To thine own self be true

This may all sound like really serious stuff, but played by the right actor, Polonius's self-absorbed, rambling, and dull speech can become *completely* hilarious. *Hamlet*needs some comic relief and Polonius certainly delivers it.

We've all rolled our eyes at our parents before, right? Yep, we thought so. They mean well but sometimes they just drone on and on and on… and on. They love to lecture you, even if you don't need it or have already heard it a billion times.

That's exactly what Polonius is doing here. His son, Laertes, is about to depart for Paris, and he has some dear parting words for him. It's really just a lot of long-winded advice: to listen more than he talks; not to borrow or lend money; not to bling himself out (or be gaudy); and, famously, "This above all, to thine ownself be true."

Basically, he tells his son to be true to himself. Shakespeare's original audience would have understood that someone who is not true to himself is false, or to put it in our language: a phony. If you borrow someone else's money to buy a bunch of cool new stuff, you're really just pretending you can afford all that stuff, since the money wasn't yours to begin with. And Polonius doesn't want his son to forget it.

Sound a little like your parents?

Polonius likes to dish advice, but he sure can't take it. He pays someone to spy on his son and spies on his daughter himself, with a little help from the king. Way to be true, dude. Given Polonius's penchant for spying on his children and Hamlet in order to curry favor with King Claudius, he's not really in any position to be talking about honesty.