

The Three Big Questions for a Frantic Family Author Q&A

1. What prompted you to shift focus from business books to a book on families?

All of the executives I've worked with over the years have told me that their family lives were more important than their work—and most of them seemed to mean it. And yet virtually every one of them reported that their lives at home were far more chaotic and frantic, even frustrating, than their lives at work. And when I realized that none of them were applying any of the simple planning and management and strategic principles from work to their chaotic lives at home, I realized something didn't make sense.

But it was also my own experience as a husband and father that prompted me to turn my organizational attention toward family life. As parents of four young boys, my wife and I could not deny that our home life was frantic and reactive too, and we had just accepted that as how life is supposed to be. And then it occurred to me that I help companies minimize chaos and confusion in their organizations. Well, if my family is the most important organization in my life— and it is—then why am I not applying some of the concepts I use at work at home? And I found that with some tweaks, it really does apply.

2. What is the link between running an organization and running a family?

There is a clear link between the two, though there are certainly differences. First, being a parent is primarily a leadership role. And while subordinates at work are not the same as children, there are requirements of being a leader in any context that apply across the board. Building trust, entertaining healthy conflict, inspiring commitment, holding people accountable and focusing on results are the hallmarks of leading any organization, be it a corporation, a professional football team, a church, a military squadron or a family.

And from an organizational standpoint, a family needs to have cohesive leaders and a clear plan with focus, and constant communication, no different from a business. However, we tolerate lack of focus and clarity at home that we would not accept at work. Again, this makes no sense because our families are more important than our jobs.

3. Why do you think so many families these days are feeling frantic and overwhelmed?

People are more frantic and overwhelmed than ever because there are more opportunities than ever, and more social expectations for taking advantage of all those choices. From constant access to media and information, to academic and athletic activities, families seem to have a hard time saying 'no' to anything. This is especially true in a society where resources are abundant, where

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consumption is a dominant mentality, and where achievement and competition are overwhelming. So many families live in a world of adrenaline addiction and noise that it becomes almost impossible to be still, quiet, reflective. And without stillness, silence and reflection, chaos reigns.

4. What are the "three big questions"?

Question 1 is: What makes your family unique?

Parents need to be able to articulate what makes their family different from the one next door, down the street, and across town. They need to understand the one, two or three principles that they value which distinguishes their family from others. It is those differences that can guide us to make purposeful, informed decisions about what we do rather than reacting to every opportunity and distraction. When we fail to understand what we stand for and how we're different, we cannot help but become generic, frantic and over-committed. That's why frantic families all start to look alike.

Question 2 is: What is your family's top priority—rallying cry—right now?

I tell my clients that they need to understand the one thing they have to accomplish during the next two to six months in order to make their businesses stronger for the future. Families need to do the same. Without a clear top priority—which I refer to as a rallying cry—a family is spread too thin between every request or urgent issue that comes along. In the end, life becomes a game of surviving one day to the next, instead of a process of prioritized improvement.

Question 3 is: How do you talk about and use the answers to these questions?

Parents should be prepared to use the answers to the previous two questions in the course of daily and weekly life. It is one thing to clarify your values or strategy and set a clear priority for the family, but if it ends up in a binder on a shelf or on a piece of scratch paper in a drawer, it doesn't do much good. A family needs to find a way to keep that critical information in front of them when it comes time for decision-making and regular discussions. Without that, behavioral change will be almost impossible because the power of daily peer pressure and the urgency of daily requirements pull as back into old habits. It may only entail pasting a piece of paper to the fridge with the family's priorities and values, or having a five minute meeting once a week to review that sheet. But that's a heck of a lot better than winging it, which is what the vast majority of us do when it comes to operating our organizations at home.

5. Some family and parenting programs are very complicated, how long will this take?

If this takes more than an hour to finish, few families will do it. That's the reality of our over-scheduled lives. Getting clarity about what makes us unique, what our top priority is, and how we'll use these

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things to run our lives, requires very little time. And it's immensely interesting and fun.

Beyond that initial hour, the only investment in time is 5 minutes per week. Even that is enough to provide the reminder you need to stay on track. Most families will actually want to spend a little more time than that, because doing so will be such a relief. Soon, you'll look forward to these discussions and they'll become a part of your regular discipline and family habit.

6. By following your model, will chaos in a family be eliminated?

Absolutely not. I think a little bit of chaos will always exist in family life. Any time you're dealing with human beings, who are emotional and fallible, there will be unpredictability and drama. That's part of the adventure of family life. However, the nature of chaos in a family will change. It will be more managed, guided and somewhat purposeful chaos, and most importantly, it won't cause the kind of anxiety that makes people wonder whether they're living the life they had hoped to live.

7. Do you plan to now focus your writing on families or will you still write about business?

I'm going back to writing about organizations. In fact, even this book is not a complete departure for me, because what I've done is look at a family as the organization that it is, but that has been largely ignored. However, I'll probably continue to grow in my experience as a husband and father, and I can certainly imagine taking on other topics related to the most important role in my life.

8. Is *The Three big Questions for a Frantic Family* based on your family?

Yes and no. Of course, my only experience leading a family is the one I'm currently involved in with my wife and four boys. So, naturally, some of the book is based on us. However, as is true of all my books, the fiction is truly just that. The characters are fictional, though they are written to reflect reality as closely as possible in terms of their experiences and challenges.