

MASK's Dad Dialed In: Michael Pollack

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I came from a fairly simple upbringing. My dad was a scrap metal dealer and worked very long and hard hours. My mom stayed at home to care for the family.

Born in the 1950s, by no stretch of the imagination were we wealthy. But we didn't miss any meals, either. I attribute that to my dad being such a hard worker and my mom being a creative cook. She made tuna casseroles in more ways than anyone I've ever met.

My dad also sold appliances and he would bring home the big cardboard boxes they'd come in. We'd make playhouses out of them, cutting out windows and doors like they were real houses. One day, my parents took one of those cardboard boxes and set it out in the rain. As I watched it fall apart, I learned a valuable lesson—that you have to work hard for the things you want in life, otherwise you won't get ahead.

At a very young age, my dad exposed me to the building and real estate business. He'd take me to jobsites and show me the right ways and the wrong ways to build. As I got older, I worked after school and summers in construction. I did the jobs that nobody else wanted to do. Rather than showing any kind of favoritism, my dad told me that whatever job I was doing, I needed to work harder everyone else because he didn't want people saying, "You're the boss' son and you're out there doing nothing."

That's one of the ways I developed my work ethic, by trying to outwork the older guys. I may not have always been as smart or as strong as they were, but I would outwork them any day. I would be the first one there in the morning and the last one to leave at night.

My parents were extremely influential on my childhood and my adulthood. They did a phenomenal job of knowing the right balance in raising children and now that I'm a parent, it's my turn to do the same for my kids.

Since they were young, my kids have been involved with many of my businesses. They've worked at the movie theater we own and have done computer work for my company. And just like my dad, I had my kids start from the bottom up.

Recently, my youngest son asked for a new computer. I said, "OK, I'll get it for you, but you're going to have to work at the movie theater. Not as assistant manager, but as the popcorn sweeper, paper towel replacer and usher. Then, when you get good enough, you can move up to cashier. Just because you're my son, you're not going to shortcut anything."

I do my best to make sure that my boys understand that money is just a commodity to buy things and that the real value of money is how you can use it to help others. From the time they were very young, we would do such things as visit senior centers and give to different charitable organizations. I'd also have them work at fundraising events I've been involved with.

I believe young people learn by example. If parents show a level of integrity, it will rub off on their kids. It's also important for children to learn responsibility, no matter how much or how little that is.

In the end, what I try to instill in my children is that the wealthiest person isn't necessarily the one who has the most. In many cases, it is the person who can get by with the least.