

# Character Is Everything

## 15 Articles on Character Education

And Why These Qualities Are So Important  
To Teach Our Students

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## Character Is Everything

For at the least thirty years I have spoken about the importance of character training in our schools. The students that teachers work with may not get any character education in their home, and deciding whether or not something is right or wrong is based upon circumstance or the environment with the color always being gray rather than viewing things in black and white. I have been in schools and have found posters all over the building that state how the school and the district are committed to character education for their students. In the same schools the use of profanity and vulgarity was regularly used without consequence and in one school a fight broke out in the hallway. Different states across the country have mandated that school districts implement a character education program and in some cases a character education coordinator has been appointed to either develop or purchase a canned character education program for district use.

Character truly is everything, but what is character and more importantly what is character education? I really don't think anyone has an answer. But I would like to shed some light on some character qualities and what they really mean. The importance of understanding what the definition of a character quality is something that teachers, students, and parents need to be made aware of. Without a clear definition of what a character quality really means a child will never be aware of when he/she exhibits the quality and a teacher will never have a starting point for how they are going to teach the quality to their students. The most important thing to remember is that good character is not subject to interpretation and is black and white or right and wrong.

**The definition of honesty is a refusal to lie, steal, or deceive in any way.** The opposite of honesty is deception. Often students in school are not as upset that they did something wrong but rather that they got caught doing something wrong. Once they get caught they find ways to either lie about their involvement or withhold information from the teacher or administrator in order to avoid the consequences associated with their wrong doing. The child might disclose information that points to another student or a circumstance in order to justify why they did what they did. Even very young students when cornered by an adult for things like not doing their homework, bullying, or general horseplay will find ways to deceive the teacher in order to avoid getting into trouble.

When given the definition of the quality of honesty at a young age, and when it is taught as part of the general curriculum rather than in some haphazard way the quality will become ingrained in the child and he will begin to understand that by displaying the character quality he will earn future trust, and will be viewed as an honest person.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Compliance**

When I first started talking about the quality of compliance I used the word obedience. I got such a negative reaction from teachers and parents that I had to change the name of the quality from obedience to compliance. It seemed as if obedience was too strong a word and parents and teachers were offended by it. I still don't think that there is anything wrong with the word obedience. Thirty years ago we demanded obedience from children. Today we can't even use the word, and obedience turns out to be the last thing we get from children. Well, what is the definition of compliance? Compliance is when a person does what he is told, when he is told to do it, with a good attitude. And willfulness is the opposite of the character quality of compliance.

Why is it so hard to get children to be compliant with the instructions of an adult? It is the natural tendency of children to want to explore and do things, their natural curiosity is always at work and they believe at a young age that they can do and say just about anything that they want. A parent's first job is to teach their children the word NO. If children don't understand what they can and cannot do, and they don't understand the word NO they will draw the conclusion at a very young age that they can do anything they want. Believe it or not children will draw this conclusion at about the age of two. This is one of the reasons why everyone talks about the terrible two's. Children are starting to walk and have a natural curiosity, and want to explore just about everything, like a hot stove, or electric outlets. They want to pull on the dogs ears, or change the channel on the TV set in the middle of a show, or go into the cabinet under the sink and play with the Drano. If children don't understand the word NO, and more importantly, if they are not corrected for their non-compliance they will begin to believe that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing. Then suddenly mom or dad get to the point that they are fed up with their children's behavior and they start to take things away, or start to scream the word NO which leads to the child crying and throwing a temper tantrum.

I am not sure where adults got the idea that they can rationalize with a two year old and truly make that child understand their adult reasoning. The truth of the matter is they can't. But these same children enter pre school and kindergarten and are behavior problems for the teacher from the get go. These children can't share, stay in their seat, follow directions, or take turns. When they are disciplined for non compliance they scream and carry on like someone is cutting off their right arm. The teacher then begins to believe that there is something medically wrong with these children, like they must have ADHD, or ODD. In reality the children were just never taught the meaning of one little word, NO.

## **Character is Everything – What Is Maturity?**

Most people view maturity as something that happens to all individuals as they grow older. But, in reality being mature is not something that occurs automatically, and while many adults have matured physically, they actually have never really matured emotionally. So what is the definition of maturity? I believe that there are two really good definitions of the quality of maturity. The first definition is the ability to subordinate an impulse to a value, and the second definition is having the ability to cooperate even though one may disagree. The problem lies in the fact that how can one subordinate an impulse to a value if one doesn't have any values or principles that have been adopted to govern one's life? Values and principles have to be taught to a person at a young age and they have to become part of the person's heart and soul. Values like respect for authority, responsible behavior, truthfulness, dependability, and attentiveness can all become internalized character qualities if one is mature enough to realize the importance of incorporating them into one's life and has practiced them long enough to make them a life long habit. So once one begins to develop the ability to stand on certain principles and sees the benefit of these principles, one will grow in the area of wisdom and emotional stature and will be viewed as a mature person by others.

Maturity is really a character quality that has to develop from the outside in first. Maturity refers to the transformation of external norms and rules into internal principles and convictions. Accountability plays a big part in the development of maturity. A child needs to realize what the rules are in his family, school and in society and needs to be exposed to the consequences that are imposed for breaking these rules. A child doesn't have the ability to self generate certain behaviors and must be supervised by an adult and at times forced to do things that he would not choose to do on his own. Norms must be imposed from the outside because a child will follow his natural desires and is really not capable of thinking things through or sacrificing an immediate pleasure for a future good.

Parents wring their hands when their sons or daughters go off to college because of the fears they have that their children will not be able live independently of them. Their concern is that that this young person won't be able to do things in the absence of the parent and will lay aside his/her moral compass to follow his own desires or passions. The parents actually questions the child's maturity and can begin to question their own parenting skills and wonder if they really spent the time needed to build the values and principles into their child's life so their child can survive without parental supervision.

## **Character Is Everything – What Is Proactivity?**

Did you know that the word proactive isn't even in the dictionary? It's a word that is used all the time in society and there isn't even a clear definition for it. I believe that it is an important character quality of merit and that it needs to be defined. So, what does the character quality of proactivity mean? Proactivity is the opposite of reactivity and can be defined as the ability to know one's response before one is faced with a problem. Proactivity allows one prevent some problems from occurring although not all problems can be prevented and some problems come upon us without warning.

The quality of proactivity is in a larger sense related to one's response when one is under stress and how one handles difficult situations. People who are proactive knows how to choose their response in any circumstance because they have a set of values and principles that they have learned that are plugged into their heart and soul. Reactive people on the other hand are very emotional and when they are faced with a problem they become angry, frustrated, depressed and so filled with anxiety that they tend to blame others or circumstances for their problem.

The character quality of proactivity is a learned quality, and perhaps the best teacher is experience or the experiences of others. When I was a very young school administrator I faced all kinds of problems with students, teachers, and parents. To be quite honest I didn't want anyone to come to me with a problem, primarily because I just didn't have the capacity to solve some of the problems that were presented to me. As I grew in my position I learned that what happened today could very easily happen again tomorrow. I learned how to determine my responses before I was presented with a problem, and became adept at student discipline, handling teacher complaints, and parent conferences. I lost my fear of confronting a problem because I already had the answer to the problem before it occurred. I went from being a reactive person to a proactive person and worked to always become part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Unfortunately today children come into school with a reactive nature and lack the ability to share, play in a group, show respect for others, do what they are told to do by the teacher, and to display kind and courteous behavior. They were never taught to use their proactive muscles by their parents who are probably emotional and reactive in nature themselves. I am sure that these same parents were offered instruction by their parents on how to handle difficult situations, but they failed to listen and learn from the experiences of others.

## Character Is Everything: What Is Punctuality

Punctuality is a character quality that gets very little attention. Society today views a person who is 15 minutes late as being on time and has even have come up with a nice little phrase for being tardy, it's called being fashionably late. So what is the definition of punctuality? **Punctuality is the act of being ready to begin each task at the appointed time. The opposite of punctuality is tardiness.** I don't think anyone thinks of ever being exactly on time after they leave high school but today lateness is looked at with a much more relaxed attitude. Many years ago schools used to take lateness much more seriously than they do today. If you have ever been in a high school and observed students milling around in the hall between classes what you would notice is that the students don't start moving to their class until the late bell rings. I have spoken to many teachers who have complained about student tardiness and asked them what they consider late? Most of the teachers said that they consider a student late if they arrive in class about one minute after the bell rings. That's not on time, that's late. Schools today are contributing to the problem of tardiness in society by not holding students accountable for either being late to class or late to school.

A person who is punctual has a high regard for the time of another person. They don't keep people waiting if anything they're a little bit early. Many professions today perform jobs and services for people that don't allow them to be one minute late. The police, the firemen, and emergency medical services can't be late. I'm sure that these professions would not be late or drag their feet in a life or death situations, but the life of another person could be on the line, and emergency services need to move as fast as they possibly can in order to get to the scene of an accident, a crime scene or a fire when they are called.

The teaching profession itself requires a person to be exactly on time. If a teacher is late for his or her class and a fight breaks out between two students and someone gets hurt the school district could be held liable because the teacher wasn't on time for their class.

**They weren't where they were supposed to be at the appointed time.**

The model for consistently having a regard for the time and resources of others is best depicted in the life of Cal Ripkin Jr. Cal Jr. as he is called played in 2, 632 consecutive baseball games over a period of 16 seasons. I understand that he was always the first one in the locker room before a game. He never missed work and was always on time. He is now a baseball hall of famer. The character quality of being consistently punctual is one that should be admired and I believe that it is a required quality to possess if a person is to have a hall of fame life.

## Character Is Everything: What Is Self Control?

Self Control – Exercising restraint over my thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, and motives. The opposite of self control is self indulgence. I believe that this quality is more important today than ever before. The quality has to be taught to children when they are very young and enforced by parents and teachers. I learned the importance of this quality as a young boy attending Catholic Grammar School.

Going to a Catholic Grammar School for 9 years had its benefits. We had to wear uniforms so there wasn't any clothes competition, we went to church all the time so we got some formal spiritual training, you couldn't even think of using profanity because you thought the nuns read your mind and would find out what you were thinking, we learned good penmanship, we were respectful, compliant, and responsible. The crazy thing is no one gave me a choice in any of these areas I was forced to do them. It wasn't like the nun said to me you can go to church if you like, or why don't you try to hold your pencil this way, or is that the way to speak to someone? If I didn't do it the way it was supposed to be done there would be blood stains on the floor, and it wasn't Jesus' it was mine. As I look back at this experience the one thing that I realize is that this type of education taught me something that no one talks about today and that's self-control. The majority of the problems that a person faces in their life are related to a lack of self-control. Everybody either eats too much, drinks too much, spends too much, can't control their temper, lusts after things that they can't have like someone else's spouse, and develops habits that they can't break that could kill them or someone else like smoking or driving too fast.

Now why does this stuff happen? Well I never remember my parents or any teacher in my life saying to me the choice is yours you can smoke or not, or you can lose your temper or not, or you can overeat or not. Self-control is taught. If I did something that exhibited a lack of self-control I got grabbed by someone and got reamed out or in the worst case scenario got clobbered. I was taught to wait on line, raise my hand, take my time, practice until I got it right, memorize, and I got drilled on skills that everyone knew were necessary for life long success. Look musicians practice endless hours to perform a single piece of music. Students study instead of watch TV. Athletes devote years of their lives to prepare for an Olympic event that may last only a few minutes.

The concepts of self-control, delayed gratification and discipline seem so counter to our cultural values. We use our credit cards because we want things right away. We become impatient if we wait more than a few moments at a drive-through at McDonalds. We eat ourselves into obesity and poor health because it feels good, with little consideration of the long-term consequences. Self-control should be graded in school and looked at as a quality necessary for success as an adult. If you or someone you know is having trouble with self-control I have a good friend named Sister Houlihan who still thinks self-control is important. She is 4 feet 8 inches tall and she can still make a grown man hold his pencil the right way.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Initiative?**

When I was working as a school administrator I was walking down the hallway with a student and a teacher one day and saw some garbage on the floor. I said to the student, "Pick that up." The student went over, picked up the garbage, and threw it in the garbage can. The teacher was amazed at how the student cooperated with my request and picked up the garbage. The teacher said to me, "Wow that was great, he just went over and picked up the garbage." The teacher was almost complimenting me for how the student complied with my request. My comment to the teacher was, "Do you think that he would have picked up that garbage if I hadn't told him to?" Unfortunately, the answer to that question is that he would not have.

The definition of the character quality of initiative is: Recognizing and doing what needs to be done before one is asked to do it. The opposite of initiative is unresponsiveness. The idea that a person can survive and succeed in this world without initiative is ridiculous and wrong headed. Having initiative doesn't mean that a person is pushy or obnoxious; it means that a person can see what has to be done and can take the personal responsibility to make things happen. One who possesses the character quality of initiative doesn't allow circumstance or environment to get in the way and doesn't make excuses for behavior, or inability to complete a task. One doesn't allow the roadblocks of life to bring one a full stop, but rather works to come up with a solution to the problem.

During my experiences as a principal and a vice principal I have observed more students who do not have initiative. These students are unmotivated, and really are just plain disaffected in their attitudes about school, work, and life in general. In plain language, they just don't care. If they fail a test, they might claim it's because they didn't have enough time to study, if they are caught doing something, it's because their pencil was stolen. If they are late to school, it's because their mother woke them up late. The scary part is the parents of these children usually support the excuses and find ways to perpetuate the behavior. The teachers and the administrators of these students often fear the parents and give in to the excuses that are used by the students and their parents. This only results in acceptance of the lack of initiative these students demonstrate.

If we want children to develop the quality of initiative they need to be held accountable and they should not be allowed to use excuses for what they are personally responsible for. The quality of initiative is a key character quality that needs to be developed in our children if we want them to manage their lives independently, and if we want them to experience life long success.



## Character Is Everything: What Is Respect?

I was driving in my car one day and was staring at the five bumper stickers that were on the car in front of me. One of the bumper stickers made a lot of sense, it said, "If you can read this thank a teacher." I never had to be reminded of this when I was a kid, I always thanked my teachers but, more importantly I respected my teachers. I didn't have a choice I had to be respectful, I didn't even think twice. I found out very early on as a student that before I had a chance to be successful academically I had to stay in my seat, not talk back, and do what I was told when I was told to do it. I realized that if I made any attempt to complain about my teachers my parents weren't hearing it which really benefited me as a student. Today if a kid goes home and starts to complain about his teacher, instead of the parents saying do what you're told, they can almost begin to complain right along with their kid planting seeds of disrespect in the child's head that ultimately will interfere with the child's academic success. Kids who sense a division of authority between their parents and the school go to school everyday with a poor attitude, and are being programmed for a lifetime of educational as well as employment related problems.

As a teacher and administrator myself I have watched the decline of respect in education today. It's almost as if society wants to muzzle the teacher from saying what needs to be said to a student that will help the student improve academically. Teachers have to measure every word and if constructive suggestion is offered to a student by a teacher it is viewed by the student and his parents as an insult that is going to damage the kids' self-esteem for a lifetime.

As a high school student I was no different than any other kid in school and I tried to get away with as much as possible and always looked to cut corners academically. I was a freshman in high school and I turned in a history assignment to my social studies teacher. This was an assignment that was assigned two weeks prior. I worked on it the night before it was due. Within a day or two the teacher handed the assignment back to the class. My assignment was not returned but, he asked to see me after class. I met with him and he said to me, "What is this, is this all you are capable of, Jimmy you can't b--- s---- a b---- s-----." I was shocked and embarrassed, and hung my head. Finally I looked at him and said, "Can I do it over?" He said, "Can you, are you capable of better work?" I worked on it again with his help and turned it in again and received a B for the assignment. I developed a tremendous relationship with this teacher, and respected him because he didn't feel as if he had to measure his words. I had a high regard for this man's opinion, and didn't even think twice about trying this again.

Unfortunately if a teacher tries to do this today, the kid usually goes home, tell his parents and a meeting is arranged to question or berate the teacher. The sad part is that this allowed to go on, and it is very common place in education and in society today. Schools today are constantly on the hot seat to improve test scores, reduce the drop out rate, and to be in compliance with federally mandated programs that provide government funds.

Everyday on the news deviant behavior is reported in schools with school shootings almost becoming common place. Society wants to level the ground, and create an environment where no one is in charge and authority figures can't even offer constructive suggestion to students and employees to help improve their performance, and are muzzled by the same systems that judge their abilities. The only way students will be successful academically is when everyone involved in the educational process learns to respect the human delivery system, the teacher.

## Character Is Everything: What Is Responsibility?

Educators today are under constant pressure to improve student test scores and to improve student overall academic performance. If a student's standardized test scores are not up to snuff or if students have academic difficulty that can't be explained the principal finds their way into the classroom for an observation, to try and find something wrong with the teacher's instructional methods. The question that gets raised here is who is responsible for a student's academic performance? I was not the very best student in elementary or in high school. I struggled just to get C's and an occasional B and never in all my time as a student did anyone question how good my teachers were, instead I was questioned about what my responsibilities were as a student

As an elementary student my father would know when marking periods were over and when report cards were issued. Once he had that report card in hand he would sit me down and go over my grades. Any grade that was below a C he would ask me what was going on in the class, and what my responsibilities were in order to raise my grade. I remember once I tried to pull a fast one and tell him that the teacher didn't like me. He didn't buy it and told me that the teacher doesn't have to like you and you don't have to like the teacher, my job was to work as hard as I could to understand what the teacher was teaching me. When I was a freshman in high school I failed Algebra I. I went home and told my father that it was no big deal, and that I would take it again in my sophomore year. He said to me, "No you won't, you failed because you didn't apply yourself." I ended up in summer school, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me because the following year I got straight A's in Algebra II, it was a breeze. He told me that he would give me all the help that he could give me but, if I fail I do it on my own, and of course if I pass I do that on my own also. He made me responsible for my own education and did not want to hear any excuses. I have a friend who has a son that I have known since he was 11 years old. I never heard him once complain about homework assignment, not having enough time to study, poor teachers, or that he didn't understand something. He took responsibility for every aspect of his school work. I looked at his high school transcript when he graduated, there wasn't one A, he earned all A+'s. He was the valedictorian of his class, and he is now attending Dartmouth College. Before a kid can be successful as a student he has to be made aware by parents and teachers that it is his responsibility to be prepared to learn and to accept failure as an indicator that they are not putting forth their best effort.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Truthfulness?**

For some reason people in society believe that there is nothing wrong with lying or bending the truth. People can usually find a way to justify their actions by saying, "Oh, that was just a little white lie," and they really do believe that there is nothing wrong with lying. What is truthfulness and why is it so important? The definition of the word truthfulness is earning future trust by accurately reporting past facts. People who are truthful earn trust and are viewed by others as being honest. People's reputations are based upon their ability to tell the truth, and people's lives can be ruined if they are viewed as liars.

How do people become liars? It starts when children are very young. Why do children lie? What keeps children from being truthful when they are confronted by an adult about their behavior? The answer I believe is the reaction that adults have when the children are truthful about their behavior. It is a proven fact that children who are raised in reactive environments become excellent liars, and may even lie to another person when it is just as easy to tell the truth. The fear of a reaction by a significant person in the child's life can cause the child to become a good liar, a person who withholds information, or a con artist who can be so convincing and so charismatic that others just believe that he/she is telling them the truth.

What does lying produce? Lying produces future pain for the person who is not truthful, and a greater reaction on the part of the ones who have been lied to. Those who are untruthful will never be believed again by those that they have lied to. Once caught in a lie, one is labeled a liar. In reality, how many truths will a person have to tell after he or she has been labeled a liar in order to lose the label? The answer is obvious; a person will never again be viewed as being honest or trustworthy again.

Honest people understand that sometimes they will face reactions when they tell the truth, and they have the strength to face the reaction. They are willing to pay the price for their behavior by admitting to any wrong doing. They develop the reputation for being honest and trustworthy, because they have the wisdom to understand that having a good name as a truthful person is more important than temporarily getting out of a sticky situation. That reputation of being an honest and truthful person is something that no price tag can be attached to.

## Character Is Everything: What Is Forgiveness?

The character quality of forgiveness is a tough one for most people to practice on a consistent basis. Most people when they are wronged want to forgive because in reality the reason they are forgiving someone is for their own mental health. Unfortunately a person may forgive another person but may have a tough time forgetting what was done to them. So they bounce back and forth between forgiveness and resentment. **The quality of forgiveness defined is the ability to cease feeling bitter toward one's offender and not holding a grudge against him or her. The opposite of forgiveness is resentment.** Everyone knows that is better to forgive someone, but often a person will say that they forgive another but way down deep they still harbor bitterness. Often that bitterness will rear its ugly head in the form of angry outburst that could be directed at their friends or loved ones, who often wonder why they are so miserable and unhappy.

A person's personality is no more than a compilation of what people have said to them or have done to them over a period of a lifetime. Children at a young age need to be taught about the benefits of forgiveness, but also must be taught how to express themselves and make others aware of how angry they feel when they are wronged by another child or even an adult. Please understand that a balance must be struck between forgiving someone and making someone aware of how their behavior may have affected them. Failing to communicate with a person's offender just compounds the problem by creating greater resentment and future pain. It also can produce a person who is a complainer who does nothing but talks about how they were wronged by another person to everyone else but never to the person who offended them.

Can everything be forgiven? I don't believe so because certain things just can't be forgotten. The prisons are filled with people who have committed horrible crimes against society. Kidnapping and murdering children, unbelievably abusive home lives that have impacted people and that can cause a person to lug the baggage of physical and emotional abuse around with them for a lifetime are all very difficult to strike from a person's memory or from the memory of the family who had to bare the burden of never seeing their child grow up.

Perhaps the best way for a child to learn this quality is for them to understand the benefits of making a positive contribution to the life of their offender, and by being taught how to strike the balance and inform their offender of the impact that they had on his or her life. The character quality of forgiveness is the high ground and must be developed by everyone who wants the benefit of a good night's sleep as well as a positive mental spirit. But let's not feel too bad if when we try to forget our past that our past doesn't forget us.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Resourcefulness?**

"I can't do it" is something I hear all the time from students and even from my own children. Most children don't know how to problem solve and certainly don't understand what their resources are when they are faced with situations that they have never experienced before. Children don't have the ability to be independent problem solvers primarily because they were never given information about their resources and were never taught by adults how to use their resources.

The definition of resourcefulness is finding practical use for that which others would overlook or discard. The definition may not make total sense here, but the opposite certainly does make clear sense. The opposite of resourcefulness is wastefulness. How much time, energy, and money do people waste today? Society today always seems to make statements like I would have done a better job if only I had more time. Students say all the time I would have done better on that test if I had more time to study. How much energy do people waste involving themselves in activities and hobbies that distract them from some real important priorities that involve family or employment? How many children understand the correct use of money or better yet how to make it?

When people don't understand the importance of time or money, they will waste it. Often people will be given resources and really not understand how to use them. All people are given twenty four hours in a day, a certain amount of money, and a certain amount of ability to use in areas of their life. When a person waste or uses their resources incorrectly, problems will always occur in areas such as employment, family, and in their attitude about life.

I was working as a Vice-Principal in a small school. I asked my boss who was the Principal if he thought I was ready to become a Principal? He responded to me by saying, "It's not whether or not you are ready to be a principal, it's whether or not you understand what your resources are." Being resourceful means that you know what resources are at your disposal and then using them to solve a problem or the problems of another person. One of the most irresponsible things that one can do is to have all the resources at one's disposal and then waste them or use them incorrectly. A person's money, time, and abilities are all daily gifts that are given to him and should be appreciated and used correctly.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Gratefulness?**

Children today have what I call an entitlement mentality. Often they believe that what ever they have gotten or are going to get they were entitled to. Children who get what they want when they want it never develop a grateful attitude, and are never happy with what they have. In fact as soon as they get what they want they may appear happy for a while but it is only a short time before they are ungrateful for what they have and look for something else to make them happy. It's almost as if that there is a giant hole in the middle of the child that can never be filled by anything, or anyone. The definition of gratefulness is having the ability to let others know by my words and actions how they have benefited my life. The opposite of gratefulness is unthankfulness. Often people wonder why others don't appreciate them or seem ungrateful towards them no matter what they say or do. Parents wonder how their children became so ungrateful even though they have given them everything. Many people go through life without ever feeling appreciated or acknowledged. The person who feels unappreciated needs to ask themselves how much time do they spend praising others, speaking kind words, displaying kind actions or just sending a simple thank you note to a person letting them know how much they are appreciated for their actions. A truly grateful person recognizes the investment that others have made in their life and makes a deliberate effort to show his or her appreciation. Being grateful is not a passive state of thinking, but an active role of expression.

Children who are spoiled develop an attitude of ungratefulness toward their parents first. It almost becomes a popularity contest. Parents give their heart and soul to their children along with all types of other needs and wants, with the hope that this will develop a relationship with their children, only to discover how ungrateful their children are. The children not only develop ungratefulness toward their parents but to their teachers, and ultimately to employers, and as they grow older towards their own family.

In order to change from ungratefulness to thankfulness a person needs to learn to praise others and show their appreciation for other people. Children need to learn how to give praise as well as receive it. They also need to get into the habit of writing thank you notes to others expressing their appreciation for another person's action. A grateful knows how to be content with what they have and they have learned how to take care of the things that they have bought or they have been given. A grateful person has the ability to count their blessings rather than focusing on their burdens.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Kindness?**

What is the kindest thing that someone has done for you lately? Have you tried to do something kind for someone? What do we usually think about when we think about kindness? Things like opening the door for others, being nice to the cashier at the store, leaving a generous tip for the waiter, sending a card of thanks. What do you think of when you think of kindness?

All of these are good things. Typically, kindness is equated with being polite or nice. Some years ago a movement started that called people to practice random acts of kindness. In other words, be nice and be polite, even to a stranger. I am not sure if the goal was to make people feel better about themselves or to make the world a better place. Either way, both are good things. I do find it amazing though that society had to create a slogan to remind people that they should treat one another in a kind and considerate manner. Everyone wants to be treated kindly by others, but most people will only treat another person in a kind manner if they are treated with kindness first. In other words if you are kind to me I will be kind to you.

Kindness is really the outward sign of how a person feels about another person. It is the expression of the love that we have for others in our home or those that we are close to. Kindness should be taught to children and should be reinforced when they display acts of love and kindness to their siblings or to friends or classmates. I have a friend who has three children when her oldest child was three years old her second child was born. She encouraged her oldest child to be loving and kind by telling her what a loving sister she was to her new baby brother on a continuous basis. The child then learned to associate the parent's approval with their acts of kindness. The older child then began to believe that she was a kind hearted person and continued to display acts of kindness on her own. The child was conditioned to express her love for her younger brother and displayed it by her acts of kindness.

In our culture it seems that people believe that have a right to be on the receiving end of a kind attitude from others. It's really the other way around. Instead waiting for someone to treat us kindly we need to display this attitude and character quality first, just for the sake of being kind not with any ulterior motive. If everyone displays this quality it stands to reason that everyone will be treated in a kind manner.



## Character Is Everything: What Is Diligence?

A journalist asked Thomas Edison, "What do you think is the first requirement]for success?" "The ability to apply your physical and mental energies to one problem incessantly," replied the inventor, "without growing weary." Diligence is more than being busy. It is a quality of dedication. According to Edison, Diligence is applying "physical and mental energies" to the problem at hand "*without growing weary*" - that is, without losing interest before the task is done. A person who exhibits the character quality of diligence knows how to invest all of their energies into a task that is assigned to him or her and doesn't allow difficult circumstances to interfere with their progress, and certainly knows how to keep their eye on the prize and press forward to the finish line.

It is true that there is no substitute for hard work. Often time's people don't take their jobs seriously enough or view the jobs that they do as so menial that they don't do the job to completion or they don't put forth their best effort. Children in school who may not understand their subject matter tend to give up when the work becomes too hard, and don't have the drive to put their mind to the work in order to complete assignments. Parents whose children don't behave and are disrespectful and irresponsible may give up trying to discipline their children because they feel like a failure as a parent. Workers who feel less than appreciated by their employer become unmotivated on the job and just go through the motions job and feel like they don't have any purpose at work or in life.

A diligent person always sees everything they do as an opportunity to put forth their best efforts and views every performance as something that they are proud to sign their name to. No matter what the job is, whether it is sweeping the street or president of a large company they view every job as an important one. Important because they are doing it and they want it to be done right.

If children are going to develop the character quality of diligence they first must have good role models and then they must be taught how to see things through to the end. The adults in the child's life should start and finish jobs that they are given or that they take on, and avoid complaining about the jobs they have to complete. Children must be held accountable for chores, school assignments, and their behavior in the home and in school and not be allowed to use excuses for not finishing assigned tasks. Parents who are diligent in working with and supervising their children to see things through to the end will find that their children will not give up when they are faced with adversity as adults and they won't allow the waves of life to interfere with the jobs that they have been assigned.

## **Character Is Everything: What Is Patience**

When we think of patience we generally think of waiting. However, there are two different types of waiting: passive waiting and active waiting. Passive waiting is more often disguised as laziness than the mark of true patience. True patience is active waiting. Patience does not mean inactivity; it means working diligently on what is at hand while waiting calmly for what is outside of one's control. A person who is patient does not place time limits on something or someone; rather they have the ability to understand the benefits of waiting. Being patient allows a person to understand what their resources are and begin to understand that waiting will build strength and character and keeps them from acting on impulse. Too often a person when they are impatient can fall prey to the desire to take certain matters that are out of their control into their own hands, only to discover that they would have been better off if they had waited for the advice of someone or until they had all the facts that were necessary to solve the problem.

Patience, why is it such a hard thing to learn? Maybe it has something to do with our instant society. We don't like waiting for things especially not things we feel strongly about. There's just something impulsive in a person that makes them want to dive in and go overboard with things and become impatient when they have to wait when things don't happen instantly.

Patience is also enduring the suffering of repeated failure without giving up. It is persevering to the end and finishing what one began. Often people tend to give up on themselves when they experience problems that they see as unsolvable. Once they are faced with a problem they make a few attempts at finding a solution, and then they give up or give in and lose patience and confidence with their problem solving ability. Some problems may never be solved, some problems may take years to solve. Understanding what a person has control over and what they can't control is a fine line and a patient person will practice active waiting as they plug along for days or even years to reach their goal. Patience is a matter of accepting unchangeables that are beyond our control. The key to accepting a problem is realizing that it is more productive to change the things you can change, than get angry about those you can't.