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Peggy Drexler

A Fathers Instruction Manual: Walking The Line Between Devotion And Direction

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Ironically, many women who have the strongest relationships with their fathers also have the hardest time finding their own place and voice.

It's a fine line between unconditional support and overwhelming direction. He wants the best for you. But who defines what "best" means?

There is a difficult emotional terrain when a father's interest in his daughter's life extends to trying to control it. How does a daughter balance intimacy and independence?

Little girls love to please dad -- make him happy, make him laugh, make him proud.

But little girls grow up.

They become women who want to make their own decisions and make their own mistakes. When dad stays involved -- particularly as a mentor and guide -- independence can create alienation.

It is important to build a father-daughter relationship that allows you to grow into the life you want; not the one your father wants.

Greater Expectations:

Many women are learning what sons have known for a long time: fatherly expectation can be a heavy load to carry through life.

There's a fine line between mentoring and domination. Is your father pushing you to reach your potential? Or is he making it hard for you to trust your own judgment, learn from your mistakes and think for yourself?

Even when absent grinding criticism, some women find the mentoring relationship can still swamp the ability to lead an independent life.

Dad and Daughter Inc.

Nowhere is the mentoring relationship more difficult than when a daughter takes over the family business -- which recent studies say almost 35 percent of family businesses are considering.

Here the swirling issues of father, daughter and independence become ensnared in - and greatly complicated by - responsibility and money.

When Daughter Does Better, Does Dad Still Know Best?

The balance of power in a father-daughter relationship can also tip toward the daughter -- something very few daughters and fathers had to confront in the past.

Parents hope -- and the economy assumes -- that each generation will do a little better than the generation before them. But the assumption in the past came with a qualifier: sons were the ones who out-achieved. Daughters married those sons.

With economic equality at least in sight and the potential for women unlimited, daughters have joined the ranks of achievers - for the first time, a generation of women is in a position to out-achieve her father.

What happens when daddy's little girl has a bigger life and a bigger bank account than her father ever dreamed of?

For many fathers and daughters, her triumphs are his triumphs; her success is a reflection of all he did to help her achieve it. For a number of women, however, out-performing dad can surface resentment, embarrassment and the awkwardness of a father continuing to give advice about arenas he has never experienced and doesn't understand.

Embarrassment can seep into the relationship in the simple fact that their lives are turning out so differently from their fathers, especially when his life fell short of his own expectations.

Embarrassment can easily turn to resentment.

For other women, the discomfort comes from another place. Their fathers are trying to maintain a place in a life they can't possibly understand.

Parting thoughts ...

- How much of a factor was pleasing your father in your choice of education and career?
- If he was a major factor, are you happy with the choice? Could you tell him if you wanted to go a new direction?
- What does he want to see in your life?
- Are you chasing his expectations or yours?
- Can you feel like a success even if he feels you're not?
- When he criticizes you - is it helpful or hurtful?
- Do you fight back, or take it?
- If you are more successful than he is, do you still value his advice?
- Are you comfortable with the differences in your lifestyles?
- Could you see yourself buying him a car, or helping him with the mortgage? How would that make him feel? How would that make you feel?