

Character Trait for March, 2014 – Sincerity

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The Character Trait for the Month of March in the City of Opelika is “sincerity”. It is defined as “the quality of being free from pretense, deceit or hypocrisy.” This particular character trait is often used along with the traits of “honesty, genuineness, truthfulness, and integrity” when defining someone of upstanding character, because that type of person is usually someone who is not only honest and trustworthy, they act out of love and respect for others.

In other words, a sincere person is someone who is transparent; they let you know who they really are. They do not give false impressions or have hidden agendas in their actions. They do what is right, even when no one is looking, because it is the right thing to do!

In the online website “We Animate Character” (www.WeAnimateCharacterEducation.com) there is a distinction drawn between “being honest” and “being sincere” which is significant. In the online article it is noted that “*one can be honest while still being hurtful, but when someone is being sincere, they are acting kindly while telling the truth to achieve a particular result.*” The example used shows what the authors are talking about in the difference between being honest and being sincere. An honest person might tell a friend, “Those jeans make you look fat.” A sincere person would say something like this, “I think your jeans might look better with another top.” Both statements let the person – who probably asked the question “How do these jeans look on me?” – know that their jeans aren’t exactly flattering on them. The honest person’s words are blunt and might be seen as hurtful, though. The sincere person’s words still convey the message, but without the words that could be taken as “personal” attacks.

But the character trait of “sincerity” doesn’t begin and end with what one says or even just being kind to others. Having sincerity as a part of your character means that you will speak honestly about your feelings, thoughts and desires and then embrace personal responsibility, in that when you say you’re going to do something (or *not* do something) your actions match your words. President John F. Kennedy said it succinctly when he said this: “...we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

So then, how do we build up the character trait of sincerity in our day to day living? Here are some suggestions given by “Character First Education” (www.characterfirsteducation.com):

1. Say what you mean: don’t try to manage what others think by giving half-truths, false impressions or exaggerations.
2. Mean what you say: If you express an opinion or share your feelings, communicate what you really think and feel. But remember, it is better to remain silent than cause pain or make promises that you won’t or can’t keep.

3. Practice what you preach: Saying one thing and then doing the opposite creates hypocrisy in our lives. It also causes us to lose the respect and trust of others.
4. Check your motives: Make certain that you are doing things with no “hidden agendas”. A good question to ask is “Why am I doing this?” Honest self-assessment is a good thing, not only because of the respect you will gain from others, but because of the respect you will have for yourself.

Relationships with others (i.e. personal, professional and business) are *not* opportunities to get what you want. They are a means by which we live – and thrive – in our communities and accomplish a good that lasts long beyond our own years. A person who has mastered the Character Trait of Sincerity – along with honesty and integrity – is someone others can easily respect and have confidence in. And that, in times of uncertainty, makes all the difference in the world.

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