

January 2015 Character Trait – Discipline

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The Character trait for this the first month in the New Year is “DISCIPLINE.” Webster’s Dictionary defines discipline as “a way of behaving that shows a willingness to obey rules or orders.”

Lest anyone be confused, that definition of the character trait of discipline is not saying that the person who exhibits this attribute is merely someone who chooses to be ruled by others. Quite the opposite is true. The “rules and orders” of discipline are those steps which allow us to challenge ourselves and obtain our dreams; and the person who has attained the ability of self-control is the one who has learned to evaluate situations – “thrill of the moment” desires vs. the long term goal that’s been set – for the best outcome in the long run. That person has successfully developed self-discipline!

When someone exhibits the character trait of discipline, what others see are the following characteristics: Someone who is willing to set goals, making plans to achieve those goals, and then following through – by staying “on track” – to achieve them, even when the going gets tough and you don’t feel like following through, or the “crowd” is taking a different pathway. It’s a positive behavior pattern which takes into account that the effects of being successful require the mental and moral courage to manage ones time and listen effectively to what others have to say.

Many folks have the good intention of changing a bad habit, learning something new or accomplishing “whatever” goal they set for themselves. Unfortunately, without the characteristic of discipline becoming a part of one’s life, more goals become “failed goals” rather than success stories.

So how does one go about developing the characteristics of discipline?

The first thing that can be done is to write down the goal you want to achieve – i.e. give it a NAME. For adults it may be something like: losing weight, going back to school for a long dreamed of degree, or learning a new skill. For children it may be something like: trying out for a sports team, taking up a musical instrument or earning money for something they really want.

The second thing to do is map out a plan for success, recognizing that some goals will require time and effort, and a series of “small”, consistent steps along the way. They will also require us to stop and think things through. Some choice options keep us from attaining our goals; others carry us a step closer to achieving the desired outcome. Mapping out a plan for success will help put a visual picture to the plan ahead.

The third thing is to recognize that it takes initiative on your part to accomplish your goal. In order to achieve our goals we all need to realize that good intentions and mapping out a plan, by themselves are not enough to help us to achieve the goals we’re going after. We have to be motivated to carry out intended plans once they have been identified.

Motivational initiative is what gets us to ask the questions of “what does it take to accomplish the goal” and “how long will it take?” followed by “what is the outcome if I *don't* work to accomplish the desired goal?” and then start out on the journey to get it done! Remember, encouragement goes a long way into helping us to cross that proverbial finish line of success. We can remind ourselves (and our children!) along the way that even if we “mess up” or “don't do something right” we haven't failed. Recognizing a wrong turn, or a break from the plan, as merely a road bump can help us get back on the right track and move on! Children especially need to hear, “You're doing a great job! Just keep working at it; you will get better!” whenever things don't go as planned. A minor setback is a good learning experience when handled in the right perspective. As the author John Foster once said, “A man without decision of character can never be said to belong to himself... He belongs to whatever can make captive of him.”

The important thing for anyone to remember about discipline. It is not something we are born with; but with effort and perseverance, it becomes a habit – a part of our character – that helps us not only to dream our dreams, but make them a reality.

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