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DUCK DYNASTY'S KORIE ROBERTSON



Grandma **was right** **after all!**

**PRACTICAL PARENTING WISDOM
FROM THE GOOD OLD DAYS**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *PARENTING BY THE BOOK*

JOHN ROSEMOND

Grandma Was Right after All!



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TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

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Grandma Was Right after All!: Practical Parenting Wisdom from the Good Old Days

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rosemond, John K., date.

Grandma was right after all! : practical parenting wisdom from the good old days / John Rosemond.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-4964-0591-3 (sc)

1. Child rearing. 2. Parenting. I. Title.

HQ769.R7134 2015

649'.1—dc23

2015019769

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

The vernacular or colloquial speech of a culture has meaning beyond the meanings of the words themselves. There is *meaning*—the accepted or dictionary definition of a word—and then there is what is termed *metameaning*—what the words reflect concerning the culture, among other things. Take, for example, the recently popular phrase “Get a life.” The words themselves can mean a variety of things, depending on context. The phrase can mean that the person it’s spoken to is obsessing about something trivial. Sometimes “Get a life” is used to end a contentious discussion, when the speaker doesn’t know what else to say. Whatever the immediate intent or meaning, however, “Get a life” is always, without exception, a sarcastic form of disrespect. It’s a dismissal or belittling of another person’s point of view, and its recent ubiquity is a reflection of the general deterioration of respect that has taken place in America since the 1960s. “Get a life” is the sort of thing people begin saying to one another when self-centeredness trumps all other social considerations.

In other words, popular vernacular reflects the *zeitgeist*—the culture’s mind-set or collective worldview. Likewise, the *loss* of certain vernacular reflects the loss of a certain consensual point of view. When I was growing up, the sayings of Ben Franklin as recorded in his *Poor Richard’s Almanack* were still in common usage. Everyone my age, when we were kids, was told, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” We also heard “Waste not, want not,” another of Franklin’s sayings. With a nod to the extremely rare exception, kids don’t hear either of those aphorisms anymore. The explanation for their effective disappearance is not that they’re old fashioned. Consider that they were still in common use in the 1950s, when they were already two hundred years old—very old fashioned indeed. Ben Franklin’s sayings have fallen out of fashion because frugality is no longer a commonly held American virtue. We live in a spendthrift, wasteful age. Consumerism rules the America of today. In fact, a frugal person today is regarded as a cheapskate, a tightwad.

As with sayings like “A penny saved is a penny earned,” the entire parenting vernacular of the pre-1960s has virtually disappeared and been replaced by . . . nothing. Well, that’s not exactly true. The vernacular of post-1960s American parenting consists of phrases like “Good job!” and “That’s terrific!” and “Give me five!” and “You’re the best!” and “When you grow up, you can do anything you want to do.” This is very new and novel parenting language, for sure. My parents occasionally told me I’d done a good job, but for every “good job,” they told me at least three times that I could have done

a better job. And when they did tell me I'd done a good job, it didn't carry an exclamation point. It was matter-of-fact, straightforward, and because it was doled out conservatively, I knew I'd really, truly done a good job.

And make no mistake: my parents were typical of their generation. Overwhelmingly my peers tell me their parents were interchangeable with mine. I knew my parents loved me, but they apparently didn't think that being stingy with praise would damage my psyche, and it didn't. Neither did being told that I was acting too big for my britches, which I heard nearly every time I acted too big for my britches.

Taking that example, it is very rare for children today to hear they are acting too big for their britches. Instead, their parents tell them, with great effusion, that they have done a great job—followed by one or more exclamation points—at least once a day (less than that will starve their psyches of warm fuzzies, which are necessary to the proper formation of high self-esteem). Some kids are told they've done a great job or words to that effect at least five times a day. It doesn't matter how well they do something; it's a great job, exclamation point. Give me five! Chest bump! You're the man!

The near extinction of “You're acting too big for your britches” and the rise of the indiscriminate “Great job!” reflect the fact that since the 1950s we have lost one parenting point of view and replaced it with one that is quite the opposite. In the 1950s, modesty was a virtue that parents tried to instill in their kids. Therefore, when children

were acting immodestly, they were told they needed to resize themselves to their britches. Today, high self-esteem is the ideal, the brass ring of *la dolce vita*. Parents in the 1950s and before attempted to rein in their children's natural inclination toward high opinions of themselves. Today's parents, by and large, make no such attempt. They *want* their children to have high opinions of themselves. Supposedly, a high opinion of oneself results in high achievement and good mental health (although the research on both finds exactly the opposite).

The general parenting point of view has changed, and radically so. The point of view that told kids they were busting out of their britches is in history's dustbin, replaced by a point of view that tells kids the lie that everything they do and say is amazing, incredible, awesome, unparalleled in the history of mankind, and that they can do anything they want to do when they grow up.

I am one of those throwbacks who happens to think that the old point of view is more functional and more in children's best interests. The objective evidence is on my side. Kids of the 1950s were a lot more emotionally sturdy than today's kids. That's borne out by reliable statistics. We came to first grade not knowing our ABCs; sat (we were not allowed to get out of our seats when we had finished our classwork) in overcrowded, underfunded classrooms; and had mothers who would not give us much help, if any, with our homework. Worst of all, we could actually fail tests and even entire school years. And yet despite these liabilities we

outperformed today's kids at every single grade level. We left home much earlier than today's kids are leaving home, and when we left, we left successfully. (I will note here that there are, of course, exceptions to everything I say about then and now, but my generalities reflect verifiable norms.)

Our physiologies were no different from those of today's kids, nor were we smarter. We were simply raised better. At this point, you can snort if you wish. In these progressive times, it is deemed incorrect to say that the past was better than the present in any regard. That's called "Golden Age" thinking, an attribute, supposedly, of old fogies who just can't accept that times have changed—and changed for the better. Such people (including yours truly, apparently) have a mental disorder that causes them to believe the ridiculous idea that the past, or significant aspects of it, was an improvement over the present.

In response to charges of that sort of "retro-utopian" thinking, let me ask you a couple of questions. First, is it better to be frugal or a spendthrift, to (a) buy only what one needs and can afford or (b) dig a deeper and deeper debt hole with every passing day? Second, is it more socially gracious to (a) be modest about one's accomplishments or (b) trumpet them from the proverbial rooftop? You answered (a) to both questions, did you not? My point is that it is accurate to say that certain aspects—just certain aspects—of the past were, in fact, *better* than their contemporary counterparts. And so it is with my generation. We were raised better, by Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation," the generation that overcame every adversity life could throw at them. It's to *their* credit—certainly not

ours—that we turned out so well (again, speaking generally but accurately).

It is, however, *our* fault that we Boomers did not realize the gift we'd been given and pass it along to our kids. The pundits convinced us that the parenting baby needed tossing out with the bathwater, that the wheat needed burning with the chaff, that new ideas were better than old ideas, and that the past was a rotten apple and the future a bowl of cherries. And so, in the late 1960s, we came to a fork in the parenting road (to switch metaphors), upon which we followed poet Robert Frost's well-known example and took the road never traveled. And, as Frost observed, that ill-conceived decision sure has made all the difference.

In general, today's parents are experiencing more problems with their kids than their great-grandparents could have *imagined* parents ever experiencing. Their kids talk back to them, ignore them, blatantly disobey them, call them names, and even hit and kick when the parents do not perform satisfactorily. Most of all, their children don't pay attention to them. They don't take them seriously. Today's parents think these problems can be solved by using correct discipline methods (or correct medications). They do not realize that these problems are the inevitable consequences of a faulty point of view, that until their parenting point of view changes for the better—until they begin thinking like parents of the 1950s, in other words—no clever discipline method they use is going to work for long, if it works at all.

So when I'm working with parents who are experiencing

the inevitable consequences of treating children as if they are the most important people not just in the family but who have ever walked the earth, my first approach is to help them change their point of view, to help them begin thinking like their grandparents and great-grandparents. To accomplish that, I often train them in the use of the old parenting vernacular: “You’re acting too big for your britches”; “You made this bed, so you’re going to lie in it”; “I knew if I gave you a long rope, you’d hang yourself”; “Because I said so”; and so on. The results are often nothing short of amazing. Parents tell me, for example, that within days of first receiving healthy doses of the old parenting language, their kids begin listening, obeying, and acting respectfully. Sometimes this sudden sea change occurs with kids as old as eight or ten who have never before listened to, obeyed, or respected their parents.

After years of hearing these sorts of testimonials, I decided to preserve the old parenting language in a book. My purpose is to help you appreciate and grasp the old parenting point of view—and in so doing, to change your and your children’s lives for the better. First, you need to learn the language. The more you talk it, the more you will begin to walk it.

Who Is “Grandma,” Anyway?

The Grandma of the title and the numerous references in this book is the typical mother of the pre-psychological parenting age which officially began in 1965 with the

publication of psychologist Haim Ginott's groundbreaking bestseller *Between Parent and Child*. As I have explained in other books, most notably *Parent-Babble: How Parents Can Recover from Fifty Years of Bad Expert Advice*, Ginott introduced American parents to a brand-spanking-new set of understandings concerning children and their proper upbringing—understandings based primarily on humanistic psychological theory. It is important to note that these theories, and therefore Ginott's derivative ideas, had never been verified with good research.

Because of his impressive credentials (a PhD psychologist who practiced in the intellectual mecca of Manhattan), parents assumed Ginott knew what he was talking about. In fact, he did not. Like Freud and many other psychologists before and since, Ginott pulled his ideas out of a hat—a very shiny top hat, to be sure, but a hat nonetheless. The amazing success of *Between Parent and Child* set in motion a cascade of parenting books written by psychologists and other mental health professionals, all of which reflected and reinforced the new psychological parenting paradigm. This new paradigm was not Grandma's paradigm, for sure. It was, in fact, as opposite from Grandma's point of view as opposite can be. Most importantly, Grandma's point of view was congruent with a biblical understanding of child and parental responsibilities. That is not to say that every "Grandma" was Bible believing, but even those pre-1960s Grandmas who were unfamiliar with the Bible's teachings concerning children

were rearing their children, however unwittingly, according to those teachings. For example, Grandma believed that humility was a virtue. The new psychological paradigm held (and still holds) that high self-esteem is a desirable attribute. Grandma believed spankings had their proper place in the raising of a child. Ginott echoed the rising sentiment of the psychological community when he said that spankings were abusive. There was no agreement whatsoever between Grandma's parenting point of view and methods and the emerging psychological approach.

The Grandma in this book is a mother raising children before 1960. She is, therefore, of my mother's or grandmother's generation. Today, she probably would be a great- or even great-great-grandmother, but the title *Parenting according to Great-Grandma* seemed cumbersome, so for the sake of convenience and clarity, *Grandma* it became.

As the reader will soon discover, Grandma had her feet on solid ground when it came to children. Her eyes were clear, her approach was practical, and perhaps above all else, she was not one to mince words with her kids. Her parenting vernacular, represented by the aphorisms herein (which are not all inclusive, but only the ones she used most often), was—as she would surely have described it—short 'n' sweet.

When people think about historic preservation, they are thinking in terms of buildings, art, books, clothing, and other tangible artifacts of earlier eras. But some of the language of those eras is worth preserving as well. I hope you agree and will do your part.

The Bible Tells Me So!

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

—EXODUS 20:12



I happen to think that the significance of this Scripture verse, also known as the Fifth Commandment, is often underplayed. The apostle Paul tells us it is the only commandment that comes “with [a] promise” (Ephesians 6:2), one meaning of which is that through the successful passing of family traditions (which in some cases may also be cultural traditions) from generation to generation, the institution of family is preserved and, therefore, culture is strengthened. One way of honoring one’s mother and father is by embracing and preserving the values that were important to them, by passing them on to one’s children. When those traditions and associated values are no longer passed along—when parents and ancestors are no longer honored in this fashion—children become prey to relativism, family ties weaken, and culture begins to disintegrate.

This is precisely what happened in the 1960s as America became a postmodern, progressive society. The Baby Boomer generation, taking their cues from the Pied Pipers of Postmodernity, embraced one new, untested idea after another. These new ideas were intentionally antagonistic to the ideas and values that informed previous American generations. In fact, the relativists demonized those ideas

and values and told us that we could prevent ourselves from repeating the sins of the past only by jettisoning all the old baggage and replacing it with a brand-new, utopian, post-Christian vision—one that informed every facet of our daily lives.

Replacing the old with the new required that children be raised according to the new point of view, that they be taught the new values from day one. And so, a millennia-old biblical point of view of child and parental responsibilities was replaced with a point of view informed by psychological theory—a mind-set and approach I call postmodern psychological parenting. The consequence of trashing the traditional paradigm has been calamitous for children, parents, marriages, extended families, schools, communities, and culture. For the sake of all concerned, a parenting renewal is desperately needed. The restrengthening of America begins by restoring traditional family values—a “rehonoring” of our foremothers and forefathers. Thus, the book you hold in your hands.



To Ponder and Discuss

What are some specific ways in which you have allowed yourself to be caught up in postmodern psychological parenting? Are you raising your children in a fashion that is far removed from the manner in which your parents raised you (and your grandparents raised them)? If so, what do you think would be different about your children’s behavior and

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attitudes if you had “honored your father and your mother” and followed their example when it came to your own kids? Were you easier to discipline than your kids are? Why? What is it that your parents did that made their parenting experience so much less fraught with stress?



1

“Because I Said So”

It’s safe to say that the parenting aphorism most associated with the good old days—when children respected adults and adults did not try to be liked by children—is “Because I said so.” Sometimes those four words ended with an exclamation point, sometimes they ended with an added “that’s why,” and sometimes they ended with both.

I heard those four words fairly often when I was a child. So did every other child who grew up in the 1950s. At least, I’ve yet to meet someone my age who claims to have had parents who did not say these words (although I’m reasonably certain a few someones of the sort do exist). The exchange between parent and child might have gone something like this:

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Child: May I have a bowl of ice cream?

Mother: No, you may not.

Child: Why not?

Mother: Because I said so, that's why not.

Child: But why?

Mother: Goats butt.

Child: What does that mean?

Mother: It means you're not having ice cream.

Or the exchange might have involved something a parent told a child to do, as in the following example:

Mother: It's time for you to pick up your toys and put them away.

Child: But why?

Mother: Because I said so.

Child: Ugh! That's not a reason!

Mother: Well, it's the only one you're getting, unless you want me to give your backside a reason.

It is important to note that in both of these examples, the child demands to know the reason behind his mother's decision or instruction precisely because she does *not* give a

reason—she does *not* explain herself. In the first example, the mother does not say, “No, honey, I’m so sorry, but you can’t have ice cream right now because it’s too close to dinner.” In the second example, the mother does not say, “Sweetie pie, I need to run the vacuum cleaner in here, so I need you to pick up your toys and put them away.” The very absence of a reason forces the child to demand (it is not, after all, a polite request) a reason, to demand to know why or why not. In other words, for a parent to say “Because I said so” requires that the parent *not* explain his or her decisions and instructions.

Unlike parents back in the golden age of child rearing (it was not called *parenting* back then), today’s parents explain themselves. They give their children reasons for the decisions they make and the instructions they convey. And because they explain themselves, they end up having arguments with their children.

In the above ice-cream example, had the mother given a reason for her decision—if she had told her child that he could not have ice cream because dinner was imminent—her child would very likely have come back with “No it’s not! I’ll still eat my dinner! I promise!” The mother then would have engaged the child in debate, trying to get the child to agree with her that he should not have ice cream when dinner is right around the proverbial corner.

This mother’s fantasy child eventually says, “You know, Mom, you’re absolutely right. When you explain it like that, I can’t help but agree. I mean, any intelligent person would

have to agree, and you have that sticker on the back window of your minivan that says I'm in the honors program at school, so yes, because you've made a rational appeal to my outstanding intelligence, I agree that it's not a good idea for me to have ice cream right now. Mom, I love you for many reasons, not the least of which is that you take such care to make sure I eat a balanced diet. Thank you, Mom."

And had the second mother told her child that she wanted him to pick up his toys so she could vacuum, he would very likely have come back with something like "I'm playing! Why do you have to vacuum now? Why can't you wait?"

The mother would then attempt to get the child to agree that vacuuming takes precedence over playing and that due to her many other responsibilities, this is the best time for her to vacuum, and therefore he should happily pick up his toys and put them away.

That mother's fantasy child says, "Say no more, Mom. You've convinced me. I now realize that adult responsibilities are more important than a child's play. That realization is something I will cherish forever, Mom, as I cherish you, and you can believe I am going to do all I can to pass that lesson to my kids. Thank you, Mom."

If the fantasy responses from these two fantasy children sound fantastic to the point of absurdity, it's because they are. No child anywhere or in any historical time has ever said anything along those lines to a parent. Granted, some children, as adults, come back to their parents and thank them for raising them so well. Both of my kids did that in their early

twenties. But it took them becoming adults to understand and appreciate an adult point of view.

Reasons, Schmeasons

Today's parents believe that children deserve reasons. That is, after all, what the parenting experts have been telling parents since the 1960s. And so, today's parents explain themselves to their children—they give reasons. And so, their children argue. It's a fundamental cause-and-effect relationship: explanations cause arguments. My point is that arguments between parent and child occur not because children have some "argumentative gene" or "argumentative biochemical" in their bodies or because the part of the brain that governs respectful obedience is yet underdeveloped, but simply because parents give reasons and explanations. Those reasons and explanations stimulate pushback in the form of children telling parents that their reasons and explanations don't wash, that they aren't good enough. At that point, parents begin defending their reasons and explanations; thus, arguments between parents and children abound.

To summarize: in the absence of reasons and explanations, children have nothing to push back against; thus, no arguments between parents and children. Simple, isn't it?

A woman once told me she had a pronounced negative reaction to the thought of saying "Because I said so" because her parents had often screamed those four words at her with an implied threat of soon-to-come violence. I had to agree

that her parents had misused the “Because I said so” privilege. But her parents’ mistake does not mean those four words are invalid. It should go without saying that “Because I said so” should not be screamed at a child or said in a threatening tone of voice, but then that applies to anything parents say. In other words, simply because some parents wrap those four words in a rigid, unreasonable, threatening attitude, they are not, in and of themselves, rigid, unreasonable, and threatening. My thesaurus gives the following synonyms for *reasonable*: sensible, rational, logical, and practical. And indeed, “Because I said so” is all of that.

First, it is the truth. The parent has made a decision. The parent has conveyed the decision—“you cannot,” “I will not,” or “you will”—to the child. Therefore, at the most basic of levels, “Because I said so” is simply a statement of fact.

Second, “Because I said so” stops the potential for argument dead in its deadly tracks. As I said above, when a parent refuses to explain, the child has nothing with which to manufacture an argument. The child’s inclination to argue hits a stone wall. This is good, because when parents and children argue, no one profits.

Third, “Because I said so” reflects a ubiquitous social reality: to wit, people in positions of authority are not required to explain themselves to the people over whom they have authority. This applies to military officers, teachers, college professors, workplace managers, and business owners. Children who enter adulthood already having accepted that social reality—having become accustomed to it courtesy of their parents—hold a

distinct advantage over the children who enter adulthood believing—again, courtesy of their parents—that they deserve reasons and explanations whenever they are given an instruction or are informed of a rule or a boundary.

It is a reality that even in a democratic society, authority figures frequently make arbitrary decisions. A boss decides things are going to be done this way rather than that way; that the line is going to be drawn in one place rather than another; that the standard will be based on this measure as opposed to that one; and so on. Why? Because the boss says so, that's why. That is a boss's prerogative. And that's that, until the boss changes his or her mind or a new boss comes along.

A prime example of what I'm saying just occurred to me because I happen to be writing this chapter on April 15—Tax Day. On this date I pay to the government a certain percentage of my income. I do not determine said percentage; the government does. Furthermore, I do not pay income tax because I think the United States government deserves the money. In fact, the government has consistently failed to demonstrate good stewardship of my hard-earned money. In my estimation (and the estimation of many), the United States government is fiscally irresponsible. If a business was run the way our elected representatives run the country, the business would go belly up in less than six months.

I do not want to pay what the Internal Revenue Service says I owe. No government official has ever given me a good reason why I should pay what I pay. Yet I pay it nonetheless. Why? Because “they” say so. Period. End of story.

Likewise, about four of every five parental decisions are founded on nothing more substantial than arbitrary personal predilection. The Wilsons do not allow their kids to have non-organic food; the Smiths do. Both sets of kids are healthy, well behaved, and do well in school. Therefore, the Wilsons cannot defend their prohibition by pointing to some better outcome. Nonetheless, it is legitimate for them to deny their children food that is not certified organic. And when their children ask why they are denied foods the Smith kids enjoy, the most honest answer Mr. and Mrs. Wilson can give is “Because we say so.”

Not only do today’s parents feel obligated to explain themselves to their children, they also seem to believe that their explanations must satisfy and pacify the children in question. Consequently, those explanations take on a persuasive, pleading, even apologetic, character. Implicit in this is the absolutely absurd idea that parents don’t have a right to enforce a decision unless (a) it can be supported by reasons other than personal preference, (b) the children understand those reasons, and (c) the children agree with them. This perspective causes lots of unnecessary pain for both parents and kids.

Now, hear me clearly. I’m not saying that parents should never give reasons to children; I’m saying that parents should make no attempt to reason with children, and there is a big difference between the two. Reasoning is the futile attempt to persuade your children that your point of view is valid. Let’s face it: your children will understand your point of view when they themselves are parents and no sooner. If you want to explain yourself, then by all means do so. But don’t expect

your children to agree. When they don't, simply say, "I'm not asking you to agree. If I were you, I wouldn't agree with me either. You have my permission to disagree, but you don't have my permission to disobey." In other words, children do what they are told, not because their parents succeed at providing an explanation that smooths their ruffled feathers, but simply because they've been told. So even in the act of giving reasons, the bottom line is still "Because I said so."

The Bible Tells Me So!

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. —EPHESIANS 6:1

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

—COLOSSIANS 3:20, NIV



One Sunday when Willie and I were visiting a church in the mountains of North Carolina, the pastor happened to be preaching on parenting. It quickly became obvious that he had been greatly influenced by psychological theory because his sermon could have been taken right out of my college child development textbook. He was talking about how important it is for parents to help their kids develop high self-esteem and how children need lots of attention and praise. Toward the end of his sermon, he said, "I don't think it's right for a parent to say, 'Because I said so.'" Willie and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Had this pastor never read Ephesians 6:1 or

Colossians 3:20? Those passages simply instruct children to obey, and the only reason given is *because a child's obedience is pleasing to God*.

A parent's authority is assigned by God. As such, a parent is called to reflect God's unconditional love and unequivocal authority. It is a sufficient reason for us to obey God because he is the one holy and almighty God—because he says so. That is, therefore, a sufficient reason why a child should obey his or her parents (assuming that they honor God in their parenting). Note that Paul does not say that children should obey their parents because their parents provide good reasons. Rather, children should obey “in everything” simply because that's the way God wants it. Children who experience the joy of obedience to their parents are taking a huge first step toward experiencing the joy of obedience to God.



To Ponder and Discuss

Do you often feel obligated to give your children “good” reasons for the decisions you make and the instructions you give them? If so, can you identify the social and cultural factors that have caused you to try to reason with your kids? Do you find yourself engaging in frequent unproductive arguments with your kids? Are you ready to reclaim your authority and stop arguing with children who are only satisfied when they win?