

We **Should Lead Our Children Like
We **Lead** Everyone Else**

By: LT James A. Crockett



Recently, I've had cause to consider how differently I led my children and my fellow Coastguardsmen. As a Coast Guard enlisted and as an officer, I have striven to apply leadership principles gleaned from innumerable courses, books, training, presentations, and trusted leaders over a 25-year career. Up until my recent revelation, however, I have not truly applied those hard-learned principles to leading my children. Partially as a result, it's been much harder to lead my three children than to lead fellow Coasties. Trying to parent three teenagers well is a leadership challenge of immense proportions!

My parents' leadership style was very directive. Punishment (or the threat therein) was the tried and true method to ensure children were well behaved and obedient. Unfortunately, I used that leadership style more than I should have to mine and my children's detriment. My early Coast Guard career was similarly directive in how I was led. Even though over time I learned better ways of leading people from a host of sources, the notion of applying those better ways to leading my children escaped me for far too long a time, so while I developed as a Coast Guard leader, as a parent I was stuck in a less than desirable leadership style. When my children were very young, managing conflict was a simple matter of ordering the conflict ended and separating the two (or more) combatants. Managing teen-to-teen or teen-to-adult conflict is much more complicated and more critical to manage well, just as managing conflicts among my fellow service members is. Carrying a directive leadership style into these conflicts often does not yield the desired result.

I have written Words of Wisdom for prospective chief petty officers for years on how they can succeed in leading their younger and/or more junior personnel, but never truly understood that such notions as taking care of people, praising in public while correcting in private, giving the benefit of the doubt, balancing family needs, giving people opportunities to succeed and giving them what they need to boldly make the attempt, and constantly teaching people are essential to leading our children, too. It is a bit of a shame that it took over 20 years in the Coast Guard to figure out what I should be doing with the 18 or so years that my children will live with me, using the same principles that I'd been trying to use with my fellow Coastguardsmen. There are many similarities between leading one's children and leading fellow service members, but there are enough differences to make leading the children harder in many ways. The many lessons learned over my 25 years of service could have made the job easier and fostered even stronger relationships with my entire family.

What led to this epiphany about leading my children? We've just been blessed with a new child in our household. It's not too late (or too early) to lead this child (and her siblings) better.