this will save a lot of money (something that is very close to home to me, with four kids and all), it also gives them a taste of managing an important event; a skill that even some adults may not have an experience for.



Beyond home, smart parents also encourage their kids to take part in the activities that would further build their leadership skills. In school, for example, besides just studying, their kids also fill the time with meaningful activities that help to build strong characters. They are encouraged by their smart parents to volunteer to be part of or even organize the co-curricular activities. School is probably the best training ground for future leaders if we know how to take advantage of its facilities.

Outside of schools, there are even more leadership opportunities. Joining music class or team sports are great examples. These activities promote teamwork, discipline to follow the rules and executing one's responsibilities to the fullest to produce beautiful music or a winning team.

Even playing with their friends in the afternoon can also beef up their social skill – an important element of a leader. Besides, some games require role-playing of characters (think “police and thieves”) as well as creative thinking to win (hide and seek, anyone?). The learning that we can take home is that playing is good – not only on the physical aspect but also on the mental, social and leadership development fronts. Therefore, smart parents would ensure that their kids prioritize playtime even when faced with the already packed schedules.

Judging from the feedback from employers, leadership is fast becoming a rare commodity among Malaysian kids and young adults today. We regularly hear about how the young workforce generally lacks the ambitions and drive to succeed. We

may even have witnessed how they would look for easy jobs but expect a high pay. From my own experience interviewing jobseekers, it is getting harder to find an outstanding candidate among the mostly average applicants. It is like trying to find a needle in the haystack.

What separates an achiever from the rest is their leadership ability. My wife and I will be able to rest easy if I know that our kids are on track to be the great leaders of tomorrow. We will do everything we can to ensure that they are getting all the leadership training they can get. This is because I believe, as per what many prominent people have been saying, that leaders are created, not born.

I encourage you to join us in creating future leaders today, because together we can change the world, one kid at a time!

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