



# The **4A's** of **Leadership®** *for Families*



**Practical Principles for a Positive Impact  
with Those We Care About Most**

*By David Esposito*

**Harvest Time**  
Partners





# The 4 A's of Leadership for Families

## Introduction

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There is no denying that our world continues to grow in complexity, intensity, and uncertainty. The consistent post-World War II pattern of education, marriage, a close family, and a steady job are no longer the dominant realities in today's world.

In addition, as our world gets more "connected" with things like the internet, social media, and on-demand personal-entertainment devices, families become more disconnected; and we are losing the critical life skill of authentic, face-to-face communication.

Despite the unprecedented pace of change we are all experiencing in our homes, businesses, and communities around the world, there is one constant truth about families that we cannot escape:

*A loving, safe, and secure family is critical to our overall well-being and is the foundation for a better world.*

**The 4 A's of Leadership for Families** is a practical and simple approach to strengthen families in a world that continues to challenge the well-being of those we care about most. Although the 4 A's of leadership were originally developed for business leaders, there is a similar applicability to support the learning and growth needed in our homes.

We all spend a great deal of time and energy outside the home as we earn a living, pursue hobbies of interest, serve our community, and connect with friends. Many times we enjoy the "success" of these pursuits such as the fame and fortune that accompanies a job well done and the praise and recognition from peers and the public at large. These types of successes all combine to meet a clear personal need to know that we matter. However, it is important we recognize another important truth we cannot escape:

*No amount of outward success can compensate for a failure at home.*

If we summarized all the religious teachings of the world, the great philosophers of the ages, and today's spiritually enlightened crowd, we can guarantee that on our death beds we will not wish for a larger bank account, a better golf score, another kitchen remodel, or another fancy car. We are reminded of this reality by what Queen Elizabeth I said on her deathbed in 1603:

*"I would give all my possessions for a moment of time."*



***"A loving, safe and secure family is critical to our overall well-being and is the foundation for a better world."***

We have the gift of time right now. I wish you all the best in using your time wisely to build and strengthen your family. It is an honorable pursuit worthy of our best effort.

My hope is that **The 4 A's of Leadership for Families** can provide a small degree of positive change in your home, as they have in mine, as we both continue on the important journey to leave a positive legacy for our children and grandchildren.

**"No amount of outward success can compensate for a failure at home."**



## Alignment

The **Principle of Alignment** reinforces the strength of purpose that can help direct us through any life experience.

There is the ageless question: Where are we going? Sadly, in many families, this question goes unanswered. As we stay highly caffeinated and get busy with activities, making money, completing our bucket list, and trying to be everything to everybody, we often fail to describe where we are going as a family:

*The most common cause of frustration and confusion is lack of purpose and direction.*



The **Principle of Alignment** reminds us of the importance as a family to answer those big questions. Where are we going as a family? What are we all about? What do we stand for? What are our values?

Many times people will describe these items as a mission statement or statement of values. What we call it does not matter—the fact that we describe and live it means the most.

A set of personal values should guide how families view the most important items of life. How do we value our legacy, love, money, forgiveness, charity, service, success, and failure? If we suffer an untimely death, does our family have the foundation to carry on to reach our full potential?

Academic research in the fields of psychology and neuroscience inform us that the prefrontal cortex part of the brain that is responsible for decision making, planning, and perspective is the last area of development in the brain and is not fully developed until our mid-twenties. For families, this has major significance as we not only want to “live our values” in front of our children; but, given their stage of development, we need to describe to them the

“why” behind what we do and what we value. Children need to hear the explanation of “why” as they are not yet wired to translate observing our behaviors or reading a set of values into the “why” we believe and act the way we do.

The **Principle of Alignment** helps families regain their direction in times of trouble and suffering. The need to regain direction is incredibly important as trouble and suffering will be constant companions in our journey of life. The ability to bounce back from tragedy and difficulty is a critical skill called resilience. When families can rally back toward a common set of values and long-term direction, we more effectively handle the times when we get knocked off the rails of life.

If we think we can just dismiss the need to gain alignment as a family because it is too academic and not practical, we need to be reminded of the warning in the Book of Proverbs:

*“Where there is no vision, the people will perish.”*

Taking time out from the chaos of life and discussing these large, significant questions with those we care about most will serve us well as we build and strengthen our family. Time and nature will eventually destroy so many things we value like a nice home, a new car, and fancy clothes. However, when we instill a set of values and a purpose in our family, they will transcend the challenges of time and begin the foundation for a legacy of positive impact.

The format of how we describe a set of values (i.e. a set of values hung on a wall, a handwritten note on the bedside, a three-by-five card on the refrigerator, or an inscription on a family photo) is not the important part. The important part is clearly describing the answers to the big questions of life and having them in a format that is easily referenced as a reminder to reinforce our commitment.

The day-to-day living of our values and the consistent discussion of “why” we do what we do will help to keep our families headed in a purposeful direction throughout the twist and turns in the journey of life.

*“The most common cause of frustration and confusion is lack of purpose and direction.”*



## A Helpful Exercise to Support the Principle of Alignment

Sometimes it is difficult to get started in developing a set of values or a mission statement for your family. Here is one practical exercise to help get a sense of what is really important.

Clear your mind from the worries of the day and try to focus on this one task for the next few minutes.

In your mind's eye, imagine 25 years into the future and that you are attending your family reunion. You are the eldest member of the family. You see generations upon generations of children and grandchildren and close friends who have come to celebrate the positive impact that your family has had on so many people.

After all the food has been served, everyone has settled down to see a slide show of pictures of the major events of your family and several close loved ones come to the podium to speak about your family.

What images of your family would you want showcased in the slide show? What great family events (big and small) would you want to see going across the screen?

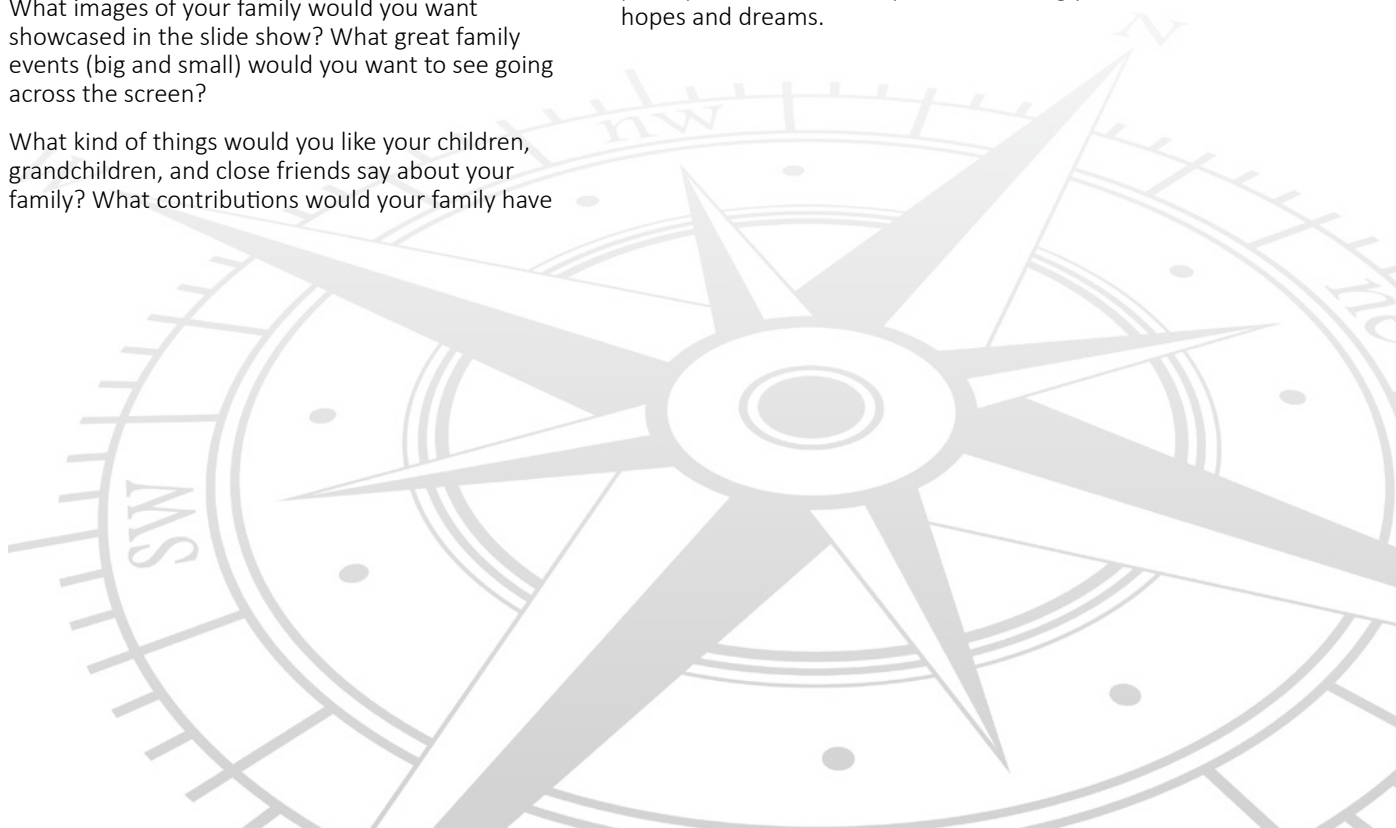
What kind of things would you like your children, grandchildren, and close friends say about your family? What contributions would your family have

made to the well-being of your family and the community? What achievements would you see as most valued by your family? What difference would your family have made in the lives of your relatives and close friends? How do you see your family handling tragedy and disappointment?

As you reflect back on this event, are there some principles like commitment, loyalty, sacrifice, love, understanding, and forgiveness that may describe your family over the years?

Take a moment to write down some of your initial thoughts. Revisit these over the coming days and weeks as you refine your thoughts. Spend time discussing these ideas with those closest to you and develop some common themes for your family.

This exercise should help you get started on developing some core values for your family and place you on an effective path to reaching your hopes and dreams.







## Assignment

The **Principle of Assignment** reminds us of the importance of serving a purpose larger than ourselves.

Throughout our lives we will always have roles to play. They maybe in the home, the workplace, the community, and our world.

In terms of building and strengthening a family, there are the practical realities in which we all have some role to play on a day-to-day basis. There are bills to pay, trash to take out, chores to be done, school assignments to be completed, activities to attend (on time), vacation plans to be made, and meals to be cooked. In addition, unless we have the luxury of a large inheritance, we need to work hard to earn a living to keep a roof over our heads, food in our bellies, and clothes on our backs.

A core element of healthy families is to ensure everyone knows and appreciates what needs to be done and who is going to do it. In dealing with the busyness of our lives, ensuring a family can function with a game plan of who is responsible for the often routine, mundane tasks is important.



Beyond the very practical outcomes of methodically “doing life” together as a family, having clarity on the **Principle of Assignment** in today’s families supports a few positive outcomes:

**1.** Assignments teach the principle of service to a cause bigger than oneself. Service to a cause bigger than ourselves is a life-sustaining, healthy principle that we all need to learn; and the family provides a great forum for learning. We move from a mind-set of “what I want to do” and “what I like to do” to a mind-set of “what needs to be done” to help build and strength our family. This mind-set helps to minimize the negative forces in our world which decree, “It is all about me.” As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” The most effective place to find ourselves is in the service of those in our home.

**2.** Assignments teach the principle of teamwork. We all have our part to play to make our family function in a practical manner in the short run, which builds a healthy family over the long term. With teamwork, we learn to give and take and work together for a common purpose. In this world, we will always be in relationships with others and the importance of working together can first be learned and engrained in the home.

Having a practical approach to ensuring that members of our family clearly understand and appreciate what needs to be done can give us the ability to play to our strengths and passions while developing new skills outside of our comfort zone. Assignments give us an opportunity to foster growth and boost our confidence in an environment of a supportive and helpful family.

There is a great deal of talk about wanting to be “happy” professionally, personally, and in our homes. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that true happiness comes through serving others with purpose, and there is no better opportunity to be happy than in the service of those we care about most. The **Principle of Assignment** gives us the opportunity to serve others in our family.

In addition to the importance of learning to serve something bigger than ourselves, learning through the **Principle of Assignment** gives our family the



practical tools to live out the values we set forth in the **Principle of Alignment**. Acts of service are the building blocks to achieve the vision we have set forth for our family.

There is one more important topic about service and the **Principle of Assignment** in our homes that needs to be addressed. The reality in many of our homes today is that those who are consistently and tirelessly serving others most often go unnoticed and underappreciated. There is something extremely honorable about the commitment of those who get the job done in our homes. A tremendous example is quietly set by those getting up on a cold, dark morning and getting the job done on a consistent basis that is worthy of appreciation but so often goes without it.

It does not matter what role we play. The day-in-day-out choice we make to get up and get going despite going underappreciated for not just days but perhaps years is worthy of praise and honor.

We may not realize it, but those around us are all impacted by our example to get up and get going. The day-to-day examples of those in quiet service to a cause beyond themselves and honorably fulfilling their commitments are to be given the highest praise—for their impact is positive and lasting on those around them.

All of us, at certain points in our journey across the various roles we play, will feel underappreciated for our efforts. Whether it is an insensitive spouse, a teenager going through that “know-it-all” phase, a preoccupied boss, or selfish coworkers, we all will go through times of service where we just feel underappreciated.

In most cases, especially in the home, the tide does eventually turn. The insensitive spouse or the “know-it-all” teenager eventually has that “light-bulb” moment when he or she realizes the quiet service that has been delivered faithfully over the years. However, if they do not, it is important that we do not lose our drive to deliver on our commitments to do our job and fulfill our obligations. Continuing to move forward in quiet service is the most effective thing to do.

If you have felt underappreciated for a while, take this writing as a little “pat on the back” of encouragement for a job and an example well done. In addition, we all should do some self-reflection and see if we are that insensitive spouse or “know-it-all” teenager and start today to put forth some encouragement and recognition to those who are in honorable, quiet service around us.



## Accountability

The **Principle of Accountability** teaches our family the importance of personal responsibility.

As the saying goes, if everyone is accountable, then no one is accountable.

Strong and healthy families realize the importance of taking personal responsibility and not making excuses.

Being accountable for the role we play and the tasks we need to fulfill is one of the most critical life skills—to know and accept that we are responsible. Playing the blame game on others is not helpful in the home, and it also translates into problems in our world.

Teaching responsibility in the home will build a strong foundation for a life of positive impact.

In today's world, we are often bombarded with examples of playing the "blame game" when outcomes fall short of expectations.

- Poor performance in school is often blamed on the teacher or the classroom environment.
- Poor performance in the workplace is often blamed on a poor boss or the demands of competition.
- The business decisions that resulted in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression were often blamed on the pressure to continue to produce growth in revenue and profits.

The consistent behavior of making excuses when things don't turn out the way we want weakens us as individuals and weakens the very fabric of our society.



The **Principle of Accountability** in the home can be our most effective reminder of the importance of taking responsibility for our actions and not playing the blame game.

The **Principle of Accountability** in our homes helps to bring about some important life learnings:

**1.** We learn that we are accountable to others. Others, especially our family, are depending on us to get things done. We learn the concept of interdependence, which enables our efforts to go further together rather than alone in building a strong and healthy family.

*"Teaching responsibility in the home will build a strong foundation for a life of positive impact."*

**2.** We learn to expand our understanding of others. Inevitably, we will each fall short on some responsibility we had in our home. Whether it was to get a school assignment done, pick up the kids at a certain time, or pay the electric bill—when those in our family fall short, we learn that our first reaction should not be critical and punishing but understanding. It is through understanding that we can see the world through their eyes to help ensure we can get things corrected effectively and minimize shortfalls in the future.

**3.** We learn that choices have consequences. If we choose not to fulfill the tasks we were given or live the values we declare that are important for our family, then we will endure the consequences of our choices. Whether that is a day without a smart phone for a teenager, or a long night on the couch for a stubborn spouse, or a major financial setback for the family, our choices have consequences; and we learn that together as a family as we journey on to reach our full potential.

"The consistent behavior of making excuses when things don't turn out the way we want weakens us as individuals and weakens the very fabric of our society."



As a family, when we adhere to the **Principle of Accountability**, we bring our choices to the forefront of every situation. We become a product of our choices, not our situation; and we begin to head down a productive path to reach our full potential.

So what happens when we fall short? We will all fall short at some point in fulfilling our responsibilities in the home.



We all know that there is a critical teaching moment at that point where someone is to be held accountable for missing the mark. The actions in this moment will heavily influence the next steps for the entire family. When we do it well, chances are our loved one will move forward productively; and others will be encouraged to continue moving forward together. When we do it poorly, we create a greater problem by undermining an individual's confidence and self-esteem and potentially derailing us from the pathway of our family values.

There are a variety of techniques for having crucial conversations when a loved one falls short. The intent is not to cover all of them in this writing, but here are a few simple considerations that can help:

**1.** We should clearly identify the shortcoming (uncompleted task, rude behavior, etc.) without making judgments like "You are a stupid jerk" or "You always screw things up."

**2.** We should seek to understand the "why." It is important to know we only see the world as we are, not as it is. Seeking to understand will help our family to more effectively address the issue.

**3.** We should address why we are having this conversation. For example, "We are talking about this because we have very high expectations as a family and for you, and I know that you and our family are capable of meeting them."

*"We become a product of our choices, not our situation; and we begin to head down a productive path to reach our full potential."*

The real learning for a family when someone falls short is the power of redemption. Our families should be the place where we feel accepted no matter what mistakes we have made. Families should be a safe place that is free of judgment and shame, no matter what. The **Principle of Accountability** gives us the opportunity as a family to teach the power of redemption and to accept those we love back into the family even after they have fallen short and need to be held accountable.

Over the course of time, spouses will fall short of loving each other in the most meaningful ways, children will make mistakes, and teenagers will become "know it alls." The **Principle of Accountability** opens the door for our loved ones to feel redeemed after a significant misstep. Redemption has the power to alleviate the burden of the dark, silent corners of our soul and work to rebuild a family after it has become broken and lost.

The **Principle of Accountability** reinforces to us that our family matters, and that we have a responsibility to support our family even when we fall short.





## Affirmation

The **Principle of Affirmation** enables us to meet that deepest need in each one of us, to know that we belong, and to see that we matter to those closest to us.

Each one of us has the basic human need to know we matter to someone else—to know we belong. Our family provides the perfect environment to feel we belong.

We live in a world that emphasizes the negative:

- In the workplace, employee surveys consistently mention the lack of positive feedback and recognition of a job well done.
- In our schools, we deploy techniques suited for a 100-year-old industrial mind-set where people are simply told to sit down and follow directions.
- In our communities, we over emphasize the bad news and rarely speak to the blessings of freedom and opportunity.

With all of this negativity, an encouraging word in our families can be like life-saving oxygen to someone suffocating in an environment of negativity and pessimism. We all carry a few heavy burdens known only to ourselves and an encouraging word is a helpful boost as we journey along.

The **Principle of Affirmation** begins with a word of encouragement to others. Offering an encouraging word is many times the gateway for developing a deeper relationship with someone close to us.

Words of affirmation, especially to those closest to us, can help in a few important ways:

1. Help others feel better about themselves and begin to feel they matter.
2. Create an environment where others may become more open to share struggles without the fear of judgment and shame.
3. Enable others to move forward in their own journey with a particular struggle, even if they do so silently and alone.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will most likely see that we spend more time identifying shortcomings in our spouse, our children, and other family members than we do highlighting the positives. Psychologists and academics would say it takes roughly five positive comments to outweigh one negative comment. For most of us, the sad reality is we don't spend enough time recognizing what is right in our family and instead spend a great deal of time talking (or yelling) about the shortcomings.

There is an enormous body of evidence that supports the tremendous upside to our mental and emotional well-being by simply counting our blessings. Studies have shown time and again the positive impact on individuals and families when we can take a small moment of time each day to pause and be thankful. The simple act of journaling three things we are thankful for each day has the ability to transform our mental state more effectively than medicine.



The **Principle of Affirmation** reminds us of the tremendous power to build and strengthen the bonds of family through the intentional effort of a kind word, a sincere compliment, and in catching loved ones doing the right thing. The discipline to highlight the good things in each one of us on a consistent, daily basis has the ability to transform a negative household into one of positive, unlimited potential, which can have a major impact on those we care about most.

In addition building each other up through the **Principle of Affirmation** as a means to deal with the constant bombardment of negative comments and perceptions we face in our day-to-day lives, the principle can help in another important



area of life. We will undoubtedly face some true disappointments in life when things just do not go our way or turn out the way we planned. The **Principle of Affirmation** can help to address our reaction when our plans go awry.

How do we view situations when we do not get that promotion, fail a test, say the wrong thing at the wrong time, or burn to a crisp the Thanksgiving turkey? Do we view these experiences as reinforcement of our negative thoughts about ourselves and those closest to us, or do we view these experiences as opportunities to learn and grow?

The **Principle of Affirmation** will help us to reinforce that there are positive learnings through disappointments; and as the saying goes,

“What does not kill us will make us stronger.” The **Principle of Affirmation** also helps us remember that life is a journey of learning. No single event, no matter how disastrous, can keep us from reaching our full potential if we choose to learn from it as oppose to anchor ourselves, and those we care about most, in negative comments about our imperfections.

The **Principle of Affirmation** will help to ensure those we care about most believe in themselves and have the support and encouragement of our family behind them.



## The Closing Reality

With regards to the health and welfare of future generations, there is no more important pursuit than the building and strengthening of the family. There is no religious organization, government program, business, or educational environment that will ever be as effective as a healthy and secure home life on positively impacting the generations to come.

The reality is that no one is perfect. We all make mistakes.

I could recite a continued flow of missteps, mistakes, and downright stupidity in my professional and personal life. But this is not about my story of success or failure or how I handle either. My life is not yours and yours is not mine. It is about each one of us as individuals and our own unique journey to reach our full potential for our families. However, we can together leverage a common set of timeless and universal principles to rally our efforts.

Even though family life is much more complex than four principles—we could not cover all aspects of the family in these few pages—it is important to be reminded that there are timeless and universal principles such as love, forgiveness, empathy, and sacrifice that we can all apply to reach our full potential in our lives and in our families. The Law of the Harvest will always be our judge—we reap what we sow.

Our character is our internal compass that guides our thoughts, decisions, and actions. As we guide our thoughts, decisions, and actions with principles like honesty, courage, loyalty and commitment, we will build and strengthen our character and **Character Creates Opportunity®** for each of us to reach our full potential.

Stay humble in times of great success. Stay committed in times of utter despair and darkness. No matter what situation we face, duty calls us to just simply keep climbing back into the ring each and every morning. For even though many times sadness and fear accompany the night, hope comes in the morning when we choose to get back into the ring for the fight of our lives: the building and strengthening of our family.

After twenty-plus years of being a husband, father, adult son, and brother, I am reminded of the sign over the entrance to the US Army Ranger School in Fort Benning, GA that I walked past over 25 years ago: “Not for the weak or fainthearted.” I often think that sign should be placed on the mantle in every family room.

I wish you all the best. Please reach out to me if I can ever help you.



David Esposito

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*“There is no more important pursuit than the building and strengthening of the family.”*



“The Law of the Harvest will always be our judge—we reap what we sow.”



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## As our world has become more connected...

...with things like the internet, smart phones, and social media, today's online chatter has actually caused our families to become more disconnected; and we are losing the critical life-skill of effective face to face communication.

Harvest Time Partners created a series of conversation games called Abundant Harvest® and Face to Face® to help families and educators open the door to more effective communication and encourage decision making based on principles such as honesty and loyalty with the intent of reinforcing the Law of the Harvest, simply, “you reap what you sow.” **Abundant Harvest and Face to Face conversation games provide parents and teachers with teachable moments and quality time with their children.**



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# The Principles of Our World Children's Books



The Principle of Honesty



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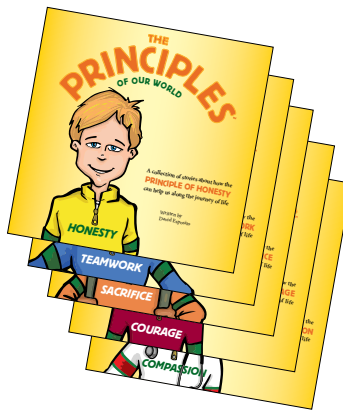
The Principle of Compassion



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## Come learn about The Principles of Our World.

It is never too early in the development of a child to start talking about the importance of principles like honesty, courage, and teamwork. **The Principles of Our World** books provide parents and teachers with the opportunity to read to young children (ages 4+) and talk about a variety of situations they will experience in life.

For young, independent readers (ages 7+), **The Principles of Our World** book series is a great addition to their book collection.

At the end of each book, there is a section called, “Where Do We Go from Here?” This section is designed for children, parents, and educators to discuss situations they will encounter in life and talk about how **The Principles of Our World** can help them effectively handle these situations.

Enjoy each book in one sitting or read just one story at a time!



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## About the Author

**David Esposito** is a combat veteran, business executive, husband, father, and creator of character-building resources that help individuals, families, and organizations reach their full potential.

He has developed award-winning resources under the brand Character Creates Opportunity®, a character-development initiative designed for all ages. He is the inventor of Abundant Harvest® and Face to Face®: award-winning conversation games that are being utilized in families, schools, counseling programs, and faith-based organizations worldwide. The games help families and educators open a door to more effective communication and encourage decision making based on principles such as honesty, loyalty, and commitment with the intent of reinforcing the law of the harvest, simply, you “reap what you sow.” Abundant Harvest and Face to Face help foster effective conversations on real-world issues and develop the critical life skill of face-to-face communication that is rapidly being replaced by today’s online chatter.

David is also the author of a series of books about ***The Principles of Our World™***. The books provide parents and teachers with the opportunity to read to young children and talk about a variety of situations they will experience in life.

David’s character and leadership skills were cultivated at West Point and through leadership assignments in the US Army Infantry. As an airborne ranger infantry officer, David led a rifle platoon with the 101st Airborne Division through several combat operations in the Gulf War. He was recognized with a Bronze Star for combat operations in February 1991.

After launching his business career as a top sales representative, David quickly rose through the ranks of corporate America advancing to become the president of a \$100-million-plus medical diagnostics company.

David and his wife Tracy founded and sponsor the Harvest Time Partners Foundation, a charitable organization that supports children and young adults in the pursuit of character-building opportunities worldwide. The Foundation supports a wide range of initiatives from college scholarships to community-service projects, as well as international efforts to reduce the suffering of children and young adults.

David provides support to individuals, families, and organizations on a variety of topics and subjects encompassing personal and executive development, team building, leadership training, and building a strong marriage and family.

*Visit [www.harvesttimepartners.com](http://www.harvesttimepartners.com) to learn more.*



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