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THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EXCELLENCE

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Cotton Center ISD Mission Statement

“Our mission is to graduate all students with skills and values to successfully compete as life-long learners.”

E.L.K.S.
Excellence
in
Learning
Knowledge
and
Skills

Excellence and Character (Part 1)

Sometimes the best way to understand something is to find out what it is not. Although excellence and character are interrelated, they are not the same. Excellence means holding yourself to the highest standard in order to attain your highest personal destiny. Whereas, character has a completely different meaning.

I have heard several different definitions for character. The Random House Dictionary states that character is a moral quality or integrity. I heard one of my previous superintendents define character as how one acts when no one is watching. I like that description. But the one that I developed for my football program was as follows:

“Character is not measured by the success you achieve but rather by the opposition you encounter and the courage with which you maintain your values in the struggle against overwhelming odds.”

There’s a great deal that can be said about this definition of character.

In this day and time, we measure success by how many football games a coach wins, how many gold records an artist cuts, or how many Academy Awards an actor receives. To me, character is something much deeper than simply accolades. It is the manner in which you handle opposition to what you are trying to achieve. Winning the Super Bowl is not indicative of character but rather how one

overcomes adversity to win the Super Bowl.

One can measure a man’s character by the opposition it takes to discourage him. If an individual becomes disheartened by minor details and setbacks, his character is not very strong. However, the more challenges one overcomes, the more character is displayed. This is why character is significant when it comes to excellence. In achieving your highest aim or personal destiny, there will be trials, temptations, storms, and circumstances that say, “Why don’t you just give up.” But when giving in looks more attractive than digging in, character may be the only thing you have to draw on to keep you going.

True character requires courage. As an educator, I have to make difficult decisions with little or no praise from anyone. Either people disagree with or no one knows about the decision, but true character is revealed during tough times and takes fearlessness. Real courage is when you’re scared to death but you begin anyway, and you see it through no matter what.

Threats of violence, lawsuits, and litigation may come spewing one’s direction but to stand as an individual of character takes courage. Alan Blankstein calls it the Courageous Leadership Imperative. To move schools in a direction of change, school leaders must “boldly go where no man has gone before.” Maybe I should say, “boldly go where no school

has gone before.”

In order for courage to be effective, one must have values. Values, courage, and character are intricately tied together because there cannot be one without the other. If you have no values, you have no courage. If you lack courage, then you lack character. If there is no character, then there are probably no values. You must face a challenges with each attribute.

No values can be great if they are compromised in the fiery furnace of affliction. Think about it. You may say that you believe that getting out of debt is important, have developed a plan, and begun implementation. What happens if you have the opportunity to go on a once-in-a-lifetime trip, but it’s going to require to take out a loan? Do not misunderstand me. I am not against loans or going on trips. Nevertheless, if your values dictate a certain regimen, but you choose to concede your plan because of temptations, trials, problems, circumstances, or fears, then you have just compromised your values.

Success will always be a failure if you forget what your values are. You cannot be truly successful without character and that requires an ability to stay with what you believe is important. So remember, every time you face mistakes and attempt to move forward in spite of them, it is a test of character.