

Setting Family Goals

Peter and Pauline were writing their New Year's Resolutions. Peter wrote that 2007 would be the year he would get the family out of debt. Pauline vowed to finally get the house redecorated. And their children were dreaming of that trip to Disney World.

Alone in their hopes, they failed to dream together. Odds are that before January is over, Peter and Pauline and their children are going to face some very natural disagreements about the use of resources.

The truth is that few families develop a plan together. Most haven't agreed upon a vision of what they hope to achieve. And where there is no shared vision, there will likely be little shared achievement.

To hear them tell the story, most families I know rush from event to event, from demand to demand, even from crisis to crisis. In many cases, they spend their money and their time with little thought to how these expenditures fit into their long-term goals.

It may be a good idea to give a little attention to the big picture of where we hope our families are going. A recent study revealed that families who establish long and short term goals are more likely to achieve things that are important to them. They tend to manage their finances better. They communicate better around the natural conflicts that arise when goals compete for resources.

And children raised in these families learn a greater sense of control over their circumstances.

How can your family use a team approach to plan? One family I know has an Annual Retreat. They find a time when everyone can gather and invite members to bring their best ideas. Even the toddlers are invited to sit (or toddle) in.

Other families hold semi-regular Family Meetings. Everyone gets to express opinions: What do we want to see happen? What is possible? What steps will be necessary for success?

One family wanted to buy a stereo system. Everyone (kids included) gave up one thing each week to make regular contributions to the Stereo Account. It was quite a celebration when they brought that sound system home, including a CD handpicked by each family member.

Another household agreed together to take on a charitable project. These plans require commitment, but bring many families closer to their ultimate goals.

What do you really hope your family will achieve together? Do others in your family share your dreams?

Perhaps the coolest part of belonging to a family is that, no matter what, you've always got a team to back you. So when you're formulating your dreams for the future, the important thing is that—win or lose—you're in it together.

How's that for a home-court advantage?