

OPEN NINTH:

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

NATIONAL PARENTS DAY – PART 2

FEATURING NJCC JUDGES

EPISODE 157

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(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, and now here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello, and welcome to Part 2 of our National Parents Day podcast. If you missed Part I, don’t worry. These are stand-alone episodes created in honor of National Parents Day, which we celebrated this past Sunday. For those of you who may not be familiar with this holiday, let me give you a bit of the backstory. In 1994, Congress unanimously passed the Parents Day Resolution to recognize, uplift, and support the role of parents in the rearing of children. And President Clinton signed this resolution into law that same year creating National Parents Day. Wanting to celebrate this day, eighteen of our judges spent time in the studio to share with us their thoughts about their parents and about being parents. Part I features nine of those judges talking about their parents, sharing their fondest memories, the influence they had on their careers and the impact on their lives. It’s definitely worth a listen if you haven’t yet. Part 2 features audio vignettes from Judges Christine Arendas, Andrew Bain, Denise Beamer, Michael Deen, Michael Kraynick, Alicia Latimore, Gisela Laurent, Gabriel Sanders-Morency, and Brian Sandor. Each were asked to share their thoughts on parenting, what they thought were the three most important qualities everyone needs to be successful parents, and what advice they might give new parents. We’ll start things off with Judge Latimore who may not have children of her own, but does not think of herself as childless.

JUDGE LATIMORE: I do not have any biological children, but when people ask me do I have kids, I say I have thousands of kids actually. I am very active in any type of activity that involves children. I have godchildren. I have friends who have children who are very close to

me or I am very close to them. I do national adoption day. My favorite assignment as a judge is to be in either juvenile court or be in any type of program that involves children. I'm active in organizations and programs that deal with children. So I don't consider myself childless. If you'll leave your child around me long enough, I'm going to love them until they think I'm related to them.

I think three qualities would be one, just the parents' ability to be a friend with their child while also maintaining their position as the parent and counselor to their child. I don't – I think you can do both. Let me just say, one, I think the first one would be the ability to hold your children accountable for their behavior, to always be willing to sacrifice for your children to the extent that you need to help them advance and make their future as good as you can. But also, patience with your children and accepting them for who they are. Children really need to understand that they can love themselves for who they are. They can also model after those who are positive influences of theirs to them, but I also think it's very important too that they learn independence and what value they bring because of their own unique nature and who they are. And I think a lot of children miss that. They want to imitate those who they see, particularly on social media or on TV and I think we really need to help children to understand, no, the best thing that you can do is be you and bring what God has given you to this earth.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Judge Latimore isn't our only judge to touch upon the impact social media has on children. For better or worse, it has shifted what childhood and the teenage years look like. For many of our judges it looks vastly different from when they were growing up. For Judge Sanders-Morency, open doors and open lines of communication are essential for understanding where kids are coming from and giving them the support they need.

JUDGE SANDERS-MORENCY: Definitely number one, open door. My parents always had that open door policy, meaning you can come talk to me at any time about anything. As long as you're honest with us, we'll always have your back and we'll you know protect you as much as we can. But you know, don't play with us. So being open. The second thing, quality time. I think quality time is special. I remember when my dad lost his job and my mom was working two jobs just to support the family. My dad became like the at-home mom so he was like cooking more. I remember I was doing pageants, so he was like the pageant dad and he would like sell cookies because it was a fundraiser. And he would pick my gowns for me. He was like, you should do your hair like this, and he would take me to cheerleading practice. Like he was super involved. And I just appreciate all the quality time. And then the third, just keeping an open dialogue; just being able to communicate with your child. I think the way I grew up back then it's different from how kids are growing up now. You know, when I was growing up, we didn't have social media. I had a pager. Things are different now. And I think because things are different and because our kids are more exposed to social media, it comes with different issues. And we just have to be, as parents we have to be open to, you know, with communicating with our children and kind of understanding where they're coming from. Be patient. Patience is key. I practice a lot of patience with my daughter because she's young and she doesn't know. And I think even as a judge you have to work on your patience because you deal with so many different people from different walks of life. I'm also involved in teen court so I deal with a lot of teenagers and patience is key. You have to be willing to listen, listen more than you speak because you might miss out on some really important things that that teenager is telling you, certain things that they're going through and they just sometimes want someone to hear them and feel them, and not really talk at them. So patience.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Patience is such an important quality for successful parenting that every one of our judges mentions it. For many, it's the first quality they talk about. Listen as Judge Kraynick shares his thoughts on what he feels are the most important qualities for parenting, starting with patience.

JUDGE KRAYNICK: Patience, patience, patience is critical. My four year old is finally no longer – has finally learned to use the bathroom completely. And you know, everybody told you, we read all the books. It's like, oh, it will happen on their own time, it will happen on their own time. Like, well, when? Why not now? And it finally clicked and thank God, we're moving forward. But patience would be the biggest thing. Number one is patience. Number two, is communication. You and your spouse or your significant other that you've decided to bring a creation, a life, a person into – into the world, you need to be on the same page with that person. Sometimes you have to have hard conversations. You have to have difficult conversations on, you know, religion, or money or schooling, or what are we going to do with the kids for the summer. And at the end of the day, you need to love the person that you're with. It's not always going to be easy. Life shouldn't be easy. It should be full of peaks and valleys because if it was always a high, you'd never have the opportunity to appreciate it when it's a high. Life is set up for those peaks and valleys so that when you're in the bottom, you look up to where you were before and you're like, hey, we can get back there. And when you're on the top of the mountain and you can see everything, you can better appreciate that so that you know, hey, we were down here and now we're up here and let's really appreciate it and enjoy this moment where we're at here. That we're riding high and we can see for miles on end its bright blue sunshine. But when the storms come, you know that you have the ability to weather those things. Have all the fun you want now because travel, go to the places, roll the dice, take the

risks. Go – you want to go walk the Appalachian Trail, go do it. Go do it now. You want to go spend a couple of weeks in Europe, go do it now because when you have kids, it's not impossible to do those things. It just changes the dynamic of when and how you can do those things.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Patience may be at the top of the list for our judges but communication ranks equally as important. Judge Sanders-Morency reminds us how important it is to have open lines of communication between parents and their kids. And Judge Kraynick talks about how important it is for parents to keep lines of communication open with each other. Listen as Judge Sandor reminds us that from the moment they are born, children are learning how to communicate and patience is the key to helping them develop these skills.

JUDGE SANDOR: I think the first is patience. I think that's probably something though a lot of people are going to say but it's just remembering that they're trying to communicate the best way that they know how, that they haven't grown up and developed all those skills that we expect and that we have. And being able to try to remember terrible twos aren't terrible because they want to be bad. It's because they want what they want and they don't know how to express it. So being patient with them. Trying to find things that you do together that are fun. So bringing your fun to your child's fun and then learning what your child has for fun and try to make that fun for you too. So being able to have fun with your child, I think is a great one. And then working, going with patience. Working with your child on those communication skills so that they can help express to you and to other people what is okay and what's not okay. If you're in a co-parenting relationship or a marriage, you've got to have that open line of communication with regard to expectations. This is how I believe we should parent versus this is how the other person believes we should parent because it's so easy for a child to divide. For those that are single parents, it's just making sure you have a support system, not just for your child but for

yourself because you are going to get tired. You are going to get frustrated and if you don't have anybody else to share that with or help you out with it, you're going to end up taking it out on your child. And you know it's just not fair to the kid. And then there are so many people who might be in a situation like I was growing up where you might have a grandparent or another family member that's actively involved that isn't the direct parent. And it's the similar thing to say, hey, I'm mom or I'm dad and my voice controls. I love you and I appreciate the help that you're giving me, but my child needs to know that what I say matters most, but they can look to you for help or advice, but you can't undermine me or contradict me because this is the way that I want to see my child develop.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: When it was Judge Arendas' time to record, she shared her thoughts on when to be a parent to your child, when to be a friend, and when to let go of advice from other parents.

JUDGE ARENDAS: Patience. We'll start with patience. Oh, Lord. Understanding. But I also think you need as a parent to understand where that line is for being a friend versus being a parent. All too often people want to be friends with their children. We have to be a parent first. Because if we're not a parent first, then the discipline isn't there. And to have successful children, you have to have discipline. You have to have boundaries and you have to have respect. And so I think you get that through those three qualities. You know, whenever you attend baby showers, they always have those games and there's always, you know, what advice would you give parents? So this is a perfect question. Because everybody has advice to give. And I would normally give my two cents worth, you know, but I always follow it up with, you have to do what's working best for you and your child because what worked for you know Sandy and her child, or for Mary and her child, might not work for you and your child. And people gave me

advice all the time and I tried to implement it but sometimes it just didn't work for us. So while you can take advice from other people, the biggest thing you need to know is you have to do what works for you and your child and stick with that.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Discipline is always a topic in any conversation about parenting. Up next, Judge Beamer shares her thoughts on balancing discipline, fairness and understanding.

JUDGE DENISE BEAMER: I also think discipline, you know, but also being – I think being fair with them and letting them be kids and understanding that they're kids. And our kids are so young, six, almost four, almost two. I mean, so that's a – it's a rowdy household when we get home. But you know I let them get out everything, you know, they play with each other and roll around and wrestle and they're loud. And sometimes I just have to take a step back and just let them be kids but there does come to a point where I have to be firm and instill some type of discipline and order. And I think kids thrive in that situation anyway, but I had a friend tell me you know, we were talking about how rowdy they get after school when they get home with us. And a friend said, well, A, they're the most comfortable with you and B, they've had to keep it together all day at school. And so this is their time to sort of unwind, unravel, and just get all their jitters out and so I've been trying to just be more patient and let them just be kids. I think for first time parents, the best advice is to put down your phone and be present in the moment. Put down your phone A, because, you know, sometimes, the kids, that's all they see their parents doing. So it's no surprise when the kids are on the screens or on their phone or asking for a phone. I mean, I'm so guilty of that myself. Really, I think that's advice for me. But you know, Grace, she's six and asked me for a phone already and I said, obviously, no. But I just realized it was because she was seeing me on the phone but really being present in the moment. I mean,



when the emails come through, and the alerts, and the tasks, and the jobs, and the responsibility, it piles up. Sometimes for me the best stress reliever is just playing with them, being with them, and talking to them.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Discipline is not just an outside force used to teach children how to follow rules and practice good behavior. As Judge Deen reminds us, it's also an inner force of self-control. Listen as he shares his thoughts on discipline, self-awareness, and how the bond between parent and child never stops growing.

JUDGE DEEN: The first one I would say is self-awareness. You have to be aware of what your strengths and weaknesses are because you're going to get frustrated a lot of the times and you're going to have to know how to act and what and how aware your children are of everything. So that's the number one, self-awareness. Obviously, patience. I think that's an obvious – an obvious one, but I also think – I don't know how to put this in a word, but you have to know kind of when to draw the line. We'll call it discipline. You know, you want to set up a structure for your child where they understand that there are rules in life; that we all have to abide by those rules. And you know they're going to cry and pitch a fit any time they don't get what they want. And in a lot of ways, there's an art in life where we all just have to learn to accept the things in life that we don't want, to ultimately hopefully get what we do want. And kind of balancing that line where she doesn't get too frustrated and too upset but also slowly teaching her that she needs to be disciplined if she ultimately wants to be independent and to gain the trust of others to get what she wants in life. Any time I see a new parent, something that was told to me that I thought was really helpful is when you first have child, you know, you would see in movies and TV that you're supposed to immediately love this child. You're supposed to break down in tears and cry and the bond is instantly there. And in reality, that's not

the case. You're going to see basically this creature that looks like a human knee and is crying and not going to know who you are. You're not going to know who they are. They're just – it's just a complete shock to the system for everybody involved, especially the baby and really that a bond, it's not that you don't love that child at that moment but that bond really starts to develop over time. And it's almost like every year it gets more and more stronger even though at some point you think it can't.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: If love lies at the heart of the bond between a parent and child and it does, for Judge Bain love lies at the heart of parenting. Up next, he shares his thoughts on parenting with love, giving children the space to learn and recognizing their resiliency.

JUDGE BAIN: Obviously, well, love covers a lot things, you know. So love, you got to be empathetic, you have to be understanding, patient. If I was going to say three things, you know, understanding, love, patience, you know, those are all the things that probably make it a lot easier for you to be a parent. Because you know, you got to understand they're individual people, you know. As much as we like to impress on our kids, they have they own personalities, their own likes, dislikes, and they're not always going go to do what you think is the right thing to do. You just kind of have to accept that that's what's going to happen. It's a lot less stressful on you. But they're going to have to learn and you can't be afraid to let them learn. Sometimes they're going to have to stub a toe, bump a head, you know, that's kind of part of growing up. Your child is more resilient than you think. At least, in your, you know, we live in our Westernized culture, you know, we have a lot of helicopter parents and those kind of things going on. But you know the biggest thing that I learned, even before I had kids, just taking care of my cousins, and you know, other like children in general as part of being the youngest of the

cousins, because at the time I was growing up, they were already – they were having kids so I'm more closer to their kids than some of my older cousins. So you end up getting babysitting duties and those kinds of things. But they are resilient people. I mean, even doing prosecutions and you know dealing with other kid cases, they're resilient. And you know you can't take that for granted how resilient they are. So you know – and you're not going – and you're always going to – you're never going to get everything right. Never, never, never, never, like I said, you're never, ever, ever going to get it all right. I mean, just trying to get them out of the house in the morning is always – we're doing this, this is happening, mistakes are being made all over the place, but as long as it's all done in love, it's okay.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Last but certainly not least, we'll hear from Judge Laurent who reminds us that each child is unique and we need to love and appreciate the differences that make them who they are.

JUDGE LAURENT: It's hard being a parent. Patience is so important because you're molding somebody and that takes patience. Love, and that's – love without limits because there's days where children will test your limits and I think that my parents showed me, like even in my times where I defied them and did everything that they told me not to do, they still loved me at the end of the day. And I think that the third quality probably is to have faith. I think you know, I come from a family of faith and you know we don't just do it all on our own, and so I think that families need to, at least I believe, have a strong faith system so that you can trust that things are going to work out well for your child. Because if you try to manhandle your child too much, sometimes they work against you, so I think patience, love and faith. Especially parents of multiple children. I've always heard that children are like the fingers of your hand. Every finger is different on the same hand even though it had the same upbringing, so you know, you love

each one of them and you appreciate how different they are. You know, each child is going to learn differently, is going to absorb differently, is going to have different experiences but you know we are there to love them, guide them, and to be there through that journey. I think that kids will always look back at their parents to see if they have our approval. And I think it's incumbent on parents to make sure that we're there with them on that journey. I think that's the most important part.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: In reflecting on what our judges have said, I wanted to share my own experience with regard to being a parent. The three most important qualities I think are patience, not just patience with your children but patience with yourself. They don't come with an owner's manual. And you need to give yourself some space to be a parent. Also, calmness. Having a quietness of spirit when you are dealing with crises, whether it's crises created by your children or crises that happen to your children, it will help your children respond in a positive way to whatever crises it is, whether it's skinning the knee on the pavement or dealing with a truly horrific situation that they might encounter. And the last important quality I think is a sense of humor. Don't take yourself too seriously. There are so many funny things that happen when your children are growing up. You need to appreciate them and help your children see the humor in life. I also have some advice for new parents. Don't take yourself too seriously. Do not be afraid to own up to your mistakes because you will make them. But also forgive yourself for the mistakes that you made because like I said, children don't come with a manual to help you raise them. You will make mistakes, but children are very resilient and the mistakes can be overcome. Lastly, don't spend unnecessary time on the mundane. Spend time on things that truly matter. Being a parent is one of the hardest but also one of the most rewarding roles in life. And while the journey we share with our children is uniquely ours, it is comforting to know that we are all

on the same path, sharing similar experiences and looking to love and patience to guide us along the way. I hope you've enjoyed this special podcast and I hope you mark your calendar to celebrate National Parents Day each year. Thank you for listening in.

NARRATOR: Thank you for listening to “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” brought to you by Chief Judge Lisa Munyon and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @ninthcircuitfl for updates on new episodes and subscribe to Open Ninth on your favorite podcast service.

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