

Character Trait for June, 2014 – Resourcefulness

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The Character Trait for the month of June, 2014 is the character trait of RESOURCEFULNESS. It is defined as the ability to deal promptly and effectively with problems or situations. An *easy* way to grasp its meaning is to remember that Resourcefulness = Necessity + Creativity + Persistence.

One of the stories of tremendous resourcefulness that is highlighted in various articles, magazines and books, is the story of Dr. George Washington Carver as he arrived at Tuskegee Institute, right here in Alabama, where he was to teach agriculture.¹

He was given a room at the Institute, which was to be used as his laboratory; but when he walked into the room for the first time, he found that the room was empty. It contained absolutely nothing. When his students showed up for the first day of classes and entered the room, they found a pile of junk in a corner that Carver had retrieved from the Institute's trash heap which had contained old jars, bottles, lamps, old china, drapery rods and other odds and ends. Confused by the scene before them, the students asked how they could possibly learn what they needed to learn without the proper equipment.

“We will make what we need,” Professor Carver said to the students.

“With what?” they wanted to know.

“With what we have.” He replied.

Under Carver's supervision, the students punched holes in pieces of tin to make strainers to test soil samples. Neatly labeled canning jars held an assortment of chemicals; broken bottles were cut down and transformed into beakers; a discarded ink bottle with a cork and a piece of string made do nicely as a Bunsen burner.

Gradually the makeshift laboratory took shape. And a valuable lesson was learned by the Tuskegee students, which carried over into later years, when they took their knowledge into the poverty-stricken pockets of the South. Expensive or brand-new equipment was not a requirement for success. Resourcefulness is.

So how do we begin to educate ourselves and our children on becoming successful through resourcefulness? It starts with thinking outside of that proverbial box.

- The first place to begin is to state the goal you are after. (Dr. Carver wanted a functioning laboratory which he could use to teach his students.)
- If the normal “avenues” to achieving your goal are not available, then what other ways are there to achieve it with a little creativity?
- Who might have information that could help solve the dilemma?

• ¹ *George Washington Carver, From Slave to Scientist* by Janet and Geoff Benge (Heroes of History, Emerald Books)

- Look for a solution someone else may have already created for your situation. Being resourceful is one thing; trying to reinvent the wheel is another! The internet can help you in your research. So can a library.
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Resourceful people *learn* from their mistakes. If you try something and it doesn't work, then try it a different way the next time and be persistent as you work. Remember this: If what you try isn't successful at first, that absolutely does NOT equate with being a FAILURE. It just means you didn't find the right solution – yet! If YOU go away before the problem does, though, you haven't solved anything, and that DOES equate with failure.

Resourceful people are those who have the disposition to think outside of the box when solutions to problems are not readily apparent, and the “get up and go” creative type energy to begin finding a solution for the need at hand. They are persistent in their search. Resourceful people don't wait around for someone else to solve their problems or handle their yearnings. They do not expect handouts. Instead, they start looking for solutions – and eventually, like Dr. George Washington Carver, after a lot of diligence and creative thinking, they find they unequivocally CAN make something truly unique and valuable out of resources that were already there just waiting to be found and used.

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