

# Pass It On®...

## The Key to Life.

*Father-and-son locksmiths Phil and Philip Mortillaro share the simple wisdom of being happy. From the StoryCorps collection.*

Phil Mortillaro is the son of immigrants. He has worked as a locksmith since he left school in the eighth grade. All five of his children grew up watching their father work hard in his Greenwich Village shop, but only his youngest son followed in his footsteps and became a locksmith as well.

As wave after wave of immigrants have found new lives in this country, their stories have inspired the generations that started here, in a new place, with new opportunities and a strong sense of the traditions that shape their families. The Mortillaro children all went on to successful careers, grateful that their father worked so hard to provide them opportunities. But Philip, the youngest, saw a different path.

He reminisces about being raised in the business: "I was literally in the shop from day one. I saw you (his father) in the shop, and I thought, I can do this. I realized that everyone loves my dad. One half of that is because he's a great guy, and the other half is because he is the guy who helps you even when other locksmiths can't."

Phil Senior brightens when he talks about his kids. It's clear that he is proud of them. He has been a good father and made sure they had what they needed to get a good start. He is also part of a very encouraging statistic. According to the Pew Research Center, second-generation citizens improve their lives beyond the level at which their parents lived.

Phil would shy away from taking credit for his children's success. He's just happy they are all doing well. But ask his son what the secret to making it is, and he'll tell you it's all about taking care of other people, being there to help, being fair and treating people the way you want to be treated.

"Coming from immigrant parents, you can never work hard enough," the son says. And it's not the smarts that make a difference; it's recognizing your own abilities and putting them to good use.

"I'm no genius," Phil Senior says, paraphrasing IBM founder Tom Watson Sr. "But I am bright in spots, and I stay around those spots."

The youngest son pays tribute to his father this way: "You raised five kids, and not a single one of them did not want for anything. That's hard to do for someone who just went up to the eighth grade."

Phil Senior counters with, "You do your best, kid. That's what you do. Your honest best."

The work ethic, integrity and sense of responsibility to the future: That's what Phil Mortillaro leaves as a legacy to his children. His son tries to measure up to the expectations every day.

"You are always my barometer. You never let anyone down. That's what sets you apart," Philip says.

From a son to a father, and a father to his family, the key to happiness is to be your best in all situations. That is what opens doors.

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