

CHARACTER CONNECTION

MAPLE AVENUE SCHOOL

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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

When all of this coronavirus talk started happening, I wasn't really concerned until everything started shutting down. Having spent the past few weeks in South and Central America, I only received minimal communication on what has now reached almost panic conditions. In the middle of conducting the first session of a three-day workshop on Friday in Pennsylvania, I was told by Drake University that all CHARACTER COUNTS! trainings would be canceled through April 5. As one of the most vulnerable because of my age, this means that I will be confined to staying close to home and if I do leave, I need to practice social distancing. And with a daughter who is a school nurse living across the street from us, it is going to be hard for me to do anything different than what I am used to.

Great TEACHERS are not successful because they have the right curriculum, the right lesson plan, or the right resources. They are successful because they have the right MINDSET.



I have come to the realization that life continually tests our principles and character with unanticipated twists and turns. Right now my convictions and beliefs about positivity and gratitude are being tested.

Schools are grappling with big questions around interrupted learning, access to remote learning opportunities and the negative effects on students, especially those with disabilities or from low-income families. If schools were to shut down long term, one of the greatest challenges for teachers, and administrators would

come down to ensuring all students have equal education opportunities and that gains in learning are not lost.

I can't help but relate all that is happening to the key principles of character and ethical decision-making. We understand that people of character stand out from the crowd because they develop the wisdom and strength to know and do the right thing.

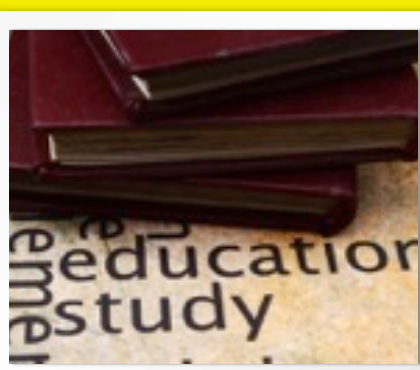
There are specific core qualities that Michael Josephson, founder of CHARACTER COUNTS!, has referred to as the Seven C's of Character: conscience, compassion, consideration, confidence, control, courage, and competence. They are written in a manner that would allow for one to personally reflect on how one ought to live their life, especially in these trying and uncertain times.

CONSCIENCE - Your conscience is your moral compass. Take care of it. Use it. Trust it.

COMPASSION - Nurture, express and demonstrate compassion by caring about, giving to and helping whomever you can, whenever you can in all ways that you can.

CONSIDERATION - Be considerate. Always be aware of how your words and actions affect others so you can do more good and less harm.

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CONFIDENCE - Approach every opportunity and challenge with confidence that you are worthy and able enough to succeed.

COURAGE - Protect who you are and what you believe with courage. Master fears and preserve your integrity by doing what you know is right even if it costs more than you want to pay.

CONTROL - Control emotions and urges that demean you, damage your name or diminish your future. Remember, you are in charge of what you think, say and do.

COMPETENCE - Continually build your competence with the knowledge, skill and ability to make effective and ethical decisions.

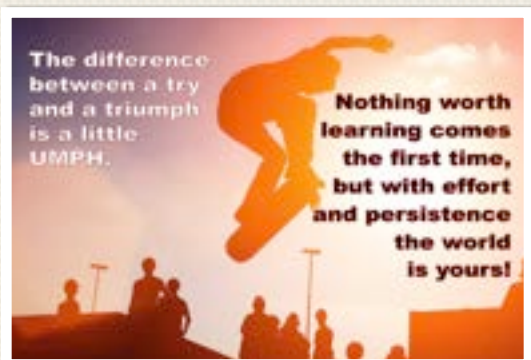
I realize from personal experience that this is no easy task. No one could possibly have imagined what this school year would be like for teachers and students at Maple Avenue. What each of you is facing, with unknown challenges still ahead, is beyond my comprehension. But, I've learned that no matter how old I am, my life and character are works in progress and that there will always be a gap between who I am and who I want to be. There is no better time to reflect and strive to put these principles into practice.

Gary Smit

PERSEVERANCE

I would think that one of the character traits most tested for you, your students and families in this time of crisis is that of perseverance. This trait is one of CHARACTER COUNTS! Six Success Skills.

Whether a student or adult, we demonstrate perseverance by continuing to do what we are supposed to do and by pursuing goals with tenacity, despite frustrations, mistakes, setbacks, and other obstacles that make their task difficult or seem impossible. Students are more likely to persevere when they can draw on specific strategies and tactics to deal with challenges and setbacks. They need actionable skills for taking responsibility and initiative, and for being productive under conditions of uncertainty.



KEY BELIEFS

- Be able to resist temptations and pressures to give up or quit.
- Believe that you will learn from the challenge and be better because of it.
- It's okay to ask for help when needed.
- With positivity, hard work and belief in myself, I will have a much better chance of getting through this.
- Choose to persist as long as you are able.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

As a school, you are faced with a choice of how to provide education in a format that is not only different but with the uncertainty as to how it will be received. From my perspective online learning does not need to be fancy in these times. Simple is probably better.

Here are a few ideas related to the character trait of perseverance that could be shared in an email or possibly be done when students do return to school.

- Have students write in their journals or simply in an email to you about difficult situations, and how they handled them without giving up.
- Discuss a poem about suffering, what can be learned from it, how to face it, how not to hurt others, and anything else about obstacles.
- Students can learn what it means to stick to a task through the retelling of the story "The Little Engine That Could." Personal application is made to their own experiences with the "I think I can..." statement.
- Have students select a character from a favorite book or story. Tell them to list that character's traits and explain how these traits helped the character to overcome adversity. Then have them compare their own traits to those of their chosen character.
- Help your students think of a fun goal they can achieve within a short time. Completing a small goal will help give students an idea of the positive feelings they will have when they accomplish their long-term goals.
- Ask the students to make two lists: one list of things that are difficult for them, and another of things that are easy for them. Categorize these items under headings such as sports, school, home, friends, etc. Study how many are in each category and check if the students have listed more difficult things or easier things. Remind the students that if they keep persevering, the

difficult items can be moved to the 'easy' list. You can also use this activity to teach about categorizing and percentages.

- Students could take part in a variety of writing exercises about the most important pastime or activity in which they participate, and the perseverance it takes to improve.

AN EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY



Here is an activity that could be done at home as a parent-child learning experience related to perseverance.

All Shook Up

Learning Objective: To realize that all it takes to triumph when facing a challenge is a little 'umph.'

Materials: Three or four plastic jars with tight lids; a plastic bowl; three or four pints of whipping cream; honey; plastic knives; sliced bread

Instructions:

- Pour a pint of whipping cream into each container and place the lids on securely and give the student several moments to shake the jar.
- After a few minutes of shaking, stop and ask what would happen if one would gave up now.
- Explain that quitting keeps great things from happening. If we lose patience and give up, nothing good will develop.

It should take about 10 minutes for the cream to separate into a lump of butter in each jar. Carefully remove the butter and place it in a large plastic bowl.

Drizzle honey over the butter and spread the treat on a piece of bread.

Process and Reflection:

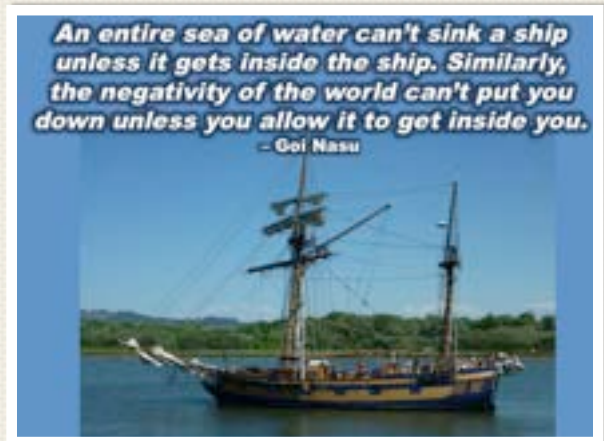
So What?

- ☒ What did we have to do?
- ☒ Why couldn't we stop shaking the jar?
- ☒ Why did it have to take so long?

Now What?

- ☒ What are situations you face that seem too difficult to overcome?
- ☒ Why do students tend to give up?
- ☒ How do you show perseverance?

- ☒ What are the rewards in working hard to overcome a challenge you face?
- ☒ What conclusions can you draw from this activity?



The Character Daily app provides you with a daily lesson, a quote and behavioral reinforcement idea based on the Six Pillars. Includes links to videos, songs and so much more that could be of help to you in continuing to communicate with your students the importance of character. Maple Avenue parents can be provided with the access code as well.

www.characterdaily.com

Maple Avenue access code: 179-862

You can also check out our family's guide to teaching good character.

<https://raycenter.wp.drake.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/95/2020/03/New-Family-Guide-K-5.pdf>

LET'S NOT FORGET

We are all in education for our kids. They are my why, and I'm sure they are your why, too. As we continue to go through this uncertain time, let's make sure that we support one another. Let's stay connected with our colleagues, our students, and our families.

Let's look at this time as an opportunity to show the resilience of educators and an opportunity to try something new for our kids. As Gene Krantz, NASA flight director for Apollo 13, says in the movie Apollo 13, "With all due respect, sir, I believe this is gonna be our finest hour." We've got this! I believe in you!



SPOTLIGHT ON CHARACTER AT MAPLE AVENUE

Here is a visual portrait of CHARACTER COUNTS! in action at your school. So much has been done in just two months! You are to be commended for your dedication and commitment in making character truly count with adults and students.



The Champions Team members during the 2-day CC! training held on 1/21, 1/22 and 1/25



Faculty/staff (in a circle activity) at the 2nd school-wide CC! orientation held on February 21st (1st orientation held on 2/3)



Students in the lunchroom with their new CC! banners



Champion Tom Sauvageau facilitating a circle with students and CITRS/Drake University (CC!) guests, and even Superintendent Mark Laurie!



Maria Hamilton's Pre-K lesson on "Responsibility" and "Citizenship"

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

We are intentional in our efforts at CHARACTER COUNTS! to ensure that professional development is not just a single sit-and-get training. Each month, we share a video lesson on a specific theme related to the integration of character into the daily life of a school. Even though you are not in school, here is a lesson that hopefully will support you in your efforts to intentionally and explicitly teach character to the students entrusted to your care.

How to Build Resilience in Students
<http://bit.ly/2OJvcpD>

Resilience is a life skill that is necessary for students to be successful in school and life.