



by Jay Goltz

Goltz On Business

Are We There Yet?

I had one of those significant life moments this morning. My oldest son has just graduated college and is starting his new job. He decided to get into commercial real estate in Chicago and is working nearby to my business. Today was his first day on the job and I dropped him off. It's been a long time since I did the “dropping off at kindergarten thing.” (If I did do the dropping off at all. I really can't remember since it was so long ago, but I'd like to believe that I did.)

Back then it was kind of bittersweet, but at the end of the day, no heavy reflection was needed. He was still a little kid. Fast forward to dropping off at college. Now that's a different story. I was a little sick to my stomach. My little boy was definitely no little boy any more. He was taking care of himself, hopefully. He was out of sight, but not out of mind—at least not out of *my* mind. An empty room at home. I was wistful, melancholy, anxious.

Dropping him off at work was different

than heartache or stomachache; it's more like a headache. It's his first day on the job. What advice could I give him on his first day in the “real world?” What advice do I wish I would have gotten?

It's almost like a second chance for me if I can help him to avoid some of the stupid

things I did. (So many stupid things.) Maybe I don't have to give him the advice in one big lump. Maybe I can delve it out in little pieces. A step-by-step approach. Spread it out over the first few months. What if I run out after a week? Am I a bad father if I send my kid out into the big cruel world without layers of protection? Some “edge?”

I can't help but think like the boss here. When I hire a young kid, I can think of

several things that they can do that really bother me. And I think of what I would like to tell them about this behavior. So I thought I could share this advice with my son as well: 1 Don't stand with your hands in your pockets. You look bored, uninterested, not engaged.

You need to cut people some slack for being young. Obviously, after you point out their error in judgment, you should expect a change in their behavior.

1Don't ever, ever, ever say, "Whatever!" It's dismissive. It suggests that you are not buying into what was said, but you'll go along.

1When somebody asks you to do something, reply in a reassuring manner, "I'll take care of it."

Wait a second. This is the same advice I gave to my son when he was 14 years old! I knew it sounded familiar. In fact, it's the same advice I just gave my youngest who is now 14. I realized that I needed something bigger—much bigger. Something prolific. I've got it! As a matter of fact, I just gave a group of 20-somethings that work for me the same advice last year. I pointed out to them that throughout your whole school career, it's always about you—your performance, your grades, your career, your future. In business, your customers don't care. It's all about *them*. What you can do for them?

It then occurs to me that I've had hundreds of employees over the years. Many of them were young and right out of school. The reality is, there's not too many things you can do "right" when you are fresh out of school on a new job. You don't have the experience, know-how, or confidence to jump in and do something outstanding—usually.

On the other hand, there are plenty of things you can do wrong—Talk when you should be listening. Come in late. Talk to your friends on the phone. Not ask a question when you are unsure about something. Cop an attitude towards a customer, or anyone else for that matter.

That's when I realized that giving advice to your own kid is much easier than giving it to someone else's kid. You know what your kid is good at. You know what your kid needs to improve himself on. (Probably the same thing you have been telling them for years, but they didn't have to listen to you.) Now that they have a boss, they have to listen—that is if they want to keep their job. It's called conditional love.

I recently had a conversation with an employee of mine who is 27 years old. I had to explain, "You talk, but you do not listen." She admitted to me that this is something that her mother has always told her. Aha! I'm onto something here. So here's the business lesson: When you have young kids come work for you, they need some time to adjust from school to business. If

they are a teenager, you really have a job cut out for you. Treat them the way you would want someone to treat your kid.

I'm afraid I learned that lesson when I sent some kid home because he had a three-inch hole in his pants and his underwear was sticking out. His mother called me with a mouthful about how he was a kid on his first job and I should not have sent him home. (On the other hand, maybe she should have told him not to come to work like that, but that's another story.) She was right. I felt bad. But I digress...

You can't expect a 17-year-old to act like a 22-year-old, or a 22-year-old to act like a 30-year-old. You need to cut people some slack for being young. Obviously, after you point out their error in judgment, you should expect a change in their behavior.

Several ways to guide them in the right direction is to familiarize the employee with the policies and procedures of the business. Also, make them aware of the bigger business picture so they can understand a little more about how your store works. If you arm them with the tools, you have more of a chance of having a productive employee.

Now here's the parent lesson (I think). My son turned to me in the car and said, "What business lessons can you give me? I know the first one: Listen. Don't talk." Vonderbar! I've succeeded. He has been listening to me! The point is, you probably already have given them the lessons they need to succeed by the time they have finished school. That doesn't mean that I won't rack my brain trying to think of some pearls of wisdom.

He's going to be living at home for a while until he starts to earn some commission, so I have an opportunity to hone the final product. I told him he needs to live at home for a while until he can pay his own rent. The reality is I'm not ready for him to move out. I'm just getting over the kindergarten thing. ■

First Business Lesson: Listen. Don't talk!

Jay Goltz, Business Editor, started Artists' Frame Service in 1978 fresh out of college. AFS employs over 80 people at its main framing operation in Chicago, IL. Goltz is also the founder of FramerSelect. He has received numerous business honors and is best known for his straight talk on how to succeed in business. He has taught at the National Conference.