

The Importance of Character for Success

Character is moral excellence. People of character are honest, respectful, responsible, open-minded, humble, fair, compassionate, friendly, cooperative, diligent, and self-disciplined. Many teens can't understand the importance of character, but character is one of the keys to success both at school and on the job.

If a person tells a lie, can he or she ever be fully trusted again? There will always be doubt. If a person says she'll meet you at a certain time, but comes 15 minutes late three times in a row without an excuse, won't you begin to see that person as undependable? If you observe someone hitting and pushing those who are weaker, you'll recognize quickly he's a bully. He's only interested in pleasing himself; he doesn't care about anyone else.

Character is who we are when no one is looking. Character is also revealed when we are in a tight situation. One day I was in the office with the president of the company where I was operations manager. It was apparently early in the morning before the secretary came in, because when the phone rang, I picked it up. The person on the phone asked to speak to the president. When the president heard who it was, he said to me, "Tell him I'm not here."

My aim in life is to always tell the truth. But now I have a high-paying job as operations manager and the president is telling me to lie. What was more important, my job or my

integrity? I didn't hesitate, I handed him the phone. He looked at me in disgust and took the phone. I didn't lose my job, but even if I had, my integrity was more important than my job.

We had placed an ad in the papers for a tool and die maker. I instructed those who answered the phone to give me all the calls so I could weed out the applicants. One applicant told me he could do anything as a tool and die maker. "Did you work on compound, blanking, and progressive dies?" I asked.

"Yes," was his immediate reply. He kept affirming his ability to do any kind of tool and die work. The way he talked, I became suspicious of his abilities. Then I asked, "Did you work on an EDM machine?"

"Yes," he quickly replied.

"What kind of work did you do on the EDM," I asked.

"What kind of machine?"

"EDM."

"No. I never worked on an EDM," he finally replied.

You think I hired him? Do you think I wanted a liar working for me? Never!

The Importance of Integrity

One of the most important virtues for success is to have integrity, to be honest. Alan Loy McGinnis, in *Bringing Out the Best in People*, had this to say about the importance of integrity:

The Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, recently studied 21 derailed executives—successful people who were expected to

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go higher in the organization but who reached a plateau in their careers and were fired or were forced to retire early. They were compared with 20 “arrivers”—those who made it all the way to the top.

The researchers found the two groups astonishingly alike. Every one of the 41 executives possessed remarkable strengths, and everyone was flawed by one or more significant weaknesses. So a person can make a lot of mistakes and have certain weaknesses, evidently, and still rise to success. But closer study of the derailed executives showed that certain types of flaws kept cropping up in a large number of them, and that one error, when committed, always led to their downfall. The researchers called it “the unforgivable sin—betraying a trust.” Integrity here means more than simple honesty. It embodies consistency and predictability built over time that says, “I will do exactly what I say I will do when I say I will do it. If I change my mind, I will tell you well in advance so you will not be harmed by my actions.”¹

Thomas J. Stanley, in *The Millionaire Mind*, asks “What are the top five factors most often mentioned by millionaires as being very important in explaining their economic success?” This is what they said:

- Integrity—being honest with people
- Discipline—applying self control
- Social skills—getting along with people

Teen Success In Career and Life Skills

- A supportive spouse
- Hard work—more than most people²

John C. Maxwell in, *Developing the Leader Within You*, said “According to 1,300 senior executives who responded to a recent survey, integrity is the human quality most necessary to business success.”³ Then he quoted Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe during World War II, and the thirty-fourth president of the United States:

In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence, the supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office. If a man’s associates find him guilty of being phony, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose.⁴

Zig Ziglar in *Top Performance* illustrates the importance of integrity:

The Forum Corporation of Boston, Massachusetts, did an in-depth study of 341 salespeople from eleven different companies in five different industries. Of this

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group, 173 were top salespeople and 168 were average salespeople. The primary difference between the two groups was not skill, knowledge, or ability. The 173 super salespeople were more productive because their customers *trusted* them, and customers are far more likely to *believe* the honest salesperson. They discovered that people do not buy based on what you tell them *or* what you show them. They *do buy* based on what you tell them *and* show them, which they believe.⁵

Skill, knowledge, and ability are certainly important, but this study shows that unless there's integrity where customers trust you, you'll never reach the top. You'll never become successful being a phony; people must trust you.

Ever since I was a teenager, I've made it a goal to have integrity—I'll do whatever I say. For years I always carry a pen and 3 x 5 cards with me in a separate wallet with my business cards. I do this because I'm a writer, and also when I say I'll do something, I want to write a note so I won't forget. I strongly desire to be a person of integrity. I've met those who say they'll do something, but they fail to do it. After a few repeated failures, I no longer trust them when they say something. In my eyes they have lost their integrity, they're untrustworthy.

It's a shame the loss of integrity we find today in our culture. Many will lie and cheat in order to make money. What we need is people who put character first, above making money. Don't believe the lie that you can't be honest and be in business. You definitely can be honest in business. When I

started my business, I determined I'd pay all my taxes. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to pay any more taxes than I have to, but I'm determined to keep my integrity. Yes, there are thousands of ways to cheat the government—but integrity to me is much more valuable than dollars in the bank.

Compassion

What is compassion? It's a deep feeling that wants to help others who are in need. It's one of the critical keys for living a successful life. Unfortunately, many teens have only a love affair with themselves. They want the world to spin around their axis. They don't care the least bit about their parents, friends, or others. The constant cry of these egocentric teens is, "Me! Me! Me!"

Their parents may be in agony over their behavior, but they don't care. These selfish teens leave their room in a mess, they leave things lying around in the house, they refuse to do any work around the house, and they always complain if they are asked to do anything. They want their parents to be their slaves and give them lots of money.

I've got news for you, if that's you, you'll be unhappy. A selfish life will always be miserable. But not all teenagers are selfish. The *Marin Independent Journal* told a story about one who had compassion:

THE AMOUNT of money Tiburon teen A.J. Casella can raise for his favorite charity seems to be limitless.

Four years ago, the 17-year-old Branson School

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junior started a fishing tournament to benefit the San Francisco-based Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation, a philanthropy that grants the wishes of children with life-threatening illnesses.

That year, he raised about \$14,000. This year, the “Fish For a Wish” benefit at his family’s resort marina property at Lake Almanor brought in close to \$42,000. The Aug. 2 event drew more than 300 people.

In all, he has raised cash and in-kind donations totaling more than \$108,000.

He was inspired to help the group after it sent one of his friends, who had leukemia, to Fenway Park to see Major League Baseball’s All-Star game. “I just saw what Make-A-Wish did for him,” Casella said. “It was just amazing. If he needed to think of some happy thought to get through, he could think of Fenway Park.”⁶

Senator John McCain graduated from Annapolis as a naval aviator. He was shot down over North Vietnam and for five years was a prisoner of war. A soldier in the communist army took a great risk to show compassion to McCain. Here’s McCain’s story from National Public Radio:

Years later, I saw an example of honor in the most surprising of places. As a scared American prisoner of war in Vietnam, I was tied in torture ropes by my tormentors and left alone in an empty room to suffer through the night. Later in the evening, a guard I had

never spoken to entered the room and silently loosened the ropes to relieve my suffering. Just before morning, that same guard came back and re-tightened the ropes before his less humanitarian comrades returned. He never said a word to me. Some months later on a Christmas morning, as I stood alone in the prison courtyard, that same guard walked up to me and stood next to me for a few moments. Then with his sandal, the guard drew a cross in the dirt. We stood wordlessly there for a minute or two, venerating the cross, until the guard rubbed it out and walked away.

To me, that was faith: a faith that unites and never divides, a faith that bridges unbridgeable gaps in humanity. It is the faith that we are all equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is the faith I would die to defend.

My determination to act with honor and integrity impels me to work in service to my country. I have believed that the means to real happiness and the true worth of a person is measured by how faithfully we serve a cause greater than our self-interest.⁷

On National Public Radio, Colin Powell, in “The America I Believe In,” spoke about how his immigrant parents arrived from Jamaica. They worked hard and instilled in their children and grandchildren a love of America and optimism. As Powell travelled he met anti-American sentiment, but underneath there was still respect. People still wanted to come to America.

Then Powell said:

An America that each day gives new immigrants the same gift that my parents received. An America that lives by a Constitution that inspires freedom and democracy around the world. An America with a big, open, charitable heart that reaches out to people in need around the world. An America that sometimes seems confused and is always noisy. That noise has a name, it's called democracy and we use it to work through our confusion.

An America that is still the beacon of light to the darkest corner of the world.

Last year I met with a group of Brazilian exchange students who had spent a few weeks in America. I asked them to tell me about their experience here. One young girl told me about the night the 12 students went to a fast food restaurant in Chicago. They ate and then realized they did not have enough money to pay the bill. They were way short. Frightened, they finally told the waitress of their problem. She went away and she came back in a little while saying, "I talked to the manager and he said, 'It's ok.'" The students were still concerned because they thought the waitress might have to pay for it out of her salary. She smiled and she said, "No, the manager said he is glad you are here in the United States. He hopes you are having a good time, he hopes you are learning all about us. He said it's on him."

It is a story that those young Brazilian kids have told over and over about America. That's the America I believe in, that's the America the world wants to believe in.⁸

That teenager spent much time raising money for "Make-A-Wish Foundation." The prison guard took a great risk to help McCain. The restaurant manager could have demanded payment from those Brazilian students, but all of them demonstrated compassion. This is the American spirit. Unfortunately, many today are living in the "me" generation. If "I" can't benefit, don't bother me.

Peer Pressure

Thankfully, there are teens with high ideals, but sticking to them isn't easy. Many teens are dragged down by peer pressure. Peer pressure occurs when a person or group wants you to change your attitude or behavior to conform to that person or group. People of character are self-disciplined; they don't yield to peer pressure. Let's say you're at your friend's house and someone pulls out a bottle of liquor. The bottle is passed around and everyone takes a sip. The bottle is passed to you. You don't drink, and you don't want to start. Do you stand by your convictions, pass the bottle, and risk being ridiculed?

Maybe it's another situation where your friends are urging you to smoke, take a pill to get high, do drugs, cheat on a test, skip school, or engage in sexual activities. You don't want to be isolated from friends, but you also don't want to end up doing things that deep inside you know are wrong. It's a

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battle everyone faces. Many take the easy road and imitate those around them. They want to be cool and fit in. In reality, those yielding to peer pressure are weaklings, crowd-pleasers, without backbone. They lack the inner courage and strength to say, “No.” *Houston Chronicle* reported:

The words of an old proverb—“Tell me who you walk with, and I’ll tell you who you are”—gained new meaning on Thursday with the release of a national study showing that teenagers whose friends were sexually active were more likely to smoke, drink or use illegal drugs.

Teenagers who reported that at least half of their friends were sexually active were 31 times likelier to get drunk, 5½ times likelier to smoke and 22½ times likelier to have tried marijuana, according to the study, released by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.⁹

The type of friends you choose can have a serious effect on your future. One of the facts about great leaders is that they are willing to be loners. They don’t yield to peer pressure. Alan Loy McGinnis, in *Bringing Out the Best in People*, stated:

In fact, one could make a case for the proposition that all great leaders are loners. Contrary to what some think, the outstanding motivators are not necessarily the gregarious, backslapping types at all. Rather, they often spend a great deal of time alone, thinking and planning.

In order to lead, it is simply imperative to have independence. Psychologist Nathaniel Branden has said:

Innovators and creators are persons who can to a higher degree than average accept the condition of aloneness. They are more willing to follow their own vision even when it takes them far from the mainland of the human community. Unexplored spaces do not frighten them—or as much as they frighten those around them. This is one of the secrets of their power. That which we call “genius” has a great deal to do with courage and daring, a great deal to do with *nerve*.

So it is a mistake to attempt to be “one of the boys” in order to lead. If we examine the personalities of people like Florence Nightingale, Churchill, Napoleon, de Gaulle, Martin Luther, and Mother Teresa, we cannot escape the conclusion that these people have been quite eccentric. And to some extent, this very eccentricity helps get them recognized as leaders.¹⁰

Eccentricity, the willingness to be different from others, is what makes great leaders. They aren’t crowd pleasers; they don’t do things just because others are doing them. These individuals have character; they’re willing to stand up for their convictions.

Sexual Peer Pressure

One of the biggest battles teens face is sexual peer pressure. It's such a big issue that I wrote the book, *Sex: If You're Scared of the Truth—Don't Read This!* I report about a survey where “hundreds of sixth-to-ninth-graders were asked why they were having sex. Over seventy-five percent said to ‘fit in or to be cool.’ Only one student said, ‘Because I’m in love.’”

The excuse the sixth-to-ninth-graders gave for having sex was “to fit in or to be cool.” It's just another way of saying, “I yielded to peer pressure.” What many teens don't realize is the severe risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can result in a lifetime of suffering and even lead to an early death. The intelligent decision is to be firmly committed to sexual abstinence until marriage. Here's a quote from the book:

Is it rational for an individual to choose a path of abstinence because he or she is afraid of getting an STD? Is a boy or girl who practices abstinence from all sexual activity stupid because he or she realizes that there are over 25 STDs they can be infected with? And if they get HIV, it may be irreversible and last a lifetime. If a girl gets Human Papillomavirus (HPV), she may develop cancer; if she gets chlamydia, she may become infertile. Her dreams for a happy future can be shattered with just one sexual encounter. If anyone cares about their future, it's a very intelligent decision to be fearful of getting an STD....

When a female dog is in heat, you can be certain any male dogs in the vicinity will try to mount her. We don't fault the dogs when they see a dog in heat and want to mount her. But youth aren't animals who must follow every instinct. We should have higher expectations for today's youth. They're human beings who can control their behavior....

"But we live in a new age." We certainly do. But that's no excuse to follow the crowd. We need young people with backbones who will stand up and say, "Don't count me in when it comes to casual sex. My future is too important to be sacrificed for temporary pleasure."

Don't mistake infatuation for love. You may feel like you're walking on clouds and the sun is shining full force on your life—but when thunderstorms arise, your dreams will be shattered. True love will take you through storms. Infatuation is fleeting emotional love. Sadly, many youth make choices because of infatuation and suffer bitter consequences for their decisions.

The intelligent and simple solution: NO SEX UNTIL MARRIAGE! Sound too simplistic? It's the solution that will guarantee you'll never pass on syphilis, genital warts, chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, or HIV/AIDS to your future marriage partner.¹¹

Another advantage of avoiding premarital sex is it will guarantee you'll never get pregnant. Speaking about young

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mothers, Rosemary C. Salomone, Professor of Law at St. John's University School of Law, disclosed these facts: "Only seven out of 10 teenage mothers complete high school. Meanwhile, their offspring are more likely to have low birth weight and other medical problems, and to be victims of abuse and neglect. Like their mothers, these children are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to have a child themselves in their teens, and one and a half times as likely to be out of work and school in their late teens and early 20s. And so the cycle continues."¹²

But mention abstinence, and many want to attack it as an old-fashioned and unrealistic lifestyle for today. But abstinence until marriage produces healthy families. If one day you want to have a happy healthy family and to save yourself for the person you'll marry, be determined to keep yourself pure.

"But everyone's having sex." It's not true. Over 50% of high school students claim they have never had sex. Remember, you're not an animal; you can control your passions.

To be successful, you need short- and long-term goals for your life. Do you want to graduate from high school and go to college? Do you want to have a career, be healthy, have a happy marriage, and raise a family? What must you do to achieve your goals? Plan your actions and write them down. Take a wrong turn, and you may have a head-on collision that will shatter all your goals.

We'll first examine the power of bad habits. Then we'll discuss how you may develop the courage to stand up for your beliefs and say with a loud clear voice, "No," when you know that's the decision you want to make.

The Power of Bad Habits

People of character also know to avoid bad habits. Many teens think they can quit a habit anytime they want. They're young and strong. They're wrong. Think how much money adults spend trying to break habits they started as teens. Let's look at smoking. It may seem like a little habit that can easily be stopped. I typed "quit smoking" with quotes in Google and received over 11 million websites. This is what the American Lung Association said on its website:

Smoking-related diseases claim an estimated 430,700 American lives each year. Smoking costs the United States approximately \$97.2 billion each year in health-care costs and lost productivity. It is directly responsible for 87 percent of lung cancer cases and causes most cases of emphysema and chronic bronchitis.¹³

One wonders how anyone would take up such a foolish habit when it causes such devastating results. When I was operations manager, the foreman of our tool and die department smoked. I'd warn him about smoking those coffin nails, but was ignored. About ten years later he visited me in the foyer of my company, a dying sick man. He had started his own company, but now he had lung cancer. A few months later he died. Think about it! He died an early death just because of the stupid habit of smoking cigarettes!

Once in a while when I see my employees smoking, I warn

them about its dangers. It's a costly habit, and many have been doing it for years. One worker who smoked quit. He was 32 years old. He quit after the doctors made an eight-inch cut into his chest for open heart surgery and warned him to stop smoking. It took open heart surgery to finally convince him to stop smoking.

Some people listen only when a sledge hammer hits them. Parents, teachers, clergy, and friends warn them; but they refuse to change. Some have the habit of smoking marijuana, others sniffing glue, drinking alcohol, popping pills, or taking drugs. Some young superstar actors and singers are popping pills, so why not do the same? Some teens have "pharming parties," where they get together and barter for their prescription drugs from their home, such as attention-deficit-disorder drugs, painkillers, antidepressants, or prescription drugs. Some mix these drugs with alcohol. Because these chemicals cause a sensation of well-being, many become addicted because their body craves these experiences. Some of these drugs can cause liver failures, seizures, brain bleeding, memory loss, depression, insomnia, anxiety, suicidal behaviors or attempts, and even death from overdose.

Some teens steal prescription drugs from home, others buy drugs from drug pushers. How do drug pushers get teens to buy their drugs? Drug pushers understand the laws of habit. Sell drugs to teens cheap, or even offer them at first for free. Get them hooked on the drugs and then sell them at regular price.

What do many teens do? They go for the quick high and take the drug. Remember, they're teens. They're strong. They can

quit any time they want. The trouble is teens don't understand the power of habits. Established habits are extremely difficult to overcome.

Taylor Hooton smiled a lot, was popular with girls, and had many friends. He dreamed of being the starting pitcher for Plano West Senior High School. "He always came to the field in good spirits," his baseball coach said.

A junior varsity coach suggested to six-foot, one-inch Taylor he should get bigger. Taylor listened and began taking steroids. He added 30 pounds to his weight, and now weighed 205 pounds. But something happened to this normal upbeat kid, he became irritable, flew into rages, stole several hundred dollars from his parents, pounded the floor with his fists, and one time punched a wall injuring his pitching hand.

His behavior became worse. "I'll just take a knife and end it now," he once told his mother. His parents sent him to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist said because of his low self-esteem he believed he had to be bigger to measure up. The doctor prescribed an antidepressant to fight the depression he would have on withdrawal from steroids.

After a trip to England with his parents, Taylor came home. The parents found that he had stolen two digital cameras and a laptop computer from the hotel where they had stayed. They grounded him. He asked his mother to reconsider, but she refused. The next day, a month after his 17th birthday, he took his belt, made a noose, and hanged himself from a door. When his father and police searched the room, they found steroids hidden behind a radio on his desk. When they did an autopsy, they found he had steroids in his system.¹⁴

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Readers Digest in “The Dangerous New High,” said, “Teenagers are stealing pills from your medicine cabinet and sharing them with friends—sometimes with deadly consequences.” At some of these pharming parties teenagers throw their pills into a bowl and grab an assortment. Other times they barter their pills. Often they take pills with alcohol.

Roger Stone, a fire captain in Olympia, Washington, lost his son when he combined beer and methadone. Their 18-year-old son, Tyler, called his parents that he was staying with his friends. The next morning his friends found him unconscious.

The article pointed out, “Even worse, kids rarely take just one pill. Many of the drugs at pharming parties are depressants, which slow down brain function, says Glen Hanson, PhD, a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Utah and former acting director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Now add alcohol, another depressant, to the mix. ‘All decrease brain activity, and they enhance one another.’ So a Vicodin-Ambien-Xanax-booze combination can be extremely dangerous. ‘It can do more than put you to sleep,’ says Hanson. ‘You can be put to sleep *permanently*.’”¹⁵

The magazine *Time* in, “Balding, Wrinkled and Stoned,” pointed out:

Of the more than 75 million baby boomers who came of age in the 1960s and '70s, millions experimented with drugs during their impressionable teenage years, and millions went on to enter middle age—and are now headed into their senior years—with decades-long addictions....

What makes the problem especially hard for seniors is that the wages of drug abuse are cumulative. A lifetime of recreational chemistry also means a lifetime of neglect of overall health—as a recent morning meeting at Odyssey House illustrated. There were too many canes in evidence for a group so comparatively young—the legacy of joints wrecked by years of undertreated diabetes—and too many bad hearts and bum livers and vascular systems fighting hypertension. “This is the first generation to have a high incidence of using recreational drugs,” says SAMHSA epidemiologist Joseph Gfroerer. “All this puts them at risk for problems.”¹⁶

I know those who are reading this are teens, but let me warn you, chickens come home to roost. If you think you can abuse your body as a teen and there are no future affects, you have an illusion. Would you like to join those in middle age who now have to walk around with the aid of a cane with bad hearts, bum livers, and vascular systems fighting hypertension because of some foolish things you started as a teenager? Or would you like to join millions of others who refused to be pressured into following a destructive lifestyle and today have healthy bodies?

How to Say, “NO!”

1. Be firmly committed. “Peer pressure will not influence or control me!”

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2. Understand the serious consequences of: smoking, drugs, alcohol, pills, and premarital sex. Be determined you will never do anything that would put your body at risk.

3. Refuse to be embarrassed or intimidated by those who are smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or sexually active.

4. Be more concerned about having a successful future than some temporary joy ride that can result in a lifetime of suffering.

5. Don't let your mind and heart become a garbage dump. As an intelligent being, you want to protect your body. Why not include the mind and heart? Refuse to look at soft and hard-core pornography on cable, Internet, magazines, and videos. Avoid sexually suggestive music, television shows promoting sex, drugs, and alcohol. Be careful about spending time alone in cars or the privacy of a bedroom. Never allow yourself to be fondled.

6. Be bold and let your commitments be known. Obey your conscience: the moral code that tells you what's right and wrong.

7. Avoid tempting situations like parties where alcohol and drugs are present to break down your resistance.

8. Make decisions to build healthy relationships. Don't pursue the motto: "I'm young only once." One bad decision can result in a lifetime of remorse.

9. Be mature enough not to feel lonely and left out

when others participate in activities you don't believe in.

10. Find out where teens who share your convictions meet and join them. Make it your aim to associate with like-minded individuals. If you hang around with the loose crowd, what can you expect?

Courage

If you want to sum up these ten principles of “How to Say, ‘No!’” to peer pressure, it's one word—courage. Courage that's not afraid to stand up for your beliefs. Courage that's willing to be different and ridiculed. Courage that's willing to stand alone.

Is it easy? No! You wouldn't need courage if it were a simple thing to do. But courageous individuals are willing to stand up tall and straight for what's right. The reward? They'll reap a lifetime of benefits. In contrast, many will pay a high price for their foolish decisions to yield themselves to alcohol, drugs, and sex. The key to not getting into destructive habits is to not take the first step.

Quitting a Bad Habit

There are other types of teens: they recognize they have made wrong choices and want to quit. They recognize the habit or habits they have are unhealthy and can lead to a path of destruction. They know it won't be easy, but they are determined to succeed. The problem with habits is there are two forces within us: the force that wants to quit the bad habit

and the force that enjoys the bad habit. To break the bad habit, there must be a stronger determination within that wants to quit rather than yield to the good feeling from the habit.

The best thing is to be courageous and unashamedly speak out that you're forsaking your destructive lifestyle. You may be ridiculed, but don't let it phase you. Expect it. Brush all oppositions aside. You're now in the driver's seat of your life, not those around you. A great help in overcoming bad habits is to find new friends who aren't following the destructive lifestyle you're trying to overcome.

There's another type of individual who realizes that the best time to pluck weeds is when they first appear; the longer the delay the more difficult it becomes. Benjamin Franklin was one of the Founding Fathers of our nation, a noted author, politician, scientist, inventor, statesman, and diplomat. Dale Carnegie, in *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, pointed out what Ben Franklin did to overcome his bad habits:

He gave himself a severe going-over *every* night. He discovered that he had thirteen serious faults. Here are three of them: wasting time, stewing around over trifles, arguing and contradicting people. Wise old Ben Franklin realized that, unless he eliminated these handicaps, he wasn't going to get very far. So he battled with one of his shortcomings every day for a week, and kept a record of who had won each day's slugging match. The next week, he would pick out another bad habit, put on the gloves, and when the bell rang he would come out of his corner fighting. Franklin kept

up this battle with his faults every week for more than two years.¹⁷

Is it any wonder that Ben Franklin became so successful and one of the most influential men our nation has ever produced? What would happen if you would look in the mirror, take a serious look at yourself, and ask, “What are my faults?” Then seriously think on this question, put on your boxing gloves, and be determined to fight every one of your faults, regardless how long it takes. You welcome corrections. You want to be disciplined. You want the best life. You won’t give up until you’re victorious.

You’re willing to go through the painful process of self-examination. Is it easy? Absolutely not! But those with courage to quit bad habits and those desirous of sterling character will do everything possible to change.

There’s no one who knows you better than your parents. If you really want to know your faults and eliminate them, go to your parents and ask them, “How can I be a better son or daughter? Please be very frank. I really want to do what’s right.”

Proceed with caution when you do this. Your parents may have a heart attack. By doing this is one of the quickest ways to discover your flaws.