

It is therefore jarring to note that a small number of insurance carriers have set up satellite offices in the suburbs and hired educated, married women as a part-time labor force. They receive below-average wages, have no fringe benefits (including health or life insurance protection), and lack opportunities for advancement that are available at the central office for adjusters and examiners. Instantaneous telecommunications between the satellite and central offices makes possible this downgrading of what should have been good jobs.

The machine-tool industry offers an illustration of a similar kind of downgrading. As firms in this industry adopt programmable automation technology, they have the opportunity to substitute machine tenders for more highly skilled master machinists. If they choose to do this in order to save on wages, poor jobs will expand at the expense of good ones. If firms concentrate exclusively on the bottom line in making strategic decisions about implementing new technologies, there will be an apparent incentive to downgrade a substantial number of these primary sector jobs.

Such a strategic approach may prove to be short-sighted and may have negative impact on the long-run competitive position of firms that adopt it. Firms that substitute machinery for skill will be adopting a man-machine configuration that is fairly permanent and certainly less flexible. With fewer skilled master machinists, the opportunities available for learning by doing are going to be severely curtailed.

By contrast, those firms that retrain their master machinists as machinist programmers need not build so much into the machine. They can design less rigid man-machine configurations, develop opportunities for learning by doing, and remain open to continuous technological change. In the long run, productivity growth and competitive advantage reside with the firms that adopt this strategy.

The choices regarding machine and job design made in the coming decade will affect the quality of employment opportunities, the potential for human capital development, and the rate of productivity growth into the next century. Public policy should encourage a pattern of educational development that sustains complex jobs and long-run productivity gains. □



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THE INDUSTRY CALLED PARENTING

Learning is a question of psychological stamina and concentration.
We acquire this within families

BY AMITAI ETZIONI

EVEN as we admire the prospects of technology, we cannot disregard the human factor, which increasingly appears to be coming unhinged. One of our most important problems has been the disintegration of social and personal values, the

retreat from self-discipline, from commitments to one another and to community, into a complicated form of me-ism and hedonism.

This phenomenon is so prevalent in North America and, perhaps, most of the world that it is no longer

enough to judge the state of nations in terms of productivity, savings, or how many dollars are being put into R&D. Rather, one must go beyond these factors and consider the state of the psychological fabric of society.

What makes this so important is that, unlike the self-fulfillment of the counterculture era during the 1960s and early 1970s, this new me-ism has made self-dedication a moral principle. By doing so, we are neglecting certain other human and moral principles whose loss to our civilization may eventually make it untenable.

This condition can be seen as a part of that process by which we transferred the Adam Smith theory of *laissez-faire* economics from the marketplace to human relations. We asked people, not only in the marketplace, but in their relations to one another and to their families and their communities, "to be their own best friend." We asked them to "watch out for number one," and, of course, "number one" is each of us. When we did this, we were cutting the most important of all human links — the need to relate to other people.

Let me try a mental experiment that will demonstrate how deeply we are linked to other human beings. Imagine that you have just won a lottery. What is the first thing you do when that happens? You call somebody. And if that person says, "So what? Do you know how much tax you will have to pay on that?" or "I just got a bigger one," what will be your first response? You are going to call somebody else. And if that person is going to respond the same way, whatever reward you just received has been diminished.

The result of this misunderstood application of Adam Smith to human relations is that each individual — within an organization, community, corporation, nation, world — concentrates on maximizing himself or herself without regard for others. We have forgotten the need to balance self-interest against commitment to shared causes within the organization of which we are part.

The problems created by this new kind of me-ism, this preoccupation with self, and the related impatience for gratification, carry over to learning and our educational system. Too many of our learning problems are ascribed to a deficiency of skills, a lack of information, poor teaching, inadequate books, or not enough money.

More often than not, the problem is really a psychological deficiency.

Learning is a question of psychological stamina and concentration. Our children have to have the self-discipline to turn off the Sony Walkman, the TV, or video game, and concentrate for four hours on the job at hand. We have to improve education and learn to build psychological stamina, and the place to begin this task is in the family.

Families are not about sex or about marriage. Instead, the family's commitment to educate the child has been the single characteristic that societies have shared throughout history. That is, until now.

Between 1950 and 1980, we took six million people out of an industry called parenting and sent them to

Me-ism betrays children

work outside the home. We asked them to produce roughly the same number of children of roughly the same quality. It is not working.

I am not talking about women's duty. I think it is as much man's duty as it is woman's to bring up children. I am not calling for women to stay at home. I am calling for more parenting by both sides. Today in the United States, 10 million children are coming home to nothing. They are called "latchkey" children because they have a key hanging around their necks. They come home to sit in front of a television set until, three hours later, one of the parents may or may not put in an appearance.

We develop an ideology suggesting that this is good. One of the catch phrases is "quality time." The idea is, especially if you are a single parent, that if you worked all day, and in the evening you are going out on a date, that in between you will relate to your child for 10 minutes or so. And you are going to make those minutes count. Indeed, the latest twist on this is something known as "quality phone calls." You call Johnny and you have a real good conversation before you move on.

To the degree that we have lost a close relationship with our children — and I would say about half the families in the United States, fewer in Canada, have lost it — we are bring-

ing to the schools a generation that is psychologically bereft and underdeveloped. The tragedy is that psychological preparation — personality development — is where it all comes together. In the end there is one person: the person who works; the person who plays with the children; the person who is involved in civic politics; these are all the same human being. But this kind of multi-faceted personality requires character, authority, a sense of responsibility, and the willingness to make contact with other human beings.

How families are going to do a better job of psychological preparation is difficult to say. The schools are, at least, somehow responsive to public policy. Thus, as citizens, parents, and educators, we can come to these schools and ask them, demand of them, to do, perhaps, a little less of everything else and a little more character building.

But when we come to families, there is no law we can pass. There is no way government can dare to regulate family life. We are facing the need for a new ethical revitalization. When we talk about our future, we have to be concerned with more than just productivity and technological development. We must also find ways to make the terms "duty," "obligation," and "commitment" meaningful without embarrassment in our society.

We can teach people to relate better to one another. Our studies that compare successful and unsuccessful marriages find that the most important difference is unrelated to fighting. People fight in both kinds of marriages. But they fight differently. In successful marriages, they fight in ways that preserve the relationships. They air their differences with a respect for the continuity of relationships. By contrast, in failing marriages, the partners do not know how to combine two functions: working out differences and communicating respect for the other person that is sharing the relationship.

This is the kind of thing we can teach people. We can teach them by explaining it, and we can teach them by simulating experiences and the kinds of behavior appropriate to them. By so doing, we perceive the human factor that underlies many of our current social, educational, and economic problems. That we neglect it is to our detriment. □