

Book Summary of *Raising a Father*, by Arjun Sen

During my days in the corporate world, some wise, rapid corporate stair-climbing friend once told me, “Arjun, in order to achieve bigger glories, one must make smaller sacrifices in life.” I know he was referring to spending less time with one’s family, not being there for one’s children’s special moments, and similar “small” sacrifices in one’s personal life. Learning from him, I always thought that one needed to make personal sacrifices to make it big in the corporate world. I really wish now that I could reach out and find that corporate stair-climbing friend and others like him. I want to tell him you can have both.

I measure success differently today. My daughter, Raka, will leave for college in two years, and I believe my success will be determined by the time I can spend with her. This is a story of Raka evolving in life and using all her charm, patience, love, and caring nature to teach me how to be a better dad. And a better person. It has been my education of a lifetime.

My world changed one day after most everyone else’s. It was the morning after the tragedy of 9/11, and I was in for the biggest shock of my life.

The day after 9/11, everyone at my company took a forced vacation day. I was at home, alternating between watching the news on TV and the news on the internet. In the middle of this anxious time Raka came and sat next to me. She sighed, looked at me, and said, “You don’t know me, Dad.”

I failed to understand the pain she felt as she made this statement. I felt challenged. Instead of trying to understand why she felt this way, I got defensive. “Of course I know you,” I replied.

Raka thought for a while then got out a piece of paper. She scribbled something on it, and then she gave it to me. She had written three questions. The questions were simple, and I was sure I could handle them. But I still could not believe what was happening: I was getting a surprise quiz. The three questions were:

1. Who is my best friend?
2. What is my favorite restaurant?
3. What is the best thing you and I have ever done?

To make a painful and long story short, I failed every question on my quiz. I was disheartened. If this had been a performance appraisal at a job, the next thing I heard would have been, “You’re fired.”

The message had been delivered. It had been delivered loud and clear. I could see my future life. I would be sixty-five, have tons of money in the bank, and be retired from a very celebrated career. I would have made it onto numerous who’s-who lists, but my life would be about counting days. I would count the days until two annual phone calls from my daughter. One would come on Father’s Day, and one could come on my birthday. They would be brief calls in which she wished me happy birthday, I asked her how she was and she said “Good,” and then there would be a pause. She would say, “Dad, please take care of yourself,” and hang up. I could hear the sound of the disconnected phone call. It echoed in my ears.

That day marked the beginning of my new life. I realized that I’d had my priorities upside down, and I began a serious effort to make sure that vision of counting days to my twice-yearly phone calls from my daughter would never become reality. As I learned more about my daughter and developed our relationship, I found that she was much more capable and responsible than I had ever dreamed. She even became an irreplaceable manager at my new home-based consulting company.

Raka has turned me into a better person. I am more patient with people, and maybe a little bit more caring and compassionate with my team members in my consulting company. It has been a lot of learning so far, but I am not done yet. I still have two more years of daily classes, and I am looking forward to every lesson.