

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Carl tries to motivate his teenage son

TOBY was an unmotivated boy. At least that's what his father liked to tell him.

"You'll never get into an Ivy League school at this rate," was one of the dad's recurring refrains. "And then what will happen to you?"

Toby's father Carl had been the CEO of a start-up. He had graduated from Harvard and come to Silicon Valley to make his fortune, but things hadn't worked out the way he had planned. Carl didn't make his fortune, and in fact had recently been fired by the venture capitalists funding his start-up.

Toby wished his father would get off his back. What Toby really wanted to do was play video games where he could kill everybody, and then rule the world. That was the one thing in his life that felt good.

One day Carl was lecturing Toby on

This is part 18 of a 24-part fictionalized serial appearing in the Daily Post, written by John Angell Grant.

the necessity of learning to multi-task. "You need to understand how to create a schedule for yourself," his father said, "And then to juggle things. Life is complicated."

Carl was told by his golf buddy that he should frequently sit down with his son and explain life to him. That would improve the bonding between father and son, his friend explained.

So that's what Carl was trying to do. "You need to approach life like this," Carl said to his son. "Like a problem to be solved."

Carl took a blank piece of white paper and drew seven columns, in preparation for explaining how life

worked. "Look," he said, "These are the seven days of the week. We'll start with Monday. Monday you have school, from 8 to 2."

Carl wrote a time grid for the week and filled in a blank saying "school."

"Then what do you do after school?" Carl asked. Toby said nothing.

"After school you have French lessons on Monday, from 3 to 4," said Carl. "Right?"

"I guess," said Toby.

"So we write down French lessons, 3 to 4. Here, I want you to do it." His father slid the paper over to Toby. "Fill out the grid. Write."

Toby took the paper from his father, and started filling it out.

"On Tuesdays you have soccer," said Carl. Toby wrote down "soccer."

"At what times," asked Carl.

"I don't know," said Toby.

"Three to five," said his father. "Write that down."

Toby wrote it down.

"I hate you," Toby thought to himself. He had long ago decided that his father was an idiot; and was just pressuring Toby to do things in life that the father felt bad about not doing well in his own life.

"I know what you're thinking," said his father, "So don't." He continued, "Here I am just trying to give you some skills, and a chance of succeeding in life. I'm doing this for you. Why are you so ungrateful?"

Toby just rolled his eyes. "I hate you," he thought.

More tomorrow.