

DRI For Life

Helping Your Children Discover Their Purpose

By Ana and Frank Ramos

Each of us has the potential to be someone great, and by “great” I mean we all have the potential to be a transformative power in the lives of others. Like a stone thrown in a pond, we are meant to create ripple effects in the lives we touch, where seemingly coincidental encounters are part of an overarching design, a tapestry where our talents and passions are interwoven into the lives of others for their greater good. Too often, we as parents try to guide our children toward a life of financial security and material success. However, our purpose as parents is really to identify and cultivate our children’s talents and passions, and help them discover where their talents and passions intersect with their purposes, because it is at that crossroad where they will become the person they were meant to be.

We teach our kids right from wrong. We teach them manners. We teach them how to read. We teach them life skills. These are all important, and they all contribute to the men and women they will grow up to be. But these efforts pale in comparison to our duty as parents to recognize, from a young age, what our kids are good at—what they’re *really* good at—and see where their talents overlap with their passions. We can do this by exposing them to a wide variety of activities—sports, music, art, storytelling, debating, reading, exploring—and watch what grabs their attention, see where their focus is directed. Do they love taking care of animals? Exploring new environments? Interacting with nature? Are

they voracious readers? Are they artistic? Do they excel at math? Does the piano come easy for them? Are they advanced readers? Can they spin a story or get the best of you in a debate? Pay close attention to these things. It’s by seeing the little things that you can direct them on their paths to the big things.

When our oldest son, David, was four, we signed him up for T-Ball. We got him his uniform, his protective gear, gave him a talk about the Great American sport, and drove him out three afternoons a week. His insistence on never missing a practice and being a good teammate showed us he was committed and had a great work ethic. The fact that he couldn’t hit or catch a ball told us maybe baseball wasn’t his thing. One year later he began piano lessons. He never wanted to miss a lesson and always practiced without being told—same commitment and sense of responsibility. Only difference was he was really good at it and it made him happy. So, T-Ball was replaced with music. David just started his freshman year at FSU’s School of Music. Had we pushed the T-Ball, we might have missed his true talent and passion.

As you start to identify your kids’ talents and passions, remind your kids of them often. Most children go through times of insecurity, where their gifts can get forgotten in the face of perceived inadequacy. That artistic flare doesn’t measure up to a best friend’s speed on the field. The student with a passion for science wishes he or she could sing or excel at public speaking like some of his or her peers. As parents we have to encourage our kids, but not with generic compliments and calls for self-esteem. Rather, remind them of their gifts. Remind them

that their gifts are unique to them, and that they can make a difference using those gifts. Encourage them to dream of ways they can be agents for change. Ask them what mark they want to leave on the world. And yes, you can do this even with young kids. In fact it’s easier when they’re young because no one has told them dreams aren’t real. Empowering kids to dream of ways to use their unique gifts is a beautiful gift in itself. Use it often.

And as they grow up, from kids, to tweens, to teenagers, help them remain focused on their dreams and on developing the gifts they’ll use to fulfill them. Whether it’s music lessons, sports, debate team, art classes, or volunteer opportunities, find a way to get behind your kids’ passions. But be careful that it’s their passion you’re supporting. Being involved in seven different activities during high school may just result in a tired kid. By then, you should have helped them narrow down their activities to the ones that represent their passions. In today’s crazy, competitive world, trying to create the perfectly well-rounded student may lead to a high school graduate with no idea of what they love. And if you don’t know what you love, what your passion is, your chances of a fulfilling, meaningful, purposeful career are slim to none.

Our youngest son, Michael, quit music lessons in fourth grade. He calmly explained to us that we should not force him to follow his brother’s passion. We couldn’t argue, so the music lessons stopped and the art lessons intensified. It broke our hearts because he is very musical, but we knew he loved art; and we thought if we didn’t push, one day the music would resurface. Fast forward to seventh grade: first he picked up his



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brother's ukulele, then he wanted his own, then he started playing the piano again (by ear, no stressful sheet music), then he started singing while playing, then he asked for a bass guitar. He just started his sophomore year. He plays double bass in the school symphonic band and bass guitar in the jazz band, he takes choir, he writes and records songs, he's performed in public, and he plays bass in our church worship team almost every week. He's considering music production as a career.

Dreams may change. They may morph into others. A long abandoned dream may suddenly be rekindled; a hobby that once captivated the imagination may come alive again. All we can do is give them the tools to develop their talents and the encouragement to pursue their dreams. Telling your children they have a purpose, they have been given gifts to fulfill that purpose, and developing those gifts and stoking their passions will enable them to fulfill their purpose in their lives. What more can we want for them? 