

# “Restitution” Giving by Grandparents

The indulgent grandparent is part of folklore and fact. This behavior has its roots in the grandparents’ late-adolescence and early adulthood, when they were first raising children of their own. Marketers identifying this dynamic and mediating it with well-tailored campaigns will succeed more readily than those who ignore it.

## First, the dynamic:

Arthur Kornhaber, in his book *The Grandparent Solution*, says:

Being indulgent with [grandchildren] gives [the grandparents] an opportunity to make up for what they think they did wrong with [their own children.] It is all about restitution. As grandparents age, they come to realize the mistakes they made as parents. Some are eager to make up for their mistakes and do better for their family.

Renee S. Woodworth, M.S.W., in an article in the early childhood publication, *Zero to Three Journal*, (February/March 1996) says:

Grandparents are a tremendous resource to their children and grandchildren. They often have more to give of themselves at this point in life. We may have done some things wrong the first time around, but we can give more time to grandchildren.

And again, a viewpoint from Jean Giles-Sims, sociologist at Texas Christian University:

Many women between the ages of 40 and 65 approach grandparenting intent on making up for the mistakes they made with their own children during the 1970s. They see this as an opportunity to do things differently...

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, Clinical Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, emphatically states: “Grandparents should indulge their grandchildren - within reason.”

It is clear that spoiling does occur, and should occur, and that the impulse is rooted in feelings of inadequacy grandparents feel about their performance when they were parents. Many authors and social scientists like Kornhaber and Giles-Sims believe this to be true even of those who were the most proficient, economically-well-to-do parents. The feeling is practically universal.



This emotional response stems from a number of things:

- merely being younger during child-bearing years, (as opposed to the more mature grandparent relating to the grandchildren)
- feeling anxious or worried about performing in the parental role without any prior experience at the task
- generally being less economically secure as a parent
- feeling distracted due to job pressure and other social demands at the very time a growing family appears on the scene
- the enthusiasm born of relief that humans feel at being given a “second chance”

The grandparent who interacts with grandchildren is experienced in child rearing, less anxious about doing a good job; economically secure; more mature emotionally, in general; and less distracted.

### **Using these Feelings To Reach The Audience**

No grandparent wants to be thought of as stingy when it comes to a grandchild. However, no grandparent wants to be accused of too much spoiling. All grandparents want to feel as if the way they treat their grandchildren is the sage “middle way.”

Moreover, the self-idealized grandparent wants every consumer choice to reflect the enhanced stature of herself/himself as wiser, more discerning, richer, etc. The grandparent will always know more than her/his child but wants to see that status as benign rather than domineering.

It is important to subtly acknowledge the grandparent's need to “fix” the past by making up for failures as a parent. This is best done by appealing to their current self-confidence, accumulated wisdom as nurturer and consumer; role as elder teacher/ statesman/shaman; tough-to-please consumer, and to their satisfaction with the hard-fought acquisition of leisure time.

The internal monologue the grandparent carries on goes something like this: “You earned all your scars and medals, this time your (grand)parenting performance will be much better. You can’t help its being so. All that experience. It’s only natural. Go ahead, do for your grandchildren – you know exactly what they need. Just don’t overdo it.”