

## **SIGNIFICANT WORK EARLY IN LIFE: A GREAT GIFT FOR CHILDREN**

*By John O. Andersen*

Our eleven year old daughter Heidi is learning to do the books for the family carpet cleaning business. She is careful, detail-oriented, and very excited about being entrusted with such an important job.

I still check her work, but visualize the time in the not too distant future when she will be able to do it all on her own.

Decades ago when families had fewer material conveniences, less discretionary income, and many more household tasks, it was possibly easier to find real work for the children to do. Milking cows, mowing lawns, churning butter, feeding animals, emptying chamber pots, mending fences--the list went on and on.

And perhaps those children knew their effort was needed; that everyone in the family depended on them. There was nothing "make-workish" about it. Not surprisingly, many of them grew up with a solid work ethic, and became self-reliant adults.

Children intuitively know when we give them important work. They often respond positively to a gift of trust. They want to be involved in our world; to do the jobs grown-ups do. We just have to spend the time to train them, and then give them some real work.

These days, many parents struggle with trying to instill in their children a good work ethic. They enroll their children in all manner of camps, classes, and sports teams. They buy them the clothes, the toys, the cars, the college tuition--everything they're "supposed" to have to fit in, and become "successful" adults.

Yet if children don't learn to work when they're young, to be meticulous, to care, and to be reliable, will all of the purchased advantages still ensure they become true successes in life?

I have my doubts.

Certainly, it makes a lot of sense to give children big responsibility early; to let them know the family truly depends on their efforts. Bequeathing them such a gift may, in the long run, prove to be far more significant than all of the material support we might shower them with over the years.

And in the short run, at least in the Andersen family, now that Heidi is learning the books, I get more time for writing essays like this one.

© *May 10, 2001*

*About the Author:*

*John O. Andersen is the spouse of Mandy. They have a 12 year old daughter and a 9 year old son. They do lots of fun things together like travel, tickle fights, and gardening.*

*See more of John's articles at <http://www.unconventionalideas.com>*

*Did you enjoy this article? Please share your reaction by e-mailing me at [editor@unconventionalideas.com](mailto:editor@unconventionalideas.com)*