

# **Tackling** **SINGLE** **PARENTING**

**From a Man's Point of View**

A Practical Guide  
for Moms & Dads

*coached by*  
**Steve Horner**

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*To Dedicated Parents Everywhere*



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## The Coach

**Steve Horner** was in the front-line trenches of tackling the demands of work and family as a full-time single parent of his two sons for almost fifteen years: from 1984 to 1998.

As a single parent, Horner worked for several years in corporate America as the sales manager of a Minnesota radio network. In 1987, he created the Steve Horner Corporation specializing in advertising, marketing, public relations, and employee training.



**Parenting coach  
Steve Horner**

In 1995, Horner put his nine-step system for successful single parenting to paper, and began work as a book author, publisher, and parenting coach. The timely and important topic of his books, single parenting, allowed him to secure a multitude of newspaper, radio, and TV interviews, and launch his own radio program. He has passionately hashed out the goals, needs, and concerns of successfully tackling the duties of single parenting with audiences from coast to coast.

In this newest release of his nine-step system for successful single parenting, Coach Steve has the luxury of adding commentary from today's world to his nine steps, first written in 1995. As you examine the parenting problems and solutions of each step, you're bound to draw the conclusion, that more than fifteen years ago, the coach must have been writing from a crystal ball.

Horner was raised with five brothers in what used to be known as a “traditional,” two-parent family in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He served two years in the U.S. Army infantry, including a year in Vietnam where he was wounded in action and awarded the Purple Heart. Later, he attended college in Minnesota and California. His ten-year marriage ended in a 1984 divorce.

These days, more than ten years after leaving Minnesota in late 1999 and hitting the open road, Horner resides in St. George, Utah. He enjoys his work as an entrepreneur, writer, lecturer, community volunteer, and participates in sports and outdoor activities. “My level of success isn’t measured by the amount of money I make,” Horner says, “but rather, the ability to pay my bills and take the time to do the things I enjoy most in life.”

Horner is a former member of the Dakota County Human Services Advisory Board in Minnesota’s third-largest county, and child-care liaison to the state for that county. Over the years, Horner has served (or, is serving) as:

- Community Education single-parent coach;
- Work and Family coach to corporate employees;
- Parenting coach to jail and prison inmates;
- Loaves and Fishes volunteer;
- Veterans Administration volunteer;
- Church lector and usher;
- Cub Scout leader for four years;
- Youth religion teacher for fifteen years;
- Inner-city youth mentor;
- Youth baseball, football, and soccer coach.

**First, an important message from the coach . . .**

No doubt about it, single parenting is a rugged adventure. I know, because I've been there. I know what you're going through. You might not believe me when I say that, or even **WANT** to believe me, but it's true. I was in the front line trenches of balancing the demands of work and family as a full-time single parent of my two young sons for almost fifteen years: from 1984 to 1998. From diapers to high school, I did it all, just as you and millions of other single-parent moms and dads are doing it all. I know the ups and downs, the joys, the loneliness, the money matters, the discipline issues . . . it's all familiar to me because I've been there. Sure, our trail might have been different. That's because parenting comes in so many different packages. There is not one exact way to parent, but I do know much of what you're experiencing. That's why I know single parenting is an adventure, and as with any adventure, it's easy to get lost along the way.

As your coach who's been through the school of "Hard Knocks," it's my job to keep you from getting lost and to keep you on the trail to success, so you and your family will eventually reach your goals. And, like a sports coach who helps you raise your level of performance, I'll be running you through drills throughout each of the nine steps.

Before you begin tackling my nine steps and the drills I've laid out within each step, I want you to get a strong, positive mental image of what successful single parenting is all about. What I'm about to tell you will probably come as a surprise, but it will soon make total sense to you.

Successful single parenting has nothing to do with most information you've ever heard or read before, it's much more basic than that. My nine-step system for successful

single parenting for moms and dads revolves around *culture*. When you boil away all the conversation on single parenting, that's what is left: CULTURE.

If you've been wrapped up in either male or female parenting superiority (are women better parents than men, or vice versa?), please understand, **that is not what my nine steps are all about**. My nine steps concern culture. Culture is far different than instinct. Culture refers to social customs, while instinct is about God-given inborn tendencies. My nine steps, for the most part, are not about God-given inborn tendencies; that information is available from other sources.

Just as cultural differences exist between people of ultra-contrasting societies such as China and America due to unique life experiences, communication experts, linguists, and psychologists agree men are culturally different from women because of *their* unique life experiences. Deborah Tannen, Ph.D., author of the 90's best seller *That's Not What I Meant*, says in her book, "Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experiences." Consider all the experiences women encounter in life that are different from those men encounter and vice versa. Now, consider how these differing experiences establish who we are and how we think.

Many single-parent mothers, particularly when I was single parenting, were raised with dolls, playing "house" and "nurse." Those socially-interdependent roles encouraged nurturing and sensitivity to the feelings of others. As young boys, many single-parent men were encouraged to play with toy trucks, build things, and participate in competitive activities such as "guns" and sports. They were given toys and handicraft that were task- and goal-oriented to foster independence.

A man who, as a teenager, did handiwork around the neighborhood to earn money, would better understand the benefits of applying primer before paint than a woman who, as a teenager, earned money baby-sitting. However, the woman, because of *her* work experiences, would have a better understanding of how to properly feed and diaper a baby than the man.

These days, more young women are actively engaged in handiwork and organized sports than in years past, and more fathers are choosing to be stay-at-home dads, which proves culture is derived from learned experiences. No one is locked into confining cultural molds as long as they have a desire to change. Each new experience offers new lessons to be learned. Certainly, women attending Virginia Military Institute (VMI) which was formerly an all-male military school, will graduate with a different perspective with regard to teaching discipline to their own children than those who attended a traditional college. The public relations director at VMI, Colonel Mike Strickler, explained, “Having experienced such a system, these women will have learned what discipline has done for them, and with most grads it has a positive effect they would want to carry on with their own children.”

As Colonel Strickler indicated, some of the women’s military experiences will prove to be constructive in their future parenting efforts. A study of human nature shows their experiences might yield possible ill effects as well. In any case, their military experience *will* make a difference in their lives, and they will have learned through their own experience, none of us are locked into confining cultural molds as long as we have the desire to change.

As men and women become parents, they take their gender-related experiences into parenthood with them. As a result, both genders have definite behavioral styles that offer distinct parenting advantages and disadvantages. For example, many men are seen as being too tough when it comes to discipline because of their tendency toward task and goal orientation. On the other hand, many women are considered too lenient because of their sensitivity to the feelings of others. Men focus more on independence, while on the whole, women value interdependence. Men are naturally competitive in comparing themselves to others, whereas women typically care more about cooperation than competition.

John Gray, author of the 90's best seller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, states, "Not only do men and women communicate differently but they think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need, and appreciate differently. They almost seem to be from different planets, speaking different languages and needing different nourishment."

Consequently, it would suggest the optimal child-rearing arrangement is for parents of a two-parent family to understand each other's behavioral style, and learn to maintain a *checks and balances* nurturing system. Unfortunately, in the nitty-gritty environment of single parenting, that's a difficult system to follow because of the absence of the opposite gender.

In hindsight, one might argue that I'm quoting outdated resources, Deborah Tannen and John Gray, in order to substantiate my position on gender culture, but that's exactly why I cited them again after all these years: to point out that some facts of life remain facts of life.

Contemporary teachings about single parenting have, for the most part, been unable to offer parents a gender-balanced, broad perspective of the parenting process. That's because most single-parenting material is written by women, providing readers with a female perspective on the subject. Oh, sure there has been material on single parenting written by male doctors or by "self-styled" male experts. In most cases, though, authors of such books haven't participated in the day-to-day challenges and difficulties to which only a full-time single parent can relate. Many of their "expert" conclusions were reached through textbook research and focus groups. It's like the battalion clerk telling the infantryman, "War is hell" as he's sitting in a cushy chair behind his computer—there's a lack of credibility. I represent the unique, male perspective as one man who fully understands the meaning of being a full-time single parent.

Susan Reimer, a writer for the Baltimore News, wrote in the mid-90s about the growing phenomenon of involving men in the parenting process in this story excerpt. Notice that after more than fifteen years, the important issues listed here haven't been changed one tiny bit:

*There is an escalating demand for more involvement by men. It has gone beyond the "second shift" debate that insisted fathers share in the folding of the wash. We are now greeting these guys at the door and insisting that they nurture their children...and that they do it the right way. Our way.*

*"The cultural script for men is confusing," said Wade Horn, child psychologist and founder of the National Fatherhood Initiative. "Studies that look at father and mother behavior show that men and women parent differently,"*

*Horn said. "Fathers tend to be more physical, mothers more verbal. Fathers are more encouraging of independence and achievement, and mothers more encouraging of affiliation. Fathers tend to be strong disciplinarians, and mothers stronger nurturers. Knowing these differences we still say to men: Stop doing it differently and be more like mom."*

*Much of this message of, "Dear, you're doing it wrong," comes from a woman's need to control the child-rearing in the family. Though we want help, we want it done the way we have been doing it for generations.*

*The current welfare debate hinges on the notion that thirty years of the Great Society has rendered the father in our culture superfluous. We are finding out just how wrong we were. We mothers have to be willing to let them do it their way.*

Now, to be quite candid, a lesbian couple with adopted children might find this newspaper story to be offensive, and that's their right. However, this parenting coach continues to maintain that men are not only *not superfluous* as the newspaper writer suggests, but men are absolutely necessary to child-rearing for the long-term welfare of the child. Father absence is strongly associated with high rates of school failure and dropout, early sexual activity and teen pregnancy, youth suicide, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality. Those findings were substantiated in the mid-90s by research at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore, the Connecticut Department of Social Services in Hartford, and the Search Institute in Minneapolis. Outspoken family advocate, Barbara Whitehead, echoed the same alarm to me over the phone back then:



“Seventy percent of juvenile criminals come from homes without fathers.” Lately, I’ve seen numbers that are considerably higher. We all know the numbers are growing.

Placing the blame for society’s problems on single parents is a touchy matter, because over eighty percent of all single parents in America are women, and to point the finger at them seems like one-sided gender bashing, an issue many people would like to avoid. For example, after reading an article which praised the Minnesota Education Association, Minnesota’s largest teachers’ union, I called and spoke to Jeanne Thomas, their vice president and author of the article. When she couldn’t answer my specific question of *how* children are better off academically today than twenty years ago as she claimed in her article, she quickly defended herself: “There are so many single parents these days.” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, I could tell she wanted to retract them. She clearly didn’t want to dwell in the jumbled, blame-game war zone of single parenting, as she hurriedly restated her position: “Kids have a different level of expectation than in years past.” And I’m thinking, lower standards make them better academically?

As with any problem, how are we going to move toward cooperation and find solutions, if we shy away from the complexities of the issue? There is no justification for the denigration of women in the single-parent issue. The blame for the negative fall-out from single parenting doesn’t belong to either gender. It belongs to malice and ignorance on the part of all of us, which is the fault of our culture. There’s that word again: CULTURE.

My nine steps are not a cure-all for the countless difficulties and challenges that come with single parenting. They show women an outspoken man’s perspective of raising

children, while showing single-parent men a road map which unabashedly points out the landmines in this unfamiliar turf.

These nine steps show how one man, a full-time single parent of two boys from their diaper days to high school years, handled the difficulties affecting his family. It's a bold, practical, thoughtful, and inspiring report from the front-line trenches of single parenting. Jane Holleman, a writer for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram emphasized that in the mid-90s, bold, practical solutions to the real problems of single parenting are rare. Once again, you'll see time hasn't changed a thing.

*Oh, help! I'm laughing so hard that I think I might faint. The excerpt I'm reading from a new single-parenting book on discipline is so funny. The excerpt isn't supposed to be hilarious. What makes it so funny is to picture yourself following even one of those parenting guidelines. For some of you out there...you direct descendants of Mary Poppins or Dale Evans...these virtuous notions might work. For most of us, however, the scenario is comedy writing at its best.*

*It offers some ideas on how to avoid having your kids spoil a trip to the grocery store. "If she gets out of control or embarrasses you, take her out of the store or to the restroom and talk to her quietly. Wait for her to calm down no matter how long it takes."*

*I'm confused. Is this discipline or quality time? Has rewarding your kid with your full attention replaced the good old time-out as a parenting method? Today you punish your kid by becoming her hostage in the bathroom? I thought parents owned the control. Guess I'm not an expert yet.*

*Parenting experts. I know they don't mean to be tongue-in-cheek. But down here in the mommy-daddy trenches, it sure sounds as if some of them are head-in-the-clouds.*

My nine steps do not include “head-in-the-clouds” parenting drills; they provide solutions to the problems of single parenting that helped my family become more effective, productive, and content in today’s fast-paced, complicated, wacky society. Some parents disagree with many of my parenting techniques, but that’s understandable; parenting styles are as unique as each one of us. Nevertheless, whether you agree or disagree with my parenting principles and techniques, they still provide viable options for single parents to explore in their daily efforts to be more effective and productive.

By the way, this system is referred to as step-by-step, because the nine steps are arranged in sequential order like the steps on a staircase: each step is supported by the merits and strengths of the preceding one.

Before you tackle Step One and the drills that go with it, I want you to know that if something seems confusing to you, it’s best to go back and reacquaint yourself with the text. Get to know what each drill is all about before you continue. That way, you and your family will get to the top of your game, and that’s what I want for you, because I’m the coach who’s on your side. I’m the coach who wants you and your family to win.

*Coach Steve*