

The Hardest Thing

The hardest things are often the best things.

Parenting is the hardest thing in my life. It's a series of new situations that require new modes of thinking, always in moments where you are too pressed for time to do much thinking. So they are a test of instincts and habits. Whatever gut reaction comes out of you is usually the best you can do in the moment.

This puts enormous pressure on out of the moment self work. You can't wait until situations arise to deal with them (my typical MO) if you want a high probability of a good outcome. Most situations are so new there's no telling what your instinctive response will be, what recesses of your brain it came from, or whether it's what you'd have chosen given time to reflect.

So the best parenting work is prep work. You've got to level up your habits so your gut reaction in the moment is the one you want. This is why subsequent children are easier than the first.

Creativity is tiring. Parenting demands lots of it. (Kid sleep schedules are also tiring. Add exhaustion to the pile of sub optimal decision conditions.) The easy solution is usually less effective than the creative solution. This is where side constraints are helpful. If you commit to abstain from certain actions, it forces you to get very creative with the options left on the table.

Of all the things I do, parenting is the one I'm the least confident of my mastery in.

It's also the deepest and most interesting.