

The Importance of Roles

Why do roles matter? How do they help with self-government?

Once, while on a home visit with a family, I addressed the roles in that family to help solve some serious behavioral and relationship issues. *(A home visit is where I spend a few days with a family in their home and coach them on setting up the Teaching Self Government system.)* This family's oldest child was rebelling against the way the family was being run. He was also rebelling against his mom and dad in just about every way. His behaviors included a lot of dishonesty and his deviousness was becoming a real problem.

I immediately noticed that the son was not invested in his relationship with his parents. The parents were desperately trying to figure out a way to get him to care. After observing the son, and the family's dynamics, it was clear that this boy did not understand his role in his family. This family had written a family vision, a family mission statement, and had engaged in countless hours of teaching, but for some reason, nothing was able to reach the boy. It seemed he didn't really have an objective understanding of who he was supposed to be in his own family.

Why Do Roles Matter So Much?

Roles are an integral part of who we are in life. Wherever we go, we associate with people in many different capacities and stewardships. It helps to understand the nature of the relationship so that the relationship will be successful. We do this by understanding our role. In fact, it helps a great deal when we understand our role in comparison to God, our neighbors, our fellow men, the people in our town, the people in our country, in the workplace, and so on.

The best way I can illustrate this is with the book "Les Miserables" by Victor Hugo. In "Les Miserables" the main character Jean Valjean, has multiple identities as the story progresses. He is Jean Valjean, then a number, then a governor, then a gardener, and so on. Even his name changes over time.

All the different capacities that he has, and the roles he takes on, give him a different identity in the eyes of everyone around him. In the end, Cosette, the girl that he has raised since infancy, calls him "Father". Upon hearing that title from Cosette, it completed Jean Valjean, and he could not have been happier or more fulfilled. The book states that of all the things in his life, and of all the names that he could be called, 'Father' was the sweetest. That was the role in which he wanted to succeed the most. That was Jean Valjean's, and the story's happy ending.

The story of Jean Valjean's changing identities, roles, and even names, illustrates how we change when

we take on different roles in life.

For example, I behave differently when I am parenting my own children, versus when I am teaching someone else's child.

While teaching someone else's child, my role is not to be their parent. I am responsible for them for a short period of time, but I am not their parent. What I can expect from that child is different than what I can expect from my own child, and the level of training I give that child is going to be different than the level of training I give my own child. Also, the way I communicate with each child going to be different based on the role I have in that relationship.

Role Confusion

If we don't understand our roles or if they are not clear, we will not know how to communicate with others, and confusion will reign. Role problems are rampant in our society right now.

Since the 1960's and 70's, people have been constantly redefining roles, which has created a great deal of confusion. In the 1970's, there was a big movement to redefine the role of women, because it was determined by a few women, that being a mother was somehow degrading. Later, many of these women had children and no longer pushed to redefine womanhood, but by then, it was too late. The new definition of a liberated woman had become the norm, because the younger generation had been the target and the liberated woman had been entrenched into society.

Core Identities are Defined by Roles

When new teachings and ideas are targeted toward young people, their core values and identities are easily redefined. Every person, and especially young people, are searching for their identities. "Who am I?", "What role am I supposed to fill?", "How am I going to fulfill the measure of my existence?" These, and many more questions, begin to surface. This is why the relationship with God is crucial, because He offers answers to all these questions. "What is my role?" My role is that I am a child of God. My role is to be a servant of God. My role is to love and serve my fellow men. Where do those things come from? They come from goodness, and goodness is a word that means, "*from God*".

Understanding Our Multiple Roles Helps us Make a Plan and Take Action

Knowing our roles makes a difference with decisions we make, how we use our time, how we choose to serve, what we study, what we say, and so on. For instance, here are the major roles that I identify with: I am a mother, a wife, a teacher, a mentor, a citizen of my country and my town. When I consider my impact on society, and the role I have in it, I also consider things such as my knowledge. What is it that I know and can share with people? What is it that I feel God wants me to do with my life? The answers to these questions will make a difference in how I associate with, and impact other people.

Now, back to the family and the boy...

We now rejoin our story of the young boy and his parents that we started with at the beginning of this article.

After observing that the boy did not understand his role in the family, I took him, and his parents aside for a private conversation. I told the boy that I had some questions for him. The first question was, “What is the role of mother?” I thought this would be the easiest role to identify because everybody recognizes, to some degree, what their mother has done for them. The boy thought for a while, then said, “Well, she makes sure that we are healthy, she teaches us stuff, she takes us places, and she corrects stuff when its wrong. She kind of protects us from bad influences...” He went on and on, listing what he thought his mother’s role was.

Then I said, “Tell me what you think the role of father is?” He said, “He provides for the family, he teaches the children things, but different stuff than mom. He protects us, and tries to make sure we don't get hurt or get corrupted. He leads...” and he listed multiple things. As he spoke he wrote down each thought on paper.

When the boy finished describing the role of father, I asked his mother, “What do you think the role of mother is?” She said, “Pretty much the things my son said, and I would add a few more. I nurture, teach, protect and care for... the list is already quite complete.”

I asked the father the same question and his list was very similar to what his son had written down.

Then I asked the son, “You are a 16 year old son or youth, what is your role in this family and in this life?”

He had not anticipated that question. In fact, he sat back, looking dazed. His expression seemed to say, “Wow. I’ve never considered it.” At that point I lead him a little bit and said, “What is it that you have to accomplish at this time, or how do you spend most of your days? What is your job?”

He said, “I am supposed learn stuff.” Then he listed some other things. “I am supposed to learn how to take care of myself. I am supposed to learn stuff from school. I am supposed to give service. Because I am the oldest I am supposed to be a good example for my brothers and sisters and am probably supposed to help my parents.”

Then I asked the parents, “What do you think the role is of a 16 year old youth?”

They said, “What he said is pretty much what we think to.”

Then all of a sudden, the son was on the same page as the parents and he did not have to get told what to do. Instead he defined who he was and he defined who his parents were, and they agreed on the definitions.

The trouble in their relationship was that his actions went against the self-described definition of who he was and who they were. I brought to his attention, “Do you see how you are a learner and both your parents are teachers?”

He said, "Yeah."

I continued, "So when they try to teach you stuff, how is that going? Are you willingly and happily fulfilling your role? Are you learning it?"

He said, "No, probably not."

I said, "Are you happy in your relationship with your parents as it is right now?"

He said, "No."

I said, "Maybe you're not happy in that relationship because you're not honoring who you are supposed to be. When you don't live your role and you try to make up, or redefine your role, you are living a lie. You're pretending to be something that you are not, and you haven't even completely defined yet what that is. It's just taking the path of least resistance, taking that selfish path. When a person tries to redefine their role, it's usually because they have a selfish reason for doing so."

"So if I was the mother and I said, 'I don't want to be a mother anymore, this is too much work. It looks like my husband has all the fun because he goes to work everyday and he does not have to deal with all this emotional stuff... so, I want to be a man. I want to go to work and I want somebody else to take care of my family and take care of my home and all that kind of stuff. I want to go out and I want to have lunches with people and I want to go to an office and talk to people all day and that's what I want to do. I am changing roles. I am not going to be a mother anymore, I am leaving this.' What is that going to do?"

"First, it's going to totally mess up my family. Second, it's totally going to mess me up, and I am not going to be happy. I'm going to constantly feel like I need more of something. Why? Because I am not living my role and therefore, I can't feel fulfilled."

Fulfillment by Living God-Given Roles

I never thought I would homeschool my children, but as many of you know, I do. When I chose to homeschool my children, I took on the teacher role differently than I ever imagined. I had to figure out how to teach a myriad of subjects, and how to format the days so that the teaching actually happened. After I started teaching my children at home, I was overcome with a surprising sense of fulfillment and joy. I recognized the feeling that I was fulfilling the measure of my existence. I was totally needed. I was truly the best person for this particular role. Please know that I am not saying that everybody should homeschool their children, this was just my experience of living my role as the mother of my own children.

I knew that God gave my children to me, and he wanted me to determine how they would learn, what they would learn and so on. By homeschooling, I was doing these things everyday and I was all of a sudden so happy, joyful and fulfilled. I was living and fulfilling that stewardship of being a teacher and a mother to my children in such a complete way that the joy was like bliss, and that bliss spilled over to the rest of my family because they were able to live their roles better as well. Isn't it interesting how roles

work?

The Emptying Out of the Adult Identity

While at the United Nations, I had a conversation with a group of people from Italy and Spain. The women I spoke with also do trainings to help families. During the conversation, one of the women who was the head of her organizations said to me, “Nicholeen, why is it that half the people have such a hard time with parenting their children? Why can't people get this right? Why is it that we don't know how to parent anymore? What is the problem? Have you identified the problem?”

I said, “Yes! There is a problem! The problem is called, ‘The emptying out the adult identity’.

‘The emptying out the adult identity’ is when adults don't want to be adults. In fact, they don't feel qualified to be adults. They haven't been properly trained to be adults because the adults that preceded them relinquished some of their role as adults. *(see Extra Resources below for the article on the PeterPan Generation)*

These adults wanted to be youth, or children, but they wanted to be respected as if they were adults. They didn't feel qualified to correct and teach their own children. Some tried to muddle through it, but in most cases, they just turned away from it. These parents didn't want to see what was going on in their families and hoped that raising children, with all their accompanying difficulties, would all resolve themselves without any direct involvement from them. Raising children was too much work, and they didn't want to be bothered with it. They didn't know the solutions to the child-rearing problems anyway. These parents were not even sure if the child would listen to them, and last, but not least, they didn't know how to establish healthy parent and child roles.

Establishing roles starts when children are very little, even in infancy. We could say that babies understand the roles. Mom and Dad feed me, they teach me, they take care of me, they can be completely trusted.

Then when a child gets older, they can talk back, walk around, create problems, and Mom and Dad might lose a little bit of that trust. Later on, the child becomes smarter and starts to develop a personality, possibly even a temper or an attitude problem. This is often when many parents throw up their hands and say, “Now what do I do?” They have not prepared their environment to properly fulfill their role. They haven't set up a structure or determined the proper tone, or the general character or attitude of the relationship that would be beneficial for that child to have growing up. *(See the Teaching Self Government [Implementation Course](#) for setting up the home structure that supports proper parental roles).*

Establishing Parental Roles

When a mother does a lot of pre-teaching, discussing, and describing, which is everything that we do when we teach self-government, then she is establishing her role for herself and the children. She is responsible for organizing the day, assigning tasks, and running the home. The child's role is to help and to learn how to participate, learn skills of communication as well as other adult skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

If things are not going right, the mother establishes her role with the children by correcting and explaining. The more pre-teaching she does, the more she defines her role for herself and her children in any given situation.

I think this is where people get confused the most. They might know their role as mother and father, but do they know their role when all of a sudden it is a stressful moment? How, as mother and father, do they help turn a situation around when somebody is completely out of control?

I know that a huge part of my role is to protect the spirit of love in my family. So, if things are getting chaotic or out of control, then I magnify that role by saying, "We are not calm right now, we need to get calm. Let's take some steps to get calm and then let's talk about it so we can understand what happened and what we can do better next time."

It is true that as parents, we are teachers, and that a good teacher needs to be understanding of what's going on. But first I know that my main job, or role, is to protect that spirit of love that exists in our home. If that spirit is not there, none of the teachings will take hold in my children's hearts. Why? Because that spirit of love also instills in the hearts of everyone, what is true and right, and what changes need to be made. They recognize the truth when they hear it because of the feeling of calmness and love that is already in the home. *This is where systems taught in the [implementation course](#) are useful --systems like the Rule of Three .*

We need to return to proper, healthy roles in all layers of society: family, business, community, government, etc. We need to understand our roles, our responsibilities and stewardships. We need to understand the ways that we relate to each other. If we understood these things there would be much less confusion. Everyone would be happier. We wouldn't try to redefine our roles or make up new ones. We would return to the truth of what our roles really are. We would ask God for help if we feel like we have a weakness in our role. Then with God's inspiration, we would deliberately take action. If our society truly desires happiness, then we must return to our proper roles.

Extra Resources

Articles

- **Peter Pan Generation:** an article about adults who don't want to grow up --the Peter Pan Generation/ Adultescent/Infantilisation/TWIT:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2176281/Generation-refuse-grow-No-mortgage-No-marriage-No-children-No-career-plan-Like-30-somethings-Marianne-Power-admits-shes-.html>
- **Mothers role:** an article written by Nicholeen about Mothers' role.
<https://parentingselfgovernment.com/article/irreplaceable-mothers-power-moms-who-know-their-roles>
- **Fathers role:** an article written by Nicholeen about Fathers' role
<https://parentingselfgovernment.com/article/fathers-parent-or-playmate-part-1>
- **Role Reversal** --a look back in history and now: an article by Nicholeen.
<https://parentingselfgovernment.com/it-doesnt-have-be-way-role-reversal-1245>
- **Healthy Adult Relationships:** An interesting list of what a healthy adult relationship looks like --written for youth, but very insightful for adults.
<http://www.expectrespectaustin.org/uploads/general/pdf/HealthyRelationships-Adults0907.pdf>

Fun Skits about the role of Father/Mother

- **Father:** <http://skitguys.com/videos/item/fatherhood>
- **Mother:** <http://skitguys.com/videos/item/mom-goggles>

Mentor

- **TSG Circles, the Support Group, Retreats, Workshops, and the Implementation Course** is meant to help mentor individuals and families to learn and live their God-given roles in family's.
<https://parentingselfgovernment.com/store/membership-and-support>
 - **Article -How to Help You Find a Mentor to go Further, Faster:**
<http://michaelhyatt.com/find-mentor.html>
 - **Article -5 Ways to Find Mentors and Make it Matter:**
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2012/03/26/5-ways-to-find-mentors-and-make-it-matter/>
 - **pdf- Characteristics of a Good Mentor and a Good Mentee:**
<http://www.buffalostate.edu/mss/documents/Characteristics.pdf>
 - **pdf- How to be a Good Mentee:**
<http://cba.k-state.edu/current-students/documents/executive-mentor/Tips%20for%20being%20a%20good%20mentee.pdf>
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Discussion Questions

- What stood out in the article or extra articles referred to in the resources?

- What are your thoughts about the Peter Pan Generation (see extra resources)? Do you see yourself in some of the descriptions? Do you see it in others you know? What effect could this generation have on our world? On your life? on your children's lives?
- Does the 'role problem' in the world today affect you personally? How?
- While you were growing up, which roles were clear and which roles were not clear? How did that affect your relationships? How did it affect your decisions? How does that affect you now?
- What is the difference between responsibilities and stewardships as it relates to roles?
- What are the responsibilities and stewardships that define your roles?
- Have you consciously defined the roles you have in life? What was that experience like for you?
- What are your thoughts about finding fulfillment by living God-defined roles? Have you experienced it? Do you agree or disagree with the idea of fulfillment by living God-given roles? Is it possible in our day and age?
- Have you experienced the role of mentor? or mentee? If so, what was the experience of well defined roles in that relationship? Could a mentor/mentee relationship help now in changes you are wanting to make?
- In your life (family, extended family, work, church, community, etc.), are your roles clear? How do you know they are or aren't? What do you wish they were like? What steps can you take to living your roles?

Challenges

- Do a "Defining Roles" exercise (alone and, if it makes sense, with your family members) similar to the one described in the article. See what insights you personally gain, and what insights your family members add.
- Read an article from the extra resources that addresses a particular concerns and make an action plan.
- Establish or deepen a mentoring relationship to increase your personal self-government.