

Can you truly become the parent you want to be?

A writer-turned-coach considers the possibilities

By Michelle Feder

Every year, Mother's Day provides a pretty-in-pink Hallmark moment, but the holiday also makes me think about what it means to be a parent.

I have two sons, who are finishing eighth and eleventh grade. And I'm a writer, so books tend to play an important role in my life. When my kids were little, I often sought insight from the zero-to-five guide, "Becoming the Parent You Want to Be."

I wanted to be patient, despite sleep deprivation, and I wanted the warm, progressive voice of the authors to inspire mine.

Meanwhile, I asked myself, what about the writer I wanted to be? I've written in journals since third grade, and I'm still scribbling. Earlier in my career, I loved the deep dive of magazine journalism: lunging into the core of a story, asking questions, shaping the raw material into mini-chapters, strung by a narrative thread. A journey from the stage fright of the blank page to the frisson of synthesis.

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When my older son turned one, I started writing about parenting, education, and child development. Later, I turned toward writing business stories through the lens of humanity.

I interviewed software development engineers about their career paths. I wrote about the craft of teaching. I wrote articles for teachers, highlighting those who were applying their compassion and craft on behalf of their students, whether they were helping acclimate refugees, or teaching U.S. history with raps from *Hamilton*.

Gradually, I considered widening my career to include academic tutoring, with an emphasis on coaching writing. A clever formula from [Everybody Writes](#), one of my favorite books on business writing, encapsulates my approach to both:

Utility X Inspiration X Empathy = Quality Content

When I begin to work with new students, I feel a spark of excitement. What materials will engage them? What kinds of tools will help them grow? As I prepare for every session, I think about what contribution I can uniquely bring.

To become the coach I want to be, I've been looking at my skill set with new eyes. I'm excited to share what's helped me find fresh thoughts on deadline. But I need to study. I've been training with Wired for Reading, so I can help all students read what they want to read, and write what they want to write.

Back where we started: Have I become the parent I want to be?

My younger son says my husband and I are the Most. Humiliating. Parents. Ever.

"Mom," he says, "You think you are so cool."

"No," I say, sincerely. "I have never been cool." I have a favorite dictionary, and I'm happy to show it to you, any time.

As a parent, you can only do the best you can, for each child, with the information you know in that moment.

Have I become the writer I want to be? There's nothing glamorous in my portfolio, but I play, every day, with words, thoughts, and stories. I've assimilated everything I've ever written.

The writer I want to be is a mentor, opening the door to new voices, whether the door opens wide with the student's enthusiasm, or just a crack, tentative, that gently lets in the light.