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On Finding Balance: Lessons I am learning from my adult son...now that I have stopped giving him advice

Nobody had to tell me. As a father, I knew it was my responsibility to teach and advise my son and it was his to learn from me. I tell and you obey or face the consequences. For generations, at least in many families, this was the model for being a 'good' dad.

From his earliest days, I told Chad how to live and succeed in this world, with an unending flurry of whats, hows, whys and shoulds. It was after all, my responsibility and well-earned privilege as his dad. However, no one told me there would come a time when advice should stop.

After some turbulent teenage years and continuing episodes of stressful events as he merged into adulthood, I woke up. Woke up to the fact that my wise advice was rolling off him like water off a duck's back. It wasn't working.

I remember a time specifically. It was in the midst of a particularly frustrating and painful exchange that I came out with words that surprised both of us: *"I have decided to no longer give you advice unless you specifically ask for it."* After a pause he said simply, *"Finally Dad. It's a deal."*

This became a transformational shift in our relationship. We begin to enter a new phase-- what has turned out to be a distinctly improved new normal in our relationship. In the past, the scales were tilted in my favor--or so I thought. Over time and together, we have been able to tilt the scales to a far healthier balance--for him and for me.

So what am I learning from my adult son now?

1. Vulnerability: In a recent long walk together, he asked some questions that triggered me telling him some stories I had never before thought important to share--stories I thought I had long buried. Some of shame, others of failures and stories when I was scared.
2. Innovation: He is showing me the necessity and benefits of changing things up, what he calls 'on-purpose disruption'. As he says, "I don't give a shit what people think when I am speaking my truth--my truth from my values."
3. Courage: From watching him take courageous steps in his personal and professional life, I am progressively learning to step into my own courageous challenges as I age.
4. Love: Because we are expressing our love and care more transparently, I am learning that the more I open up to him the more times of freedom, fun and balance we experience as father and son--now long-life friends.

Now at 73 and 45 years of age, we are realizing how much better a 'new normal' is for both of us. He is now a middle aged adult as I am growing into elderhood. This has become my time to learn from him more than to give advice. Funny though, it seems like he now asks for advice more often--and so do I.