

Father's Message to Son Grows into Life Skills Book

By Rodika Tollefson , Scott Turner

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GIG HARBOR — When Dennis Trittin's son, Michael, was getting ready to leave for college, Trittin felt he needed a way to prepare him for what's to come in life. A life wisdom message of sorts.

His idea was to tell Michael about his own life successes as well as include other examples — present him with a summary of what it takes to have a successful life while impacting the world.

"This was going to be my father gift to Michael, to have a series of conversations of these, I call them life pointers," said Trittin, who retired at age 53 from a 30-year career in the investment industry, including 27 years with Russell Investments. "This was really out of a sense of 'your first born is ready to leave the nest.' You have this overwhelming desire to give them the best you have to offer to make sure that the transition is as smooth as possible."

Trittin sat at his computer (on his bedroom floor) one evening, typing away at his ideas, and didn't stop for hours, until he ran out of thoughts. "I was staring at a computer screen with exactly 100 of these life pointers," he said. "... I believe this is all divine providence, how these ideas kept coming to me. It was the most surreal experience."

As he contemplated the results, he realized it was much bigger than a list, and much bigger than his advice to his son. To test the idea that he had the beginnings of a book, he sent it to a few close friends. When he received his confirmation, Trittin was set. He took off for Wisconsin, where the family owns a condo, to take the list apart, categorize it and start filling in the topics.

When he flushed out his writing and ended up with 10 chapters filled with 109 ideas — from how to define success to how to date responsibly — Trittin had a book of practical life wisdom and principles. Although he wrote it for the 18-year-old audience, it turned out as a potential tool for parents, who could apply those ideas when their kids are even younger.

"... The most powerful benefit is going to be in the hands of parents who now have a comprehensive guide to what preparation of your kid, who's ready to leave high school, looks like, what it ought to look like to give them the best chance at succeeding in life," he said.

The book, titled “What I Wish I Knew at 18,” touches on many aspects young people face as they turn into adults, including adversity, personal productivity, spiritual life, relationships and career selection. One chapter is devoted to finances — Trittin’s true area of expertise.

Trittin had tried to initiate an effort for Russell to become a nationwide financial literacy program for young people but there was little interest at the company. Instead he retired and developed that type of program for Lighthouse Christian School, where both of his children attended and he has been involved on the board of directors.

“I was starting to get really burned by how students are not learning what they need to learn about finance ... You can see it everywhere in this country, schools are not offering finance courses,” he said. “People — parents, kids — are making terrible financial choices.”

He said he never intended to write a book, and certainly not a book about life wisdom, but once he did it, things made sense. “I don’t have a Ph.D. in child psychology. It’s just (about) true, honorable ways to live life, to get along with people, to empower people, to take responsibility, with tons of practical wisdom of how to do this or that across all of life aspects,” he said.

He’s exploring a half-dozen market segments for his work, including educational institutions and faith-based organizations. He hopes the books fills in the life skills gap that many young people have as they turn into adults. And he’s already looking ahead to a second book and is working on narrowing down his next angle.

Trittin said he felt guided by God through the entire process, not only as he wrote the book, but as he started thinking about marketing and creating connections. As he wrote the examples and the chapters, he prayed — and the ideas came.

“Honestly, I believe God wrote this book,” he said. “I think He gave me the subject matter. I think He gave me the life experiences and now what I know is, He’s given me the people in my life that I need to know in order to get this message out there.”

For information about Dennis Trittin and “What I Wish I Knew at 18: Life Lessons for the Road Ahead,” go to dennistrittin.com. Check out a video of his story at vimeo.com/19721315.



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