



**Episode 651: Building Your Family Culture and How  
Strong Families Change the World  
With Family Brand**

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from [WellnessMama.com](https://WellnessMama.com) and this episode is all about building your family culture and how strong families change the world with Family Brand. And I'm here with Chris and Melissa Smith, who are entrepreneurs and founders of the Family Brand and the Level Up Your Family program, which is a movement that's helping families strengthen their bonds, build better relationships, and develop an amazing family culture, which is what we talk about today and themselves while separated, and they nearly divorced years ago. And they decided to change the destructive narratives and rebuild with intention. And now they are helping others take back their families as well. They are parents of five and they host the Family Brand podcast as well. And in this episode, we go really deep on how they got into this work of helping families, the biggest challenges that are facing families today and how we can navigate them, how the idea of more is caught than taught and the importance of modeling as a parent.

And then we go deep on family values and family culture. How to keep your values from coming across as a list of do's and don'ts. Ways to identify and incorporate your family values. How every family has a culture. And figuring out if yours was created by default or by design and how you can either define what your family stands for or the world will do it for you. They talk about their system that I love of weekly family check ins around culture, daily touch points talking about what you're grateful for. Who in the family did something kind for you this week? Who has something going on that week and calendar syncing and if anyone has a challenge or problem they would like the whole family's help in solving. I really love and resonate with their messaging and I think that you will as well. So, without further ado, let's join Melissa and Chris.

Melissa and Chris. Welcome. Thanks for being here.

Melissa: Thanks, Katie. We're so happy to be here with you.

Chris: Yeah, we're stoked.

Katie: Well, I'm really excited to chat because I got to talk to you last week for your podcast, and I'm excited for this to be a continuation of that conversation. I will also link to your podcast in the show notes so people can hear that conversation and all the wonderful conversations you've already had. But I'm excited because we get to delve into parenting and family dynamics a lot today, and I get to talk a lot about physical health on this podcast. And I think this side of the conversation can actually be more impactful even when we're talking about physical health, because I think the tone and the energy of our homes really does come into play. So much for the health of everyone who lives there. And to start off broad for people who aren't already familiar with you guys, I know you have quite an amazing story of how you got into this work, so I would love for you to just share a little bit of your background and how you came to do this family brand work.

Chris: Yeah, we always say it's really three things. I would say one of those things. I had started a coaching consulting company, actually, in Katie's world, working with amazing health experts and healthcare practitioners, and we would help them uncover their identity, unlock their message, and unleash their team. So we'd go really deep on, well, who are you and what do you stand for? And what do you want to be known for? And I've done it with so many entrepreneurs, and I was, like, driving home from the office one day, and I thought, why don't we do this for families? Why have I never taken my family through my own process? And why haven't we, as a family, defined who we are and what we stand for and what we want to be known for? So I ran the idea by Melissa like, we should take our family through the campfire Effect, and she's used to me just throwing around crazy ideas all the time as an entrepreneur, so she was like, sure. And it actually ended up making a really profound difference in our marriage, in the culture of our home and our children, their confidence. And then Melissa had a really cool experience I'll let her share that had her realize, oh, Family Brand is not just meant for well, it wasn't even called Family Brand at the time. It was just this thing we had done. But I was like, we just branded our family. We created the Family Brand, so that's where the name came from. And then Melissa realized it wasn't just for our family.

Melissa: Yeah, I used to work as a nurse, and I had stepped out of nursing for a little while to raise our babies. We have five children, and as I was looking at getting back into nursing as they were getting a little bit older. I think our youngest was three at the time, I was really questioning, do I want to get back into nursing? And I just had this really cool experience where I just felt I would say from God, like, hey, no, this family brand thing. Go all in on go all in on this. Families are lacking resources and this is a really cool resource that you can bring. So I guess I feel like it's my personal mission, if you will, to give families resources to strengthen families.

Chris: Then I would say a third one. There's been a lot of addiction and mental health challenges in my family and a lot of, I've lost two brothers, I've lost a nephew, have a sister in prison right now for addiction. She's doing great. And Melissa and I were like, really? That was a concern of ours. How do we raise children and maybe change that narrative in our family with our kids and rewrite the story? So it's kind of a combination of all that Katie, that was like, let's do something for our family. And Melissa, I talk about this all the time. I'm in the world of entrepreneurship a lot. There's endless amounts of resources for entrepreneurs to improve their business, strengthen their culture, grow their brand, create values. And then I realized families hardly have any resources and we don't see this as competitive. We would love to see way more businesses like Family Brand out there in the world because the amount of families that need help compared to how much help is available is kind of surprising sometimes.

Katie: Yeah, I absolutely agree. There's so many incredible resources for entrepreneurs. And I had a similar conversation with myself, realizing that when we're going into something that in the scheme of things, is much less significant, like starting a business, we make a business plan and we have a roadmap and we have OKRs and we know where we're going and what our values are and what targets we're trying to hit. And yet so many of us enter parenting and raising a family, which I would argue is the most important work we can do in this life, and kind of try to figure it out as we go along. And there's all those quotes about how kids don't come with an instruction manual and I think that's somewhat true, but I think there's also a lot to be gained anytime we can sort of iterate and take the strengths of one system and apply it to another and learn from it. And I love that you guys are doing that with applying sort of business principles to raising a family, because it at least brings so much intentionality to a place that I think is so needed and so valuable. And I also know, and you guys talk about this, there are so many challenges facing families today that we haven't even historically had to face in the past. And so I think this conversation about bringing more intentionality and focus to that is so helpful. But maybe let's delve into some of the challenges that families are facing and then we'll go more specific on how we can approach some of those.

Melissa: Yeah, I think the first thing that comes up for me is so we had our first child in 2007, which I think is not the year the iPhone came out. So I'm like, this is a unique period of time. I feel like so many families have this question of screen time media, social media, and the impacts of that on families are huge. And I think that's something that across the board, people have questions about and just are learning how to navigate.

Chris: Yeah, I would say with that Katie, that has more children, I think, than ever before, questioning their identity. And when I say identity, the identity of do I matter? Am I good enough? Do I have worth? Do I belong? Because I just see social media, even for me, social media is like this massive echo chamber of comparison. I wish I could say that I always consciously get on social media to be elevated and inspired. I just

unconsciously get on social media to compare myself to other people and I catch myself. And I think our poor kids was just constantly being reinforced to them, yeah, you're probably not enough, you're probably not pretty enough, you're probably not smart enough, you're probably not good enough. So we're dealing with this battle of identity, and then I would say we asked most of the moms in our community one time, what's the biggest challenge you face? It wasn't overwhelming. Their response was just time and overwhelm. Just we're pulled in so many directions. And so one of the things that we found is it's really easy if you're not careful to kind of we call it outsource your family. It's like, so, okay, I'll outsource their education to the school, I'll outsource their spirituality to the church or a faith community. I'll outsource their sense of belonging to a sports team. And it's like, none of those things are bad. They're all good. But what if our family is the source and then all these other things pulling at us are the supplements to the source instead of allowing them to become the thing? But, yeah, I just think social media, our kids identity and then just constant noise.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. I had my first child in 2006, so very similar timeline with the iPhone entering the world. And I think the technology is a big conversation for parents today. And I would love to hear a little bit more about how you guys approach that, because with mine, I've figured out some principles that seem to have been helpful. And I know that there's so much to this conversation, but I've even taken some heat, actually online for not posting about my kids, talking about my kids or even showing my kids. And part of that for me was that exact reason of realizing I got to grow up in a world without social media, without having a digital personality before I was an adult. And I got to intentionally choose to enter that world. And I've also, from 15 years in the online world, seen firsthand how it can be amazing, and it can also be there are some people who will say hurtful things and you develop a thick skin. And I didn't want my kids to have to do that at a young age.

And I think the other side of it is this is something our kids are going to have access to their whole entire lives. It's something they're going to navigate their whole entire lives. We certainly can't shelter them from technology. It is part of our world. So I'd love to hear some of the ways that you guys navigate that and help families navigate that.

Melissa: Yeah, I guess I'll just say this. What has worked, we can each share research, but every family is so unique. And what works for us may not be the best answer for you as the listener, but I think that's the beautiful thing about it is that we as parents can trust our intuition and trust that we know what's best for families. So with that being said, something that we do and have chose to do is our kids don't they don't have phones until they're like our oldest son, he just got a phone as he was entering his freshman year of high school.

Chris: Which he, we don't know if it's true, but he kept telling us I'm the only kid who'd left who doesn't have a phone in school. I was going to feel sorry for him about that. And I was like, Good. Okay. Yes. Awesome. And he never loved that response, but kind of like the best offense is a great defense. Anyways, keep going.

Melissa: Yeah. I guess the first thing is that I feel like we didn't want to introduce phones to our children too soon. And then another thing, and again, some of these are not popular mainstream ideas, but we don't have

a gaming system in our house either. I just feel like there's so many ways that predators can get access to our children or just the time suck that I feel like it is for a lot of children. I didn't want that for my kids, and I want them to instead use that time to develop themselves and to do other things that I feel like are going to be more meaningful for them in the long term.

Chris: And I'd also say we fight the battle.

Melissa: Totally.

Chris: We have struggles around screen time with our kids and them wanting more and wanting them to have less and there's that time, too, where as an entrepreneur, you're like, look, I just need like an hour or two here's an iPad. Watch this. And just like, don't come in my office. That's real too, I think, for every family. I also think one of our favorite quotes around family and parenting in leadership is more is caught than taught. So our kids will always learn way more by what they catch us doing than what they hear us saying. And I've tried to figure out who to give credits that quote to, but it's one of those quotes like, everyone claims that it's theirs. So I don't know who originally said, more is caught than taught.

And I've noticed, Katie, that if I'm telling my kids, like, hey, use your time more wisely and don't be on your phone all the time, and then they look over and see me on my phone all the time. And so that's really for me. And I think Melissa really been a wake up call. Like, man, we've got to model this a little bit better. And like you said, it's not something that's going away. And I think it's this challenge of how do we balance technology and how do we balance the idea that people are going to be on screens and yet teach children that their identity isn't attached to that screen, their self worth isn't attached to that screen.

Katie: Yeah, and to your point, I think there's infinite number of ways to do that well, and I think each family will find the way that works best for them. But I love that you guys are having that conversation, and I'm fully in alignment about modeling being so important. I love that idea of caught than taught. I realized this firsthand, actually, with my kids when I was thinking, oh, I hope some of them want to take music lessons. And I kept trying to encourage music lessons, and then I realized, oh, actually, this is because I wish I had done that and stuck with it when I was a kid, so why don't I just do it? And I decided to do something terrifying and take voice lessons. I grew up in a household with two hard of hearing parents, so music was not part of my life till I was an adult. And it was absolutely terrifying, but also amazing and challenging and ironically, through my kids seeing that they now are interested in music a lot more. And it wasn't because I encouraged them to do it with words. It was because I did it myself.

And there's so many quotes along those lines of get busy becoming the person you hope your kids are not, asking them to become that person. I think it's so, so powerful. And yeah, I think the technology conversation is so nuanced and it's walking that line of teaching them how to have responsible access to this incredible tool, because it is. And as entrepreneurs, we use it every day in amazing ways, but also helping them avoid some of the pitfalls. I kind of compare it to the food conversation of I've done so much in the health and wellness

world. But often my stance with that, with my kids, surprises people because I view it as in our home, I make sure we have really nutrient dense foods available and they get to choose if they eat it or not. But I don't forbid any foods. And if they're at a birthday party, I don't tell them they can't have sugar or they can't have food dyes because they're going to encounter those things as adults and they have to learn how to encounter that and balance it on their own.

And I think the same kind of applies to technology. Not to say we don't kind of guide how they're going to do that and control when they're young, their access to it in a way that's safe. But like you said, this is something they're going to encounter. I've talked about it before, but one way I've done this with my kids is to have a rule that it's a verbal contract, that before they can have a phone or a car, they have to have a profitable business for a year. And it doesn't have to be wildly profitable, but it has to show a profit. And I think it's because there's so many lessons that are learned through that hands on entrepreneurship and trying and failing and iterating and having to learn risk tolerance and time management and details and finances that helps them to have some of those skill sets going into the technology conversation.

And I know this is just one small part of the many, many things that we get to guide our children through in their childhood. You guys also talk so beautifully about family culture and I would love to start to delve into this now and maybe just start broad and define what you mean by family culture and then we'll go into some of the directions of guiding that.

Chris: Yeah, and this is some of the work that I was doing and still am doing it with companies. And one of the things that we do is we help them develop an intentional culture. And there's two types of or two things we focus on inside of that culture, a culture of belonging and a culture of performance. So a culture of belonging is man, we feel like we belong here, all of us, and we feel like we're loved and seen and accepted for who we are and we have a voice and then the culture performance is and we can get things done. Like we can operate at a high level. And I actually think that culture performance is made possible by the culture of belonging. The more people feel like they belong, the more they're going to work together. And there was this really interesting study done in this book called *We Are All the Same* by Age Now value Graphics. And it was a business book, kind of dispelling the myth, Katie, that the reason people buy from people is because of their demographic, right?

So for the longest time in business, it's been said, oh, people buy from you because they're a certain age or they're a certain income or they're a certain gender. And this book kind of dispelled that myth and said, no, the reason people buy from you is you share the same values. And so they did this huge study, and they measured like they interviewed about a half a million people all over the world and tried to decide what's the number one value of humanity? And it came back that the number one value, according to their study, over half a million people was belonging. That the thing people want more than anything is to feel like they belong. And I think the same is true in our homes. Like, can we create a culture of belonging where even though all of us are completely different individuals, we still feel like we're loved and seen and accepted for who we are, and that we have a voice and we just feel safe, and we feel like it's a place we want to be and we feel wanted.

That's another thing that I think is interesting, is do our children feel wanted by us? And that's easier to do in a culture of belonging. And so when I think of the idea culture, and most of I've talked about this, what is culture? I think at the end of the day, it's how we treat each other. It's the ways that we interact with each other and treat each other. And one of the categories that we so in our work that we do with families, there's these eight categories that we encourage families to build their values in, and it's all based on research and science. Melissa and I just eight is not our favorite number. We just randomly come up with it.

And one of those categories is “we appreciate” because one of the research shows is one of the things that strong families, according to the research, have is a deep appreciation for each other. Another thing I would say that actually ties in this culture blogging and what we were talking about earlier on Media is, is it safe for us to talk to each other about anything? Like, do we have that kind of culture in our home where we can talk about really difficult things or challenging things without judgment? And one of our family values is Smith can talk about anything without judgment, not because we live it perfectly, but it's somewhat aspirational we hope that around media or a hard thing you're going through or anything that we can just yeah, we can talk. Would you add anything about culture or belonging?

Melissa: No, I think you touched on it perfectly.

Katie: Yeah, I love that so much. I think a lot in terms of 80/20 in business and also in just every area of life. And I think you hit a nail on the head. I've said the similar thing with belonging and significance being very important for kids, and significance, I think, ties right in with the performance side. And it seems like that goes 80% of the way toward really building that culture and helping our kids feel those things and sort of the idea of them making, no matter what happens, knowing that they are loved unconditionally. And I mentioned it on the podcast with you guys, but that's something I say to my kids every day. I love you unconditionally. There's nothing you ever have to do to earn that, and nothing you ever do can take away from that. And I think the not having to earn it part was a part I didn't internalize well when I was a child. And so it's very important to me to make sure my kids hear that and know that.

And now that I have teenagers, one thing I've thought is if anything ever they're in a tough situation or something goes wrong or they make a poor decision that leads to a poor consequence, I hope their first thought is, I want to call my mom, not, oh, I hope my mom doesn't find out. And that seems like it lines up perfectly with that you can talk about anything without judgment. And I think that's a big one that maybe a lot of us didn't get when we were children. And I'm so excited that the conversation now seems to be really shifting to that and to really valuing our children, not as just miniature people that aren't full adults yet, but these autonomous, amazing, incredible humans who we see and value for all of their amazing qualities without discounting any of that because of their age and approaching that conversation with respect.

And I think that helps them to form their own voice and to be confident in it as they enter the world and to have those roots in our family, hopefully in a place where they always feel they can go back to and are safe. I would love to hear a little bit more about these eight categories and also maybe if you're willing to share some of your own more of your own personal values around your family and your culture.



Melissa: Yeah, we'd love to share. And now I'm like, oh, shoot, I'm on the spot. Can I remember all of them? So the first one is we prioritize, and I'm trying to decide if I should go into detail about all of them, but basically it's this understanding that strong families prioritize family. And it seems obvious, but yeah, all the research shows. And when I talk about the research, I guess our favorite study that we found, it was 24,000 family members in 34 countries over, I think, like three decades. So it's extensive, like really good research. And that the strongest families that they actually lived with families, and they followed them again for a very long time and all of the families they defined as strong, they prioritized family.

Chris: And then another thing that I think was really interesting about the research up until that time, most of family research, Katie, was done on what makes families dysfunctional. And the University of Nebraska did this research and they came along and they're like, why are we only studying what makes families not work? Why don't we go out and find families that we believe are working and that we would define as strong families. Let's figure out what makes it so this was like really different research at the time and yeah, that's the most exhaustive we've ever come across. Yeah, we prioritize and then there's we appreciate that. I mentioned, right, as you said in the research, they show a really deep appreciation for one another.

Melissa: Then the next one is we talk, strong families can talk about they talk about big issues and they also just have this running through dialogue about little things. It's just they can have open communication about all things.

Chris: The other category is called we bond. And that was and what was really interesting I love the line out of the research. It said, strong families spend quality time in great quantities, both because even me, as an entrepreneur, I've made the excuse before, like, oh, I'm not spending a lot of time with my kids right now because we got a big launch coming, and we're doing all this stuff. But man, when I do, it's really quality and I get that look, we all have things, we're juggling, it's the balance. But I also realized I don't want everyone that to be an excuse for me. What I want to strive for is quality time in great quantities.

Melissa: And the next one is we believe. And this is about around spirituality and it's something that you share as a family around spirituality. And that can be religion, but it doesn't have to be. It can be something more broad depending on the family. Like we believe we're all connected or we believe we are all one.

Chris: And then we overcome. The research was really clear. Strong families have an ability to just get through hard things together. And it's not that it's not hard, but they can. So we think it's important that families have a value that reminds them of who they are when hard things happen and like what they're committed to. Like, so ours is "Smith's do hard things". Maybe we should have been sharing in these categories. And I can't tell you, Katie, we use that one, I would say every single day, maybe multiple times a day since we've created it. And I also want to point out these aren't values, Katie, and for me that are like, oh, I'm creating these for my kids. I've been as impacted as a human being just individually by these values and thinking about like, something comes up in my work and it's hard. It's like, well, I'm a Smith and Smiths do hard things.

And I also am modeling this to my kids. So are they witnessing me do hard things? So I think where values sometimes get off for families is if values are come across as a rules of like, do's and don'ts in a company or a family, I don't think it's very effective. But if values are more a reminder of who we are and who we're committed to becoming and they help shape our identity, that to me is the power of the values.

Melissa: And then the next one is we move. And this is around health and wellness. However each family wants to define it. Ours is Smiths are healthy and active. And that's just a reminder that we use when we're out on vacation. Like, Smiths are healthy and active. Let's go paddleboarding or let's go for a walk. That's how that can kind of play into our lives. And then also as we're making decisions around food and everything, it's like that internal filter that we have for that one.

Chris: Or like when our kids go to the birthday party, again, we're the same. Like, yeah, eat, like, have fun. And I hope that maybe you eat five Oreos instead of 15, like, whatever that is for you, but you have this little thing like, okay, is Mr. Healthy and active? Maybe I'll rein it in a little. And then we impact this is around that we believe strong families have this commitment, this desire to impact others and give back in the world. And so our value around that is we are committed to elevate and inspire others. And again, for us, our values don't occur for me, like, these are all the things we're doing really, really well. It's more so these are the things that we're committed to becoming. And sometimes we're doing really good in one and we need help in the others.

But what I found, Katie, is these values create a shared language. So one of the things that we talk about, how do you create belonging, a culture of belonging? And we say it's through shared identity, shared language and shared experiences. So the shared identity part is, yeah, we all have our individual identity, but can we create a collective identity that's bigger than any one of us, that we all feel like we're part of? And then the shared language is, do we have words that we can use that remind us of that identity? And then the shared experiences is really, are we living? So are we out doing things as a family together that we're like, oh yeah, this is us living our values or living that identity?

Melissa: I think I would add there too is this isn't Chris and I like dictating to the family what this looks like and what we're going to do. This is very collaborative. Anyone? It's different if your children are. Younger versus if your children are older. But this is a conversation we're in with the kids. What do we believe? How are we going to impact? Yeah, I just want to make sure we add that, that it's a conversation that we're in together.

Chris: When it's really fun the way we have families go through the program. Every child gets the eight categories and we give them about 20 possible ideas under each because that can be overwhelming to like, oh, here's the category, think of a value. And so we give them about 20 under each. And every kid gets to circle their top two and then they come together. So everyone's part of the co creation of what we recommend. And yeah, it just ends up being this really cool process that you created together.

Katie: We have a similar motto in our family of you are made to do hard things. And then I also add the caveat now that they're older, but not everything has to be hard. Like, don't expect challenges where they don't have to be challenges. Sometimes things can work out well the first time. But I love that mindset because I think it puts them in a mindset of kind of the growth mindset and the overcome mindset versus facing a challenge and then backing away. And I also really love that you guys get the kids involved. I think this is a huge key for moms because there's so much around that conversation of moms holding most of the emotional labor and responsibility for a family and that in most cases is extremely true and feels very overwhelming.

And you hear this language a lot of like, my kids helped me or even my husband helped me do this thing, which still maintains that the mom is the one responsible for that thing. And I think when we can bring our children actually into co-creating that culture and feel ownership and autonomy and respect within it, they then are willing to become truly, actually a very valuable part of the culture and everything that needs to get done. This is not mom or dad responsible for everything. And the kids are helping, so they should get rewarded for helping. This is we're all working together toward this common goal and it makes the culture stronger. It makes all of our lives easier and more enriched and healthier by doing so.

I told this, I think, on the podcast with you, Melissa, that my kids. One day I came home from a Podcast day, and they had had what they call an all siblings meeting. And they had basically written literally, a charter of intra-sibling communication and realized, like, hey, Mom's really busy right now with Podcast and all these things that she does, and the kitchen is not always getting cleaned at night, and there's sometimes a backlog there. So how do we solve this problem? And they literally came up with a schedule where each kid had a certain number of meals throughout the week, breakfast, lunch and dinner. And they knew the timeline of when the kitchen needed to be done. So it was like 10:00 a.m.. Breakfast had to be finished. 3:00 p.m. Lunch had to be cleaned up, 8:00 p.m. Dinner. And they all knew.

And so instead of like, you're going to unload the dishwasher, you're going to wipe down the counters, whatever, they each took full responsibility for those meals and making sure the whole kitchen was cleaned, and they keep each other actually responsible for that. And they basically were like, So, mom, you're kind of fired. We got the kitchen. Like, we got it. And they now even help cook meals. And they took the initiative for that. And I will be completely honest, their system works better than the system I was trying to use before that because they have ownership of it and they feel how valuable they actually are to our family culture in that small way.

And now that's spilled over into them taking ownership for other things within the house. And those truly are not my responsibility anymore. They're not helping me. If anything, I'm helping them when I do something in the kitchen. So I think it's part of also really respecting how incredible and how curious and how capable kids are, even from a very young age. And when we don't "baby" them, but we respect how incredibly capable they are, they rise to that in ways that have exceeded what I would have expected from them because they realize how valuable they are and hopefully feel like you guys talk about that sense of belonging in the family and that source of significance and performance and how much they actually do contribute.

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And I also love how you guys talk about how every family does have a culture and how to sort of know what your family culture is and then also to get more intentional with directing that in the way that you want it to go. So maybe let's talk about does every family have a culture and how do you know what kind of culture you have?

Melissa: Yeah, we do get questions like that sometimes, or just observations. They're like, well, we don't really have a culture in our family necessarily, but every family has a culture. It's not something that, even if it's not stated, it's just how you're interacting and how things are running in your family. That is your culture. So every family does have a culture, whether it's been defined or not.

Chris: It's funny, Katie, entrepreneurs used to come to me all the time and say, the problem here, Chris, is we don't have a brand or the problem here, we don't have values or the problem here, we don't have a culture. And I'd always say no. You do. And based on the fact that you're telling me that, it means to me that it's been created by default instead of by design, that would always be kind of my it's impossible not to have a culture in your home. It's impossible not to have values in your home. It's just have they been intentionally created and stated, or do you have is it by?

So that's one of the things Melissa and I talk a lot about is what if we just create our culture by design? What if we create our values by design instead of by default? And one of the things that I say and I know it's kind of bold, but it's like, look, either you can define what your family stands for with your culture or your values, or the world will do it for you, but it's not optional. There's going to be a culture created. And so that, to me, is, yeah, you have a culture. It's just why don't you just define collectively as a family what you want it to be and decide and why don't you decide what you want your values to be collectively and use intentional language? And so I think the key word that keeps flowing around and everything we do seems to be intentionality comes up a lot or by design.

And going back to what we were talking about earlier, about your children, just like, there's something you've done, Katie, in your parenting and in your culture of your home and with your values, that has your children occur for themselves as people who can do things. How powerful is that? How powerful is it for any human being at any age to occur for themselves as I'm a person who can do things, and I'm not saying I'm the best and I'm not saying I can do everything, but I can do hard things. I can think of solutions, and I can bring myself to it and take responsibility and take initiative. That's all created by culture and values. And emphasizing that.

And one thing that this might sound, but going back to also the the benefit of that from a parenting perspective, we just had right before the podcast, our three come in because we're on vacation here at the beach, and they had a spat on the beach, and they're, like, wanting us to referee. In the past, I would have, like, jumped in and refereed and be like, well, you stopped doing that, and you stopped doing that. Instead, I was like, hey, Smith's love and support each other.

And it's such a more effective place for me to come from, of reminding them of really what I'm saying in that is I'm reminding them of who we are. I'm reminding them of the culture we've created, because outside of that, I'm as guilty as I just get after my kids, which usually doesn't seem to have much effect. And so, yeah, the culture is, like, how we treat each other, how do we remind each other? But, yeah, your story to me of what you just said about your kids and them taking charge I would say we don't see it that way. A lot of times. We just see like, oh, that's cool, my kids did that. I see that as that's a reflection of the culture that's been intentionally created and the values that have been intentionally shared. It's not like you do it. And here's the other risk, I think, Katie. Sometimes we create values as a family. We're like, check. We have a conversation about culture and we're like, Check. And it's like, no, this is a conversation we're going to be in for the rest of our lives.

Melissa: We do have this new thing I just put on our website, too. It's really fun. It's a family culture quiz, and it's just like ten questions that kind of hit the highlights of a strong family culture. And then it shoots you out like an answer and then a score, right? A score, yeah. Shoots you. By answer, I mean score. It shoots you out a score just where you kind of rank in those things. And then it'll also send you some information about how do you create more belonging in your home, which is like, we've been talking about, like, the foundation of all of it.

Katie: I love that so much. And one tangible thing I would recommend to other families that was helpful for us in the kind of culture piece is we have what I sort of called our culture wall, where we have sort of our eight sayings that you were made to do hard things, among others, that I did art that went with them. And the quotes are on our wall, so they're daily reminders. And that's in the kitchen where we spend a lot of our time with that many kids that we spend a lot of time cooking and eating food.

We also have the Four Agreement, which was a book that was really impactful for me. We have those written out and hanging in there as well. So they're just sort of in the background, always visual reminders of part of that family culture that we see every day, even if we maybe don't recognize it and read them every day they're there. And they sort of are a good reminder.

We also it's a fun way sort of to tie in that you were made to do hard things. And also one of our values is curiosity and asking good questions. We try to do family challenges, like at least every three months or sometimes every month, where we will learn a new skill together or try something new together that's out of our comfort zone. So that could be things like, we all learned how to solve Rubik's Cubes. We did a chess month, whatever. It is something that's fun that we can do together to kind of touch on that quality and quantity time together that's not on the screen. Maybe it's something active. I learned how to pole vault as an adult, thanks to my kids into one of those monthly challenges and now they all still do it. But I think just fun things like that help just as touch points for the family culture and good little reminders.

I'd also love to talk about systems a little bit because it seems like we've touched on moms being overwhelmed and busy quite a bit. And I know for me personally, having systems in place, even if they were loose systems kind of built on top of the culture, I think it is very much culture down versus tactics up. But I do think once you get the culture piece dialed in, systems can help be a way that you express that reliably. So I would love to hear any systems you guys have implemented or ideas that you have for other families. If overwhelm is something that's a big issue.

Melissa: Yeah, I'd like to jump back really quick. Something you mentioned about just having your sayings on your walls, which is something that we absolutely recommend to every family to have these visual reminders of your values or your meaningful things up in your home. Because I think that that does make a huge difference. And then going forward into systems, one thing that we so we have things that we like to do daily, weekly, monthly, that kind of create ritual, which is another important thing around families, like tradition and ritual around a strong family or is ritual. So daily we actually repeat our family values so they're hanging above our kitchen table. And it's just something we do really briefly in the morning, usually as we're eating breakfast

is we will say our family values together. And we have a wide range of kids right now, ages 6 to 15. And at the time when we first established this, our kids were younger. And so we even have actions that we put to it so that the two and three year old at the time could be engaged in it too. So we have these actions that we do and it's just this fun quick thing that we do to say our family values remind ourselves of who we are every morning.

Chris: And then at dinner every night. That's another thing I would say around the system is we try to eat as many meals as possible. One, because it brings us together and two, the research is just crazy, like some of the research out of Stanford that links teenage pregnancy, addiction, suicide, mental health, just to how many meals a family either eats or doesn't eat together on a weekly basis. And so that alone and it creates an opportunity for us to be together. And we ask three questions, all of us go around and do it. What was the best part of your day, what was the worst part of your day? What was the weirdest part of your day? So we just call it best, worst, weirdest. And our kids love it. They usually fight over who's going to go first. I'm going first for best, worst, weirdest.

And one of the ones they shy away from the most is like, I don't really have a worst part, and I'm always, like, get a meltdown at, like, three whatever. It's like, I know you had something. And I think just again, it's okay to talk about you had a worst part of your day. We can go anywhere. People are always willing to share their best. They're always willing to share their weirdest. And the weirdest can be, it was weird because something really cool happened, or it was weird because something hard happened, but it gives each of us kind of a peek in each other's day. And I think that daily saying of the values, the daily of, like, hey, let's really listen and connect over a meal is important.

And then weekly again, this is a concept we brought out of a business book called The Nine Lies About Work by Marcus Buckingham. And there's two things. One, we do a family check in. So we come together every Sunday as a family, and we really kind of go through four things really quickly. What are you grateful for from this past week? And that just gets the meeting kicked off in a good spirit of gratitude and energy. Who in the family did something really kind for you this week? And that gets us kind of acknowledging each other and remembering that we do kind things and not take each other for granted. The third one is just an essential necessity for us. Who has something going on this week? So we sync calendars, and then the last one has been kind of fun that we've added probably in the last couple of years. Does anyone have a challenge or problem they'd like, the whole family's help in solving?

And that's just kind of like, hey, you have this Braintrust of people here, and you have some people with cool perspectives. Like, if you have a problem or challenge you're going through that you could use the whole family support in. And we've had some really cool conversations, been able to help each other out so that's the family check in, and then do you want to talk about the individual check ins?

Melissa: And then the other thing we do is we take each of our kids, Chris and I, one on one, usually on Sunday, and we ask them, what's important to you this week? How can we support you this week? And then

we write everyone's answers down on a big chalkboard, and that lives in our kitchen as well, so it's something that we can revisit.

And at first, I was just talking to a mom the other day. She's, like, been clunky, like, getting this check in going. But your kids grow to realize, like, oh, mom and or dad, they really value, like, what's important to me. They're here for me. They support me. And we've just found it to be a really cool ritual to do every week with the kids.

And we help them set little goals for the week, too. And then also we bring up if there's something that we see they are maybe like our daughter, for example, she wasn't getting her seatbelt buckled when she would get in the car, so we would issue them a challenge. So usually we'll issue a challenge that week, too. I challenge you to get your seatbelt buckled when you get in the car this week, or something like that.

Chris: And I would say the goals, that was Melissa's idea. It's been really effective for all of us, so we just set them in four categories. So what's your spiritual goal for the week? What's your physical goal, what's your intellectual goal, and what's your social goal? And so all of us just kind of and they're not usually huge, right? But it's just like my spiritual goal is I want to meditate five mornings this week. My physical goal is I want to work out with mom twice this week. My intellectual goal is I want to learn more about this subject.

Melissa: Our six year old wants to learn more about Mongooses this week.

Chris: And then my social goal is I want to write letters to my friends back in Hawaii. I think more than anything, though, Katie, more than what's important to you this week, how can we support you? It's that our kids have started realizing, like, oh, I can count on this time, and we took that out of that book, *Nine Lies About Work*. And what they found was the highest performing teams and companies. The manager of those teams would do a one on one check in with every member of the team weekly. And it created, again, that culture of belonging, like, oh, you see me and you care enough about me to want to come be with me and get into my world a little bit once a week. And because of that, it unlocked this performance in the individual and in the team.

So that's kind of daily, weekly, monthly another thing weekly. Melissa and I have been really committed to this for a really long time, kind of non-negotiable that we do a date night once a week, and sometimes it's last minute, and it's like going through the drive through somewhere, and sometimes it's more about like a date night weekly. And then monthly, we try to take each of our kids on a one on one kid date. I don't take all five and Melissa doesn't take all five, but I'll take three one month, and she'll take two, and then we but each child is getting a one on one kid date. And again, nothing. Like, sometimes we go down to the park and throw bread to the ducks. Sometimes we run to the gas station, get a pack of gum, and sometimes we just go on a walk. But we always talk about. The things that our kids will talk to us about in a one on one is even different than the check ins and a two on one. There's just something about that one on one created time.



Melissa: And I would add here, if you're hearing us talk about this for the first time, it probably sounds like a lot of information, like how how am I going to do this in my family? Like, this is not making it easier. This is feeling overwhelming. So we always tell families, if you just start with what you're already doing, maybe you're already eating dinner together, which is great. So maybe you can just add a little more intentionality there, like asking a couple of questions that you go to. Or maybe it is you do have some family values. Maybe it's like you recite them once a week or something.

Chris: Or get them up on the wall.

Melissa: Get them up on your wall. Yeah. So just starting really basic and not feeling overwhelmed in it, because I think any action you take to bring more attention and more just say more intention is going to be amazing.

Katie: Yeah, I find myself just nodding my head and resonating so much with what you guys are saying and I love that you brought that in as well. The goal of this is not to be perfect or to do everything all at once. It's the small steps toward improvement that can help so much and really just build that culture, which we keep coming back to. And I know you guys have so many more resources available than what we can cover in a 1 hour podcast.

And hopefully this is resonating a lot with other families as well. I think this is, like I said in the beginning, some of the most important work, if not the most important work we do in our lifetime. And I love that you guys bring business principles into something that is the most important work that we do. Can you just speak briefly about the resources you guys have and where people can find them? So if people want to keep going deeper and learning and resonating with us more, they can find you guys.

Chris: Yes, we have [familybrand.com](http://familybrand.com), as Katie mentioned, Melissa had her on our podcast, which Melissa won't stop talking about how awesome that was. So we're excited to have that go live with Katie. So we have our podcast, we have a website, and then if families say and we have a lot of free resources on that website, how to strengthen your culture, how to create more intentional time together as a family, some cool things around meal time. So those are free resources. If a family katie said, I want to actually go through a structured approach and I want to create our family culture. I want to define it. I want to create our values. We also have a program that families can purchase it's a digital program. And if anyone in your community was ever interested in that, we would love to offer them a discount through you.

There's so many things you can do just with the free resources on our website to start building that confidence. And that intentionality. But yeah, all of us at [familybrand.com](http://familybrand.com), if you are interested in going deeper, it's called the Level Up Your Level Up Your Family program. Our biggest thing is we just want families to feel like, man, I have some help. Like, I have some resources, like, I have some things that I can start to use to just strengthen my family. And the other thing I would say is you're probably doing way better than you think. This is an area where especially even for me, with dads, they're just like, I'm a horrible dad and I don't

do enough and I work too much. And I'm like, yeah, you're probably doing better than you think. And yeah, we could all be better.

Katie: And I will make sure those are linked in the show notes for you guys listening. If you are on the go, driving or walking, those will all be at [wellnessmama.FM](https://www.wellnessmama.fm) along with the links to your more involved resources if people want to go deep with their families. And a couple of questions I love to ask at the end of interviews, the first being if either of you, if there's a book or number of books that have had a profound impact on your life, and if so, what they are and why.

Melissa: I think the one that I would say is the last couple of years have really loved *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* by Deepak Chopra. So we moved to Hawaii in 2021. We lived there for a year, and it opened my mind up to a different view of spirituality than I had ever really explored before. And that was just a book that a friend had kind of shared with me and I really love it. Talks all about spirituality and finding your purpose, but from a really spiritual sense. And I've loved that and I read it often, and I love bringing it to my parenting too, with my kids, helping them find who they are and what they want to be.

Chris: That is an awesome book. A couple that come to mind for me, one that's kind of been a staple, is *The Go Giver*. And that book just really changed my perspective on, yeah, the way to have a successful, happy, fulfilled life is to actually give as much as you can like to be a giver. And there's certainly a lot of principles that apply from that book into a family and kind of creating that culture of love and giving. And then one that I'm rereading is the work by Byron Katie. And I've read it a while back and I'm rereading it again now and again. Just so many principles that are useful for your life and also in a family. That's a hard one because there's so many books that I would but those are what come to mind for me right now.

Katie: I will link to all of those as well. I'm excited to check out the *Seven Spiritual Laws*. I haven't read that one yet, but I did love the work by Byron Katie, and I'll echo that recommendation. And funny story, actually. I have said those things from that book enough times to my kids that I had one day where one of my daughters was having a tough day in a meltdown. And my youngest, actually, at the time, who was, I think five, I overheard her in her room, asking her sister like, well, is that true? What else could be true? And I was like, wow, they really do listen to everything we say, even if it doesn't seem like it.

Chris: That's awesome. Who would you be without that thought, right?

Katie: Exactly. Well, this has been such a joy and such a fun conversation and I value so much what you guys are doing in the world. I love it. I'm so glad that our paths have crossed. Thank you so much for your time today and for sharing. And again, all the links will be in the show notes so you guys can continue to connect and learn from Chris and Melissa.

Melissa: Thanks, Katie.

Chris: Thank you.

Katie: And thanks, as always, to all of you for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy and your attention with us all today. We're so grateful that you did and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of The Wellness Mama Podcast.

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