

## Upgrading the future, one decision at a time

Parenting today is not too different from running a space exploration programme. As far as funding goes, kids and space bots usually cost more than we budgeted for. Despite preparing them with the utmost care and attention, there are simply too many known and unknown variables at play.

How are we supposed to prepare our greatest and most precious investment, our children, for a future that we can't imagine?

By focusing on their journey, not the final destination, because their journey will create their destination.

For a future that will look very different from our past, *Raising Thinkers* identifies the skills in shortest supply for the future workplace, covering the mechanics of high-level, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, decision making and fluid intelligence, and proposes a curiosity-based approach to problems.

Drawing on the latest research in neuroscience and psychology, this book sheds light on what companies are looking for today in their leaders of tomorrow and what nations need most in their entrepreneurs.

For parents scoping the journey of a lifetime, *Raising Thinkers* is an invaluable guide to raising thinkers into 2020 and beyond.



**Tremaine du Preez**, MSc, is a behavioural economist, author and executive coach. Before moving to London, she spent 12 years in Asia coaching and lecturing in leadership, decision science and critical thinking in MNCs, government agencies and on MBA and undergraduate programmes. She designed a critical thinking training programme for the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and is a global faculty member of Duke University's Corporate Education division. She is completing her doctorate in coaching critical thinking.

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# RAISING THINKERS

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Tremaine du Preez

# RAISING THINKERS

Preparing Your Child  
For The Journey Of Life

For Review Only

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# RAISING THINKERS

Preparing Your Child  
For The Journey Of Life

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For Thane, my wisest teacher

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PART 1  
OPERATION  
PARENTHOOD

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **GOING WHERE NO PARENT HAS GONE BEFORE**

You will travel far. But we will never leave you.  
The richness of our lives shall be yours. All that  
I have, all that I've learned, everything I feel...  
all this, and more, I bequeath you, my son. You  
will make my strength your own, and see my  
life through your eyes, as your life will be seen  
through mine.

**~ Jor-El, Superman's dad, 1978**

The desire to understand the origins of our universe is as old as thought itself. We've searched the stars and listened to the darkness beyond for millennia, analysed the celestial crumbs that fall to Earth and pioneered technologies to help us extract the smallest facts from the grandest theories. In the late 1970s a team of European scientists dreamed of journeying through both space and time to land a probe on a speeding comet to find an answer to this oldest of riddles. It was a whimsical idea at a time when mankind hadn't even seen a comet up close. But their

outlandish notion grew and grew with complete disregard for the confines of reality until there was no stopping it. It gathered 250 scientists from 11 countries and \$1.7 billion of funding for a 30-year journey back to the beginning of the beginning.

Christened the Rosetta Mission, the most conceptually and technologically audacious act of discovery ever undertaken: to chase a comet across the galaxy for 10 years with a probe the size of an SUV ricocheting across our inner solar system at speeds of 66,000 kilometres per hour through megalithic asteroid belts, ice, gas, dust and whatever else is out there. After 19 years of research, committees, permissions and setbacks, it was done. The Rosetta probe was launched in 2004 on an unknowable journey that would, hopefully, last a full decade.

For three years of that journey Rosetta slept in deep space hibernation, alone in a faraway orbit, in the coldest regions of space, 520 million kilometres from home. Then in 2011, she woke herself up and figured out where she was in space by comparing what she saw with stellar images stored in her databank. After hours of searching she finally found Earth and called home, “Hello it’s Rosetta. I’m fine, I’ve just woken up and here I am.” Mission control in Germany couldn’t have been happier or more proud.

In November 2014, Rosetta reached her target, her raison d’être, in the outer reaches of our solar system – an ice and dust ball a mere four kilometres wide, tearing through space 130 times faster than the top speed of a Boeing A380. Rosetta released her Philae lander to rendezvous with this icy comet known as 67P, and the real work of looking back 4,600 million years to figure out how our solar system developed from ancient primordial chaos began.

Were there risks to this operation? Could the team at mission control have done everything possible to ensure that the mission, their reputations and taxpayers’ money weren’t compromised in any way? Yes, of course there were both known and unknown risks – all of them huge. Despite 19 years of planning and research the team could never have guaranteed the success of this mission. In fact, when Rosetta’s lander reached the surface of the comet, it was greeted with ice and dust far softer than expected. It drifted, bounced twice, failed to fire its harpoons and came to rest in a dark, shadowy crater, well hidden from sunlight. With its last ounce of solar power, it radioed home to say that it was out of energy and shutting down till it found the sun again, or the sun found it.

Parenting today is not too different from running a space exploration programme. As far as funding goes, kids and space bots usually cost more than we budgeted for. The first 18 years, maybe more, are a flurry of designing, learning, testing, correcting and improving the skills and personalities of our offspring. Despite preparing them for the journey of life with the utmost care and attention, there are simply too many known and unknown variables at play for us to be confident that nothing will go wrong. Come launch day we still won’t know exactly what lies out there on their paths. The unknown is risky business and exactly why NASA, the ESA and their global peers employ a team of the smartest brains with specialist skills in every area needed for each project. To quote from their website: “It takes hundreds of people; machinists, engineers, scientists, programmers and many others to get a spacecraft from the planning stages to its



destination in outer space.” The Rosetta Mission took over 1,000 brains to get to launch and even then, success was merely one of the possible outcomes.

Can you imagine the parenting equivalent? Beginning with fertility specialists, a maternity team consisting of prenatal yoga instructor, nutritionist, nursery decorator, financial planner and second-hand car dealer; followed by the prelaunch team of early childhood specialists, paediatricians, fitness trainers, life coaches, caregivers, babysitters, party entertainers – and we haven’t even started on school and extra-everything class specialists.

If you are a parent, you don’t have to imagine any of this – except the government-funding bit. You will already know that it takes hundreds of specialists, project-managed by you, to launch a child on the path to his or her dream. But there is something that the teams at NASA or the ESA do very differently to you and I, something that helps ensure that all those tax dollars result in valuable outcomes to their space programmes despite daunting odds. Before any space agency launches a space bot off into what seems like uncharted territory, the team will already have spent a great deal of time and resources researching and understanding the environment that the bot is most likely to encounter throughout its cosmic adventure. This includes the stresses that its software, hardware and structure will face over time. Materials are selected that can withstand harsh and unpredictable conditions. Failsafes are encoded into software to maintain contact through a range of projected environments and situations. This is all done to give the space bot the best chance of successfully completing its mission. Even then, success cannot be guaranteed.

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The children in our care are being prepared for a life filled with wonders and challenges that we haven’t yet thought possible in a future that will look very different from our past. Most of us were raised in a world where there was only one TV in the house and the phone was either in the hallway or the kitchen attached to the wall with a dangling, twisted cord. Madonna was cool. Mom and Dad wielded parenting skills they had gained over the previous two decades. They didn’t have Google in their pockets to answer our endless questions, but we still thought they were the smartest people on the planet. Now we are the parents raising our children with unparalleled access to knowledge and resources. Thanks to the Internet we have answers to all of their questions, except maybe the God- or multiverse-related ones. For the first few years, we are the smartest people in the world to our children. After that they go straight to Professor Google and a panel of known and unknown peers.

Our generation found answers in the library or from magazines or teachers, parents and friends. Our friends were children we grew up with, whose parents knew our parents. We were all part of the same community, for better or worse. The environment that will shape our children is less tangible, harder to define and influence and more complex and interconnected than ours could ever have been. The nature of a “friend” or trusted resource has also changed dramatically as virtual friends acquire the same status as the flesh-and-blood kind.

We are going where no parent has gone before. I know that I don’t have all the answers to my son’s questions and I don’t know how to make all his really big dreams come true. But I do have an idea of where to start.

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## A note about what this book isn't

This is not a book about being a good parent. I will assume that you are already the best parent you can be. I will also assume that your relationship with your child allows you to influence their life. That the basics are covered and your children are fed a balanced diet and clothed in Baby Gap (just kidding), kept safe in the care of qualified carers and, most importantly, loved as much as you could possibly love another human being. We cannot work together on their higher-order thinking skills if their home base isn't secure.

## And other assumptions I make

Families come in all different shapes, sizes and flavours: one mom and one dad, a single parent, two dads or two moms or any combination of these. Children are raised in homes with one, two or no working parents, with siblings or none. They are boys or girls, homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual sporting a variety of languages, races, religions and nationalities. I will refer to your child or children as *him* or *her* interchangeably and the family as any variation of the above. *Parents* will refer to a child's primary caregiver or givers, related by birth, law or not at all.

We live in a diverse external world, but our internal worlds, drivers and cognitive motivations are astonishingly similar. That is why this book is written for boys and girls, moms, dads and caregivers from Kent to Kansas, Kenya to Korea and every stop in-between. It does not however, cover the complex cognitive worlds of special-needs children.

## 1.1

# SCOPING THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

Any voyage, especially one where the stakes are high and the destination is uncharted, must start with an objective. Only when we know what the purpose of *Operation Parenthood* is, can we scope the mission. Do you, parent of (insert your child's name here), have a very clear idea of the outcomes that you would like for your child? I'm not talking about whether you want little Xander to be a lawyer like his daddy or Anushree a microbiologist. No, what is your mission objective for their lives? Independence? Resilience? Bravery to go after their dreams or fulfil their potential despite limited opportunities? If you don't know what gifts you want to impart to them throughout their childhood, then whatever the school system serves up on either side of their cafeteria lunches will have to be good enough, won't it?

I asked parents from around the world what they wished for their children and here are some of the answers I received.

“That they grow up identifying their unique talents, skills, values and passions and choose to follow that in all areas.”

**Jaime, Australia**

“To be happy, kind, respectful, balanced and self- assured.”

**Maxine, South Africa**

“To find confidence, love, commitment.”

**Kelly, Indonesia**

“Happiness, flow and resilience.”

**Menakshi, India**

“That they find something in life which they really enjoy and have a passion for. And don't fill up with fear.”

**Antonia, Buenos Aires**

“To be brave and follow their dreams no matter what.”

**Karl, Canada**

I used to wonder how *I* would answer this question. In fact, I thought about it a lot. What did I want most of all for my son? Was it as simple as happiness or fulfilment or some other even less tangible quality? If so, how would I give him that? As with

most mental conundrums, the answer came to me when I wasn't thinking about it, on a holiday in South Africa just after my son's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday.

We spent a morning with a falconer along the aptly named Garden Route in the South. A mesmerising, befreckled, red-bearded old man who rehabilitates birds of prey that have been hurt or fallen on hard times, so to speak. Many of their species balance on the brink of extinction with no government protection or funding to raise awareness of their plight. These birds are his all-consuming passion and love of his life. A life that is entirely funded by donations from the public. Is he doing a worthwhile job? Yes. Is he happy? Absolutely. But would I like my son to grow up doing something he loves that is entirely reliant on fickle hand-outs from tourists over a few summer months? Even if it makes him happy? Hmm.

Then I realised that it wasn't happiness or resilience or even finding purpose that I truly wanted to gift him.

What I wanted most of all for my son was for him to learn to make the best possible decisions that he could. Be a good thinker and deliberately curate everything on the path leading to his future, not simply following the capricious current of life. Besides, my husband and I knew that the decisions we had made in the past had created our current reality, and the decisions that we made today would create our future. My son's life would also be guided and determined by the choices he made along the way. Would that make him happy? We hoped so. We hoped that being able to make good decisions about how to spend his time, what to study, what to read, what not to eat or drink and how to

respond to challenging situations in the playground, the campus or the office would make his life a little easier, and maybe, a little happier. The rest would be up to him. And if he chose to be a dreadlocked-bohemian-surfer dude, then at least it would have been a well-considered decision. I hope.

But how could we teach him to make good decisions? Did we even need to? Surely his school would teach him to be a good thinker? We soon found out that, even though school subjects were now considerably cooler than in our day, teaching students *what* to think is still their primary goal. Facts and data are easier to teach and test for. Are primary school teachers even familiar with decision science and critical thinking? Should they be? But were we in a position to teach him how to make good choices ourselves? We'd racked up a fair amount of lousy decisions between us in the past. So lecturing him in the art of decision science, or anything for that matter, would likely backfire before he hit puberty.

What we *could* do was learn as much as possible about making good decisions, thinking about thinking and processing information soundly. Then, and only then, could we coach him. In fact, this is how I came to do what I do as a coach and lecturer in critical thinking and decision making. It was all for my most precious little one – because I realised that I couldn't raise a critical thinker if I wasn't one myself.

Yes, I know, not everyone can devote a decade to thinking and writing about thinking (it's been as cerebral and romantic as it sounds), which is why I have written *Raising Thinkers* as a guide to help you lay some solid cognitive foundations to set your children up for their journey of a lifetime.

So, mission architect, *what* was it that you wanted for your children? Write down your thoughts here, right now, so that you don't forget. If you are reading an ebook, grab a pen and paper because you'll need them again soon.

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As a behavioural economist and lecturer in critical thinking there is zero chance of me forecasting a future based on historical data – my crystal ball doesn't work *that* well. Such predictions would come with a loud thumb-sucking sound and be as pointless as trying to call interest rates in the year 2025 (apologies to anyone who has). But this creates a conundrum for us – how can we understand the forces that will shape our children's future environment and challenges with only historical and current data to work with? Couldn't we rather just sit back and wash our hands of the whole future affair? Leave it to our child's teachers/peers/latest YouTube idol to take care of till she turns 18 and we can tuck her into an escape pod and send her on her way?

This worked out all right for Superman's parents back on planet Krypton. They didn't have 18 years to prepare their son for launch but they did the best they could with what they had. Just before the destruction of their entire planet, they snuggled their new born babe, Kal-El, into a nifty life-support capsule, set his path for Earth and hoped that he would land in loving arms. Wasn't it

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lucky that he landed in a field, on a farm in a developed country where an elderly, kind and childless couple found him and raised him to be a caring citizen and indestructible superhero, capable only of exercising his powers for good? But what if he had landed in Syria, Siberia or the Congo? He would have needed a different set of skills to navigate his way to superhero status and global stardom. Could his parents even have imagined such a setting for his formative years? How are we supposed to prepare our greatest and most precious investment, our children, for a future that we can't imagine?

By focusing on their journey, not the final destination, because their journey will create their destination.

To do this we can start with current information just like the teams at NASA. Gather information and insights that will help us anticipate a most likely range of environments and conditions that our children will encounter along their way. This will also allow us to model a series of obstacles they are most likely to face and equip them with the skills needed not just to overcome challenges but to thrive in a new, unknown world.

So let's explore some fundamental features of the futures that we'll be jettisoning our little darlings into. The skills that they will need in these settings and what can reasonably be expected from education systems across the East and West. We also ask what can reasonably be expected from us, the engineers of their future selves, given our mental frames and abilities.

I'll end each chapter with a note on its key takeaways and thinking points. Hang on to these, they'll be useful as your children grow and your parenting tactics evolve.

## TIPS AND TAKEAWAYS FROM CHAPTER 1

1. What is the objective of *Operation Parenthood* for you? We all want different things for our children. Have you thought about the talents you would like to gift them throughout their childhood?
2. We can't know the future that we are launching our children into, nor the jobs that will occupy them throughout their lives, but we can learn as much as possible about the trends likely to impact their journey through time and help them make informed choices about their future.



## 2.3

### THE CV IS DEAD, LONG LIVE AI

Did you know that it's easier to get into Harvard than Google? Your or your child's odds of getting to work at one of the world's most desirable employers with the all-you-can-eat-for-free organic deli at the Googleplex and its many miniplexes around the world, are 1 in 130. The odds of getting into one of the most hallowed academic institutions known to our generation, Harvard, are a mere 1 in 14. Google gets over 1 million job applicants a year and employs 0.4% to 0.5% of them. Their internship is 2,600% oversubscribed.<sup>1</sup> It must be the free lunches.

In a company that produces the purest, most valuable data that money can buy, it's no surprise that their recruitment processes have benefitted from their lead in analytics. Lazlo Block, their Senior Vice President of People Operations and principal architect of their recruiting process made headlines when he revealed what most Googlers already know: that academic success at college or one's GPA (grade point average) is the least important metric in their interview process. In fact, he went on to say that it is discounted in the final selection stage.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An average of 40,000 applicants apply for the 1,500 positions. The number is rising too.

<sup>2</sup> Lazlo Block gave insights into their hiring process at an interview on March 28, 2013 at *The Economist's Ideas Economy: Innovation Forum* in Berkeley, California

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He didn't say so simply to be cool and contrarian. He doesn't need to because their 16 years' worth of data on recruitment have revealed that there is no link between formal academic success or technical ability and potential to add real value to a company that transacts in new technology. What they hire for is the ability to learn, mental agility and someone who is not held hostage by years of deep specialisation in a particular area.

Google is all grown up now and their recruitment process is unashamedly geared towards identifying candidates who will create the future – without being evil – of course. So when Lazlo Block says they are looking for curiosity, intellectual humility and resilience, he isn't saying so because it sounds all Googly but because he knows this is what has brought them to where they are and will take them forward. Plus, they have found a way of testing for this through their behaviour-based interview process.

Block highlights resilience several times. Someone who has known academic success most of their life has probably never gotten down and dirty with failure and so might well be crushed by it. Internally, Google fails a lot, that's the nature of exploring uncharted territory. Without resilience, no new app or technology would be brought to life.

In a bout of intellectual humility, Block admitted that their previous, infamous, interviewing idiosyncrasies that included asking bizarre questions like how many cows there were in Canada, were one of these failures. "A complete waste of time. They don't predict anything and serve primarily to make the interviewer feel smart," he admits. Well, that's good news, especially if your child wants to work at Google. But what if he

wanted to work somewhere else? Is this discounting of GPAs and 15 years of expensive education just a Google thing? Nope, it seems to be a growing trend. A trend that is sucking the life out of an old faithful of corporate recruiting: the formal curriculum vitae. A relic of the pre-electronic age, it seems to be going the way of big hair and platform shoes as it retreats into the ever lengthening shadows of the digital world.

In February 2015, French cosmetics giant L'Oreal was faced with 33,000 applications for the 70 places available in their Chinese graduate recruitment scheme. At the thought of combing through 33,000 CVs, their recruiters decided that it was time to do things differently. "Don't send us your CV," they announced, "we won't read it." Instead, they directed candidates to three online questions that they should answer instead. Here's one of those questions, compliments of the BBC and L'Oreal: "If you had one month and a 25,000RMB budget (\$4,000; £2,570) to tackle any project your little heart desired, what would you do?"<sup>3</sup>

What? How dare they? There was no call for the name of the school applicants graduated from, their chemistry scores, language proficiency or greatest hopes and biggest failures. The answers to those three questions in 75 words or less were analysed by artificial intelligence. Suitable candidates were then ranked in terms of the qualities most desired by L'Oreal. Only 500 of the initial applicants were invited for Skype interviews thereafter. L'Oreal's recruitment director confessed that CVs don't give insight into what they are really after in students – raw talent.

Unfortunately, all these skills we've been chatting about aren't yet staples in classrooms. But don't worry, I'm not going to suggest

<sup>3</sup> Sudworth, J. (2015, February 25). Can technology identify China's top graduates? *BBC News China*.

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that you crack open the Lego and task your 3-year-old with finding patterns in random heaps of plastic on the rug or see a therapist to get a handle on his temper tantrums. I am going to help you help your children think in alternative ways about information. Especially in areas where you don't know the answer or there is no answer to know. Guiding them into mentally uncomfortable situations armed with a cognitive Swiss army knife is as valuable as the best education your money can buy to prepare them for this brave new world.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tremaine has lived and worked in Asia, Africa and Europe, coaching and lecturing in leadership, behavioural finance, decision science and critical thinking to multinational organisations, government agencies and on MBA and undergraduate programmes. Whilst in Singapore she designed and facilitated a Critical Thinking training programme for the Monetary Authority/Central Bank of Singapore and other government agencies.

She has a BCom in Information Systems, an MSc in Financial Economics, is a certified executive coach, *Huffington Post* blogger and the author and co-author of several books. She lives with her husband, son, spaniel and books, between her head, Singapore and London. She currently travels from London.

Tremaine is founding director of The Coaching Club – offering executive coaching via subscription to organisations serious about maintaining a coaching culture to drive engagement, performance and happiness.

*To find out more, visit [www.TremaineduPreez.com](http://www.TremaineduPreez.com) and [www.CoachingClub.co.uk](http://www.CoachingClub.co.uk). For more resources on raising thinkers and regular webinars, visit [www.RaisingThinkersBook.co](http://www.RaisingThinkersBook.co)*