

Personal impact



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

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Skills 110-15-12There hasn't been anyone who has had a larger impact on my life than my son, Damian. Since he was a small child, he has taught me strength, endurance and empathy and he continues to teach me daily lessons on how to apply these traits to life. I knew from the day he was born, my life had changed and would continue to grow and change just as the seasons change each year. As I look back on our journey of almost ten years, I didn't realize then how much he would change my life in unexpected ways. I was a paramedic for three years when I found out I was going to be a father. I didn't have a preference of a boy or a girl; I was just concerned about the baby's general health. However, when I found out he was a boy I swelled with the pride of a lion.

Having a medical background, I asked the doctor if I could deliver my son. He thought about it and said, "I guess that would be okay." This added responsibility would further heighten my anticipation of Damian's arrival. I was like a kid waiting for Christmas morning, and he made it a long wait. It was three days past Damian's due date and I was growing impatient; when the doctors finally decided to induce.

He was going to teach me my first lesson of strength and endurance that night as I waited for the medicine to progress his delivery. I waited quietly like a hunter in a tree stand as doctors and nurses monitored his progress. I knew it was time, when the smell of rubbing alcohol and iodine wafted into the room like a thick fog over the San Francisco bay. I was scared, but I knew I had to do it. Somehow I found the strength to deliver my son and this

formed a bond as strong as super glue. His tiny body resting in my arms, made me feel like a hero. To this day, I look back on that moment as a monumental achievement because Damian had already given me strength I didn't know I had.

Thinking that the hard part was over, I took in the emotions around me and I was flooded with thoughts of being a good dad. My moment of elation was interrupted because something didn't seem quite right with Damian. What it was, I couldn't put my finger on, but I expressed my concern to the doctor and was told, "You're just a paramedic, what would you know?" Twelve hours later two doctors and a nurse came in and informed me Damian had Mosaic Down Syndrome. The news chilled me to my core like the wind on a February day in Wisconsin. I wanted to run, I wanted to scream, but I took a deep breath and looked down at my son, that is when I found the courage to endure this new path we were on.

He was small and helpless, but already he was teaching me to be strong for him. The tests of endurance would continue because shortly after returning home from the hospital he would spike a fever. His body was a furnace, hot to the touch and I was worried, but he was calm. His stillness amazed me and helped me be strong. I watched as the doctors poked, prodded and tested him to find the cause of his fever. Even though he was a few days old this stillness helped calm my nerves.

It was like he was saying "Don't worry daddy, I'll be fine." This was just the start of many sleepless nights spent on rock hard hospital beds or cramped in a chair that was two sizes too small. Despite the nights spent

away from home, and the worries that accompanied each surgery and procedure Damian and I would never give up on one another. The many medical procedures and sleepless nights by his side have made our bond stronger because we were there together. Damian also taught me about endurance the summer after he turned three.

I was working in Beloit when I got a phone call from his egg donor, mother, in Milwaukee. She said, "Damian fell down, but he's fine; but he hasn't walked on his leg for the last seven hours." I dropped what I was doing and drove as fast as I could to Milwaukee, cursing his mother the entire way and praying he was okay. When I arrived, I rushed him to Children's Hospital and we found out he had broken his leg. His test of endurance and strength came during the following months when he had to learn to walk with a full cast and by the time it was ready to come off, he was sprinting in the darn thing. Throughout all of the days, months and at times what feels like years spent in doctor's offices and hospitals, Damian remains optimistic and empathetic, even at his young age he is always more concerned with the feelings and well being of others.

There have been countless times when he has stopped what he is doing and asked "Daddy, are you okay?" He just seems to know when I am worried even if I try to put on a brave face. His ability to gauge a person's feelings is uncanny, even in strangers. I will never forget the time we were waiting for yet another surgery that he went over to a little girl who was crying and gave her a hug. It was almost as if he was saying, "It's okay kid, I've done this a million times, you'll be fine." I was floored by his gesture of kindness and empathy towards this scared little girl. Damian

and other kids with Down Syndrome are often characterized as being happy all the time, but boy is that stereotype wrong! Don't get me wrong, Damian is a happy kid, but he goes through ranges of emotions just like the rest of us, and when he gets on a stubborn streak he is harder to move than a mule. I think this characterization stems from the empathy that Damian and other kids like him show.

He is just so in tuned with the feelings of others that it is easy to connect his empathy to happiness. Not only has being Damian's father helped me become a better dad, it has helped me be a better person because I am recognizing my own empathetic feelings towards him and other people. I am able to put my feelings into a better context to help friends and families get through their tough situations because of everything that Damian and I have been through.

Damian's impact continues to guide who I am and who I will become. He has helped me grow into a better dad, a better paramedic and now as I go into nursing school he will continue to shape my life as a medical professional. Having him as a son, impacts my career choices because I can take the life lessons he teaches me and apply them to working in real world situations. Working as a paramedic, I found myself saying sympathetic things like "You're going to be okay" or "I know what you're going through," now I know that people in these situations are looking for empathetic responses instead of sympathy. His lessons on strength, endurance and empathy directly affect my daily life because the relationship between the three elements makes me a stronger person. Damian affects my life in a positive way.

Over the last ten years despite all the emotional and physical set backs, he would never let them get him down. I am inspired by his daily efforts to support his friends and family by being in touch with their emotions. His strength and endurance through countless medical procedures shows courage that some adults don't have. I can only imagine the things to come for us as our relationship continues. I know that I would not be the person I am today if Damian hadn't come into my life. I hope that everyone can be as lucky as I am to have a Damian in his or her life.