

## The Responsibility to Be Irresponsible

I saw inconsistencies time and again when I'd attend events in personal development, financial intelligence and relationship building. The speakers were incredible, I was able to apply the lessons taught to directly help improve my life. The results committed me to becoming a lifelong student in these subjects. However, some of the "gurus," at these events shared something in common. On stage they'd flash a picture of them self sitting on the hood of a sports car, in front of a mansion, along with a picture of their family on vacation in a tropical destination. I personally never cared much about sport cars or mansions, still, I really looked up to all these people.

I looked up to them until I started guest speaking and saw *behind* the curtain.

People say a picture says a thousand words but they don't always say what the people on stage want them to. Behind the curtain, some of these gurus were always on the road. Some of them were closet alcoholics. Some worse. Their marriages were failing or over. Saddest of all, many of them had barely any relationship with their children.

These were smart men and women, with money. I believe they had good hearts and the best intentions when starting the journey, but they lost their way and their priorities. They stopped living the message they were marketing on late night TV and in the big magazines.

**Earl Nightingale once said, "As you attempt to put yourself in a position to acquire all the things that money can buy, don't sacrifice the things money can't buy."**

This saying haunted me. It haunted my surf buddies. We'd talk about such sacrifices at length on our surf trips. We made a pact not to fall into this trap. Relationships would come first and there would be no substitute for quality time in our life.

This was the birth of the Board Meeting Strategy – a simple rhythm that has been a grounding pillar for building a stronger relationship with our children.

It works like this: every 90 days we have a Board Meeting with our children. It's a minimum of 4 uninterrupted hours and it's always:

- One-on-one
- Without electronics
- Doing a fun activity of their choice, with some open communication saved for the end (this step is the basis of experiential education)

With the Board Meeting Strategy, children get the respect their business-owner parents usually only give to their key team members or largest investors.

I've done the strategy for years, and it works extremely well. I even wrote a book about it and shared some personal stories and breakthroughs I had with my adopted sons, as a result.

The longer I do Board Meetings with my children, the more I want to keep doing them.

**One of the greatest things about having a Board Meeting is that I often get to pull my boys out of school to have one. It's great doing a fun activity during the week when everyone else is grinding away. There's something special about breaking this routine and having an experience with your son or daughter. If you've done it, you understand.**

A lot of people don't understand this. They see it as irresponsible beyond belief. They say, "You pull them out of school to spend a day at the beach with you? Don't you believe in a good education and the value of school?"

Of course I do. I like my boys' school, too. However, I believe in the importance of our relationship more.

On occasion, we need to break the normal routine to remember what's most important. Work and school can easily dictate our schedule forever, if we let them. I refuse to let this happen in my family. So, two to three days per year each of my kids will miss school and I'll miss work to have a Board Meeting.

This makes perfect attendance loyalists and workaholics want to throw up. They are usually the first ones to say to me, "What kind of example are you setting?!"

This is something I've thought on a lot. It's something that takes me back to the gurus I saw on stage. They were successful in the eyes of the unimportant majority but unknown and disconnected to an important minority.

I believe the example I'm setting is this:

**When my kids grow up they will have a habit instilled within them to play hooky from work and school every 90 days to spend time with their most important relationships – without remorse and without guilt. It will also prove to their own children that they can (and will) put their relationship ahead of their work.**

Missing two days of school per year is a small price to pay for real connection between parent and child.

Each Board Meeting I come back to work more energized, more productive, and more focused. To steal Steven Covey's analogy "the saw has been sharpened". I've given time and space to people that mean the most to me.

Showing this type of "irresponsibility", putting work and school 2nd, helps ground the most important relationships. Most people, and society as a whole, would be better off if more people took the responsibility to be what most would consider irresponsible.

Without fail, every New Year's we reflect back on our year as a family and ask the boys for highlights. Every Year they always talk about their Board Meetings.

**I have a simple goal in all this. When my children turn eighteen and leave the house to start the next phase of their life, I plan to hand each of them a yearbook of our Board Meetings over the years – a short log I've been keeping since we started the practice. It will include the dates, a few details of the fun adventure they chose for that day, a photo and notes of reflection from the conversations we had.**

Four meetings a year for 15 years commemorated forever.

Visualizing this day keeps me committed to my responsibility to be "irresponsible."

**Let me ask you, if you had received a log like this from your father on your 18th birthday, do you think you'd have said "I can't believe I missed those days of school."?**

**I can't speak for anyone else but I know what I would say. I didn't have this with my father growing up and I wish I had.**

Thanks to some great mentors, I learned how to have a great relationship with my dad. I'm one of the lucky ones. Like those gurus on stage, I know hundreds – perhaps thousands – of people who never learned this skill and now have a huge void within themselves. They were taught to be responsible, to put school and work first and to wear this commitment like a badge of honor.

Now they're alone and unfulfilled. Their children barely know them. If they had only taken the time to be a little more irresponsible...

## Top Tips for a Successful Board Meeting

There are several ways a Board Meeting can be sabotaged, and if you're not prepared to execute the Board Meeting Strategy with consistency, love, and passion, it could become meaningless just like any other empty ritual. If incorrectly executed, it could be just another thing your kid feels forced to endure. We don't want that to happen so I'd like to share with you the top ways to ensure successful implementation of the Board Meeting Strategy.

**First, you must be totally present.** No matter what, don't concern yourself with other matters during the Board Meeting. Anything else can wait a few hours. Just focus on what you are doing with your son or daughter.

This may sound easy, but it's not always so easy in practice.

Consider that the day of your Board Meeting might be the same day you lose a big contract. Or, perhaps it will be the day your father tells you he has cancer, or it might be the day you receive a phone call from your child's principal about bad behavior.

Even if none of these happen, other big pressures come at us every day as entrepreneurs. These are a fact of entrepreneurial life, and if you waited for no pressure before giving your child your full attention, you'd never do it. Turn off the phone, make a real effort to turn off the voices in your mind, and focus on your child.

**Second, you must drop your guard.** This might be tough because you may not even realize your guard is up. There's even a chance that your guard is habitually up. Perhaps there's been a loss of trust between you and your child. It's far more common than we care to admit. Be aware of how you're feeling, and if your guard is up, drop it during the Board Meeting.

One of the biggest findings in psychology over the past few years have been the power of vulnerability. Brene Brown's 2010 TED talk went viral and set the stage for the vulnerability revolution. Wherever true vulnerability is practiced, we see relationships growing, strengthening and improving, Drop your guard, open up, and enjoy true communication.

**Third, don't cram in too much content.** I know we all have 50 lectures lined up that we believe our kids need to hear, but lecturing is probably the surest path to losing their trust and any

interest in future Board Meetings. Keep the focused reflection light (especially in the beginning). You've already spoken volumes without saying anything just by spending quality time together.

If you treat the Board Meeting with a 'to-do list' mentally, you'll lose them the first time. It's all about creating space. As trust is built, conversations will happen.

**Fourth, it is important that you say what you're holding back.** This is something you'll only understand once you are in a Board Meeting. What often happens (in my experience and with our clients) is that once you've set this time aside, had fun together, eaten a meal, and had a focused reflection, you will end up reaching a moment of emotional clarity where you want to say something meaningful.

Say it.

**If you hold back when that opportunity comes, you'll regret it. Why? Because vulnerability must be met with vulnerability. If your child trusts you enough to be vulnerable, you must reciprocate.**

Have you ever confided in someone and then regretted it afterwards? Have you ever opened your mouth and been met with a blank stare rather than empathy and reciprocal vulnerability? If you haven't, you're lucky because this is an awkward feeling, but if it has happened to you, I'd wager that you stopped being open and vulnerable with that person from that moment on.

Have you ever heard a child or teenager say of their parents, "They just don't understand?" Of course you have. You've probably even said it yourself. The feeling of being misunderstood by one's parents is widespread, and it's usually due to a vulnerability gap. The only way to let your kids know you do understand is to be vulnerable. This means saying what you're holding back.

That authentic statement of love and appreciation you're thinking about (but hesitating to say) could be the game changer in taking your relationship to a new level.

**Fifth and last, you absolutely must have fun on your Board Meeting.** Our experience has taught us that this is a common denominator for successful Board Meetings. The ability to have fun with your children is priceless when developing a deeper connection.

If you can't let go, they will notice. They will notice your stiffness. They may even feel slighted by your inability to have fun with them. They will get the sense that you'd rather be somewhere else. Sadly, many of us have simply forgotten how to have fun, or perhaps we only know how to have fun in an "adult way" – like having drinks with our friends.

One of the best things about having children is that they can teach us to have fun in their way, but to let that happen we must relax, let go, and accept them as our teachers.

Many of us can't imagine letting ourselves be guided by a child because we're accustomed to our role of guiding them, but there is nobody more qualified to teach fun than a child. Every single child is born with a PHD in fun.

**Let them be your teacher.**

They will love and respect you for letting go and playing with them. Don't do it for them, though. Do it for you. Do it because play feels good. Having fun is vital to a successful Board Meeting, so get into your fun zone the moment the Board Meeting starts.

I am confident that, if you follow the three steps to connection and remember these simple rules, you will have an incredible quality time experience with your child.

Enjoy!



**About Jim Sheils**

Jim is known as the “Crazy Glue” for entrepreneur families. His popular “Board Meeting” strategy, along with other simple frameworks, are helping thousands of business leaders worldwide reconnect where it counts the most- at home. Jim’s ability to build immediate trust and create consistent results for his clients (and their children) has given him the opportunity to work with top organizations around the world. Jim has become a leader in the movement to improve education for our children, which is a growing concern in many family circles. Sharing his own family’s journey into alternative education and the creation of his “Education Matrix”, Jim shows parents how to get involved in their children’s education without feeling overwhelmed.

In addition to deepening family relationships and improving education, Jim owns a private real estate company that has done over \$200 million in transactions.

Jim is an avid surfer and enjoys traveling with family and friends, especially his beautiful wife Jamie and their 4 children Alden, Leland, Maggie and Sammy. Jim’s biggest adventure to date: donating a kidney to the greatest guy on the planet, his father.