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NECESSITY IS FATHER OR FAITH

I don't really know why I am writing this column other than I feel like perhaps someone out there may want to hear this story, or may be on the brink of a similar decision.

In 1998 I had a successful insurance career in Brazil, running the Sao Paulo office of a British insurance company. My wife worked for a company some of you may have heard of: Procter & Gamble. Two small kids, a boy and a girl, aged three and five completed the picture. My wife was offered a promotion to move to Caracas, Venezuela. I had to make a difficult decision: should I give up my career and follow my wife, or put my foot down and demand we stay put? I decided to move and become a stay-at-home father, in a new country.

I thought it was a "no brainer" at the time. Our kids were growing up. Our hectic schedules were making spending time with them hard, specially for me: my office was far from home and the job required socializing after hours and travel.

When we arrived in Venezuela my son came down with Meningitis within 5 days (he had contracted the incubating virus back in Brazil). I quickly learned a few sharp lessons. First, I no longer had an assistant! It was on me. Secondly, this was a far more demanding job than my former career. To begin with when you work on raising kids, it's not like a work project. If it does not work out, you don't get a second chance to make a pitch next year. The result of your work is not measured in money, profit or savings that can be neatly calculated at year end so the company can see

what a great job you have done. The result of your work will take years to show up and when it does, it is probably irreversible. The pressure to perform is there every day but you never get daily feedback from your "projects"!

My wife was and is enormously supportive. In retrospect it was a huge leap of faith to give the day-to-day raising of children to someone singularly lacking in experience. She has put up with rants and raves and has gently counseled me if I have gone astray. She has been a true partner in the extraordinarily difficult enterprise of raising healthy, principled and interesting children.

OK, so some guys out there are asking, so what did I get out of this? The easy answer is lots of grey hair! Actually I got so much more. I have had a shot at being with my kids every day, teaching them what little I know about the big adventure called life. I get to pursue some of my passions like writing and being a car buff, now they are older. I get to see the fruit of a tree planted under less than ideal conditions, twelve years ago, and it isn't bad. The "no-brainer" became a blind leap of faith, but heaven help me! I'd do it again.