

Character Counts

Earlier this year there was a huge billboard alongside a well-traveled road where I live with “Character Counts” staring you in the face as you drove by. Character does count. It counts a lot. Things that have been happening in the political and business world would suggest that it doesn’t count and, furthermore, a person can rise to and sustain acceptable levels of achievement without it. There seems to be, in many quarters, a tendency to overlook a lack of character in one’s personal, private life in exchange for high degrees of success in one’s professional life. The Bible makes no such distinction. It occurred to me, when studying the primary passages on leadership qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, that most of what is mentioned in these two passages has to do with character, not competence (check it out). At the University of Santa Clara, California, a researcher conducted a study of 1,500 business managers that revealed what workers value most in a leader. Employees said they respected a leader who shows competence, has the ability to inspire and is skillful in providing direction. But there was a fourth quality they admired even more — integrity. Above all else, workers wanted a leader whose word was good, one who was known for their honesty, and one whom they could trust (character).

In *The Navigators*, it is becoming increasingly clear to us that we have focused too much on skill development and not enough on character development. We are making some significant changes in the way we develop leaders. Having character, not being a character, is what is foundational to being a Christian leader.

One of my all time favorite coaches is John Wooden of the UCLA Bruins. He achieved the unbelievable by winning ten NCAA basketball championships in twelve years — seven in a row. John is the only man ever elected to college basketball’s hall of fame as both player and coach. He was, and still is, a sterling example of Christian character in action.

There is a delightful book entitled, *They Call Me Coach*, in which John Wooden tells us his story first-hand. The book published in 1972 catches the essence of the man. It is chock full of the wisdom of an athlete who put his faith and character into practice on the court both as a player and a coach. I could take the rest of this article and give you quote after quote by John on character issues, but I won’t. Let me give you just one. “Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation, because your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

I will be the first to admit that I have paid entirely too much attention to what others think of me (reputation) and not enough to what God thinks of me (character). I have a seminar I do from time to time entitled, “Critical Factors for Success.” I make the point that all the key elements that lead to success are in three categories. Character in your person, caring in your relationships and competence in your endeavors. By far, the most important (in my opinion) is character. Having Christlike character as bedrock in my life is absolutely essential to everything else. Developing, with God’s help, Christian character will significantly impact my relationships and my competency.

The most important thing in my life, at this stage, is to be a person of integrity. To be the same person at home as in public. To be a leader who can be believed and trusted by my family and the people in my ministry. CHARACTER COUNTS! It matters to God and it matters in leadership.