

NOVEMBER

# CREATING SYSTEMS FOR HOUSEHOLD TASKS

ACTIVATION GUIDE



homeroom

MARRIAGE & FAMILY MENTORING MEMBERSHIP

OK, now that we've talked about the nature of the problem (the tragedy of the commons) and the reason our culture struggles so much with household tasks (the feeling that families should be system-free zones) we can get to work creating systems for household tasks.

### STEP 1 - PICK ONE PROBLEM AT A TIME

It's tempting once you decide to build some systems to build a bunch at once. This is a mistake. Systems are a big deal and take time to get everyone on board and to get right. We recommend starting no more than one new system per month.

This makes choosing which system to build a big deal.

There are two criteria we use in choosing which problem to address. First, which problem is creating the most chaos and second, which problem tends to repeat with a high level of frequency. For example, the garage being a mess may feel like a lot of chaos but the kids leaving toys out may repeat so often that you choose to start dealing with the toy problem.

Feel free to make a list and rank them but be disciplined to only move onto the next problem when the first problem is solved.

No system will work 100% of the time but a good system should solve the problem at least 80% of the time. Don't shoot for perfection but for traction. 80% is a lot of progress.

### STEP 2 - UNDERSTAND WHAT'S CAUSING THE CHAOS

When you build a system you need to calmly and thoroughly discuss the problem and not lurch to a solution.

Everyone in the family must feel ownership over the problem and the solution.

Give yourself at least 30 minutes to discuss the problem and find a solution.

This can be done at a weekly family meeting or a special meeting to discuss this issue but everyone old enough to hang with this discussion and help implement the solution should join the conversation.

It's good to start with the reason these discussions are worth all of our time.

- We want to create a peaceful, orderly household.
- We want to love each other well by not forcing others to absorb our chaos.
- We want to learn to work as a team to solve our common problems.

Then someone should describe the problem in as much detail as possible.

- How does this problem develop?
- How does this problem impact the family's culture?
- How does this problem affect the family members emotionally?

Have patience with this step. Remember this maxim from Albert Einstein:

**“If I had an hour to solve a problem I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.”**

### STEP 3 - BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS

So remember the first rule of brainstorming, no idea is a bad idea. Get creative. If you hit a rut don't be afraid to turn to google for ideas or post the problem in the Homeroom Facebook group to get a variety of possible solutions.

Look for family consensus.

When it seems like the family is converging on a solution, ask for everyone's agreement.

What I like to watch out for in this step is someone holding back especially if they become negative because they realize this solution may require them to do some work or to sacrifice in some way. Call that out. Emphasize that you are a team, that everyone's buy-in is critical and this is the hard work of what it means for a family team to learn to love one another.

Sometimes we solve the problem in a way that is easy to implement and this can be the final step. But other systems require ongoing effort and accountability. For those systems we have two additional steps.

#### **STEP 4 - TRACKING**

Now we get to the part of what makes this a true system—we must find a way to track our progress.

We have a stack of small whiteboard handy that we use anytime we're implementing a new system.

We find a way to keep track of how we're doing and put the whiteboard in a prominent place.

You can use paper as well but make the system and its tracking as visible as possible.

#### **STEP 5 - REWARD / ACCOUNTABILITY**

When implementing a new system we try and come up with a way to celebrate achieving our goal. Families are a team but we often don't know what it looks like to score, to win and to celebrate. Now that you have a system with specific measurables decide together on a reward for success.

We like to set a goal for our new system that is one week out. If we hit our goal this week we'll get to enjoy a reward together.

The reward creates a positive association around the new system and it gives you something positive to use to remind your team members of why we must stay focussed on this system.

This is another reason why it's best to implement only one new system at a time. Attention is often the real problem. We forget. That's why having your tracker in a prominent place and a reward to strive for is so helpful. Keep track of your progress toward your goal on your tracker.

What if you fail to reach your goal?

Don't get discouraged and **DON'T GIVE UP!**

Have another meeting where you discuss what happened.

Understand the problem, tweak the system if needed, and make this issue your #1 family team focus for another week. Keep striving for that goal until you reach it and can celebrate together.

How long should you stay focussed on this one system?

It's important not to move on until the system becomes an ingrained habit of the family team. This often takes at least one full month. Once we know that this system works and that we all understand it, we finalize the system by creating a consequence for individuals violating the system.

What breaks systems is individuals slipping back into bad habits and that has a cascade effect on the rest of the individuals of the family until you're right back where you started.

## Defend The System!

At our weekly meeting we bring any tracker and hold individuals accountable for breaking our hard won system.

We like to make this not too much of a downer. An example is that our kitchen system requires each person to do one kitchen blitz per week tracked on a whiteboard. Failure to do a kitchen blitz means you put \$5 in the family fun jar.

### THAT'S IT!

Once you've been through this process and tasted some success you not only have solved a major point of household chaos but you are mastering a chaos slaying weapon.

It's important not to overdo system creation. If things are working 80% of the time a system may not be necessary. Systems require a lot of effort to create and maintain but they are far better than living with repeated chaos in crucial areas of a family's life.