

## January, 2014 Character Trait – Decisiveness

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The Character Trait for January, 2014, in the City of Opelika is “decisiveness.” When someone possesses this character trait they are able to sort through information and make an informed choice about something in a timely manner, based on good insight and understanding. Decisiveness is an important part of leadership and should be one of those hallmark character traits all of us strive to incorporate into our own lives as well as the lives of our children.

Decisiveness is an easy trait to understand, but one that is – for some – difficult to achieve. That’s because in our day to day living, when we are inundated with decisions which must be made, some folks tend to procrastinate and put things off because they are either afraid of “going against the crowd” or being different, or because they simply don’t want to (or know how to) take the time to think through the potential consequences of the choices to be made; and so and they prefer *not* to have to choose a specific path to follow, or action to take, until conditions force them to make a quick decision.

And sadly, some folks don’t even make a hasty decision – they simply make no decision at all. President Theodore Roosevelt probably said it best when he stated: *In any moment of decision making the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.*

Even the “wrong thing” in decision making, when properly evaluated, teaches us valuable lessons on what to do – or what *not* to do! – the next time a decision needs to be made on any given subject. And lest we forget: not all decisions are life altering. Unlike Robert Frost’s “The Road not Taken” not every decision makes “all the difference” in our lives (like choosing a career path or choosing *not* to drink and drive). They are simply “day-to-day” living choices we make like, what shall I wear to that event or how shall I spend my time tonight – watching TV or reading a book?

So how do we start to teach ourselves and our children this important character trait? As Napoleon Hill, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century American author who was one of the earliest producers of the modern genre of “personal-success” literature puts it: *The way to develop decisiveness is to start right where you are, with the very next question you face.*

In helping our children learn to make decisions, we can start with activities they already know. Games are a great way to start a dialogue with them on choices we make. In checkers, for instance, there are several moves which can be made. Some get us “blocked” by our opponent – but others move us forward in the game! It all depends upon the decision we make with the “next move.” Discussing these choices during the game helps our children see the difference between the choices they make.

Another fun way to help children learn about decision making is this: the next time you're on an outing (a park, or the zoo, etc.) and you come to a "fork in the road," explain to them what they might encounter taking one road, and what they might encounter taking the other. And then, let your child decide the next move. When they've made the choice, ask them what went into their decision to choose the path they did. And don't forget to add in words of encouragement like, "I think you made a great choice there!"

Life is about choices. As our children and grandchildren grow older, it's important for us to continue to help them develop the ability to sort through information and make informed choices about things and situations in a timely manner, based on good insight and understanding, and based upon a morally strong value system, knowing that the ability to make decisions helps set the stage for what can be accomplished in life.

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