

CHARACTER



Responsibility

October 2006

Responsibility: With every right comes responsibility.

“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.”

--Helen Keller

Aristotle said that “[e]very man should be responsible to others, nor should any one be allowed to do just as he pleases; for where absolute freedom is allowed there is nothing to restrain the evil which is inherent in every man.”¹

“An itinerant umbrella-mender sat on a box in an alley, mending broken and torn umbrellas. He seemed to take unusual care, testing the cloth, carefully measuring and sewing. A young man who was watching in fascination turned to him and said: ‘You seem extra careful.’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, without stopping his work. ‘I have always tried to do good work.’ ‘Your customers would not know the difference until you were gone.’ ‘No, I suppose not.’ ‘Do you ever expect to come back here?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then why are you so particular?’ ‘So that it will be easier for the next fellow who comes along,’ answered the worker firmly. ‘If I put on shoddy cloth or do bad work, the people will find it out before long, and the next mender who comes along will never get any work.’²

Like all successful mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, employers and employees, this mender was responsible to others by providing quality work. Webster defines responsibility as that quality or state of being responsible relating to moral, legal, or mental accountability including reliability and trustworthiness.³

In 1984, Judge David K. Winder spoke to the newest members of the Utah State Bar about how responsible lawyers are trustworthy. He advised these new lawyers that the federal and state Utah judges would trust each new lawyer to tell the truth about applicable law and facts. With piercing candor he then warned the lawyers that if the trust were violated, all judges would share with each other that a particular lawyer could not be trusted. Trustworthiness is not limited to lawyers and judges. In all of our dealings, we must be trustworthy. For example, as parents we love all of our children but may treat them differently because we trust one over another.⁴

Parents teach their children responsibility by giving them assignments to help around the home, by example through faithfully fulfilling responsibilities accepted (including parenting), and encouraging and supporting the children’s diligent efforts in school. I recently heard a new first grader explain how she can be responsible by bringing her school papers and books home, completing her homework, and sharing with her parents important school papers needing their approval.

We enjoy a land of liberty because men and women assume the responsibility of maintaining the law of the land.⁵ Responsible citizens vote, obey the local, state and federal laws, and actively participate in government. Without law, tyranny begins.⁶ Because of irresponsibility, we are laden with more and more laws every year.

Responsibility falls on all of us in every facet of our lives. Like the umbrella mender, we should all do our best in every task given us. Our word should be our bond. We should act so as to always be trusted. When a mistake is made, we must admit it without excuse and try to fix it. And, we must do our part to keep our society civilized. For without a responsible citizenry, we will experience chaos in our lives and ultimately tyranny.

1. The Great Treasury of Western Thought (1977), p. 892, line 5.

2. Inspirational Stories for Public Speaking (1975), p. 339-40.

3. Webster’s Third New World International Dictionary, (1993), p. 1935.

4. “To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved.” George Macdonald, The Harper Book of Quotations (1993).

5. “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” George Bernard Shaw, Dictionary of Quotations (1996), p. 922, line 47.

6. “Where law ends, tyranny begins.” Sir William Pitt, *Id.* at 771, line 67.

Paul Newton
Lindon Resident

“He who conquers himself is greater than he that conquers an army.”
–*Oriental saying*

“It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law.”
–*Cecil B. deMille*

“What is right is right, even if no one is doing it. What is wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it.”
–*Unknown*

“The price of greatness is responsibility.”
--*Winston Churchill*

Book List

The Library

by Sarah Stewart

The Gardener

by Sarah Stewart

The Paper Dragon

by Marguerite Davol

The Best Town in the World

by Byrd Baylor

The Signmaker's Assistant

by Tedd Arnold

Miss Rumphius

by Barbara Cooney



Family Activities

****Mahatmas Gandhi**, was born October 2, 1869. Said he, "If we remain non-violent, hatred will die as everything does, from disuse." We must be responsible in our thoughts, acts, and deeds. *What else did Gandhi teach about responsibility?*

**** List the chores in your home on small pieces of paper.** Put them in a bottle and draw out the assignment for the next week. *Talk about the feelings of self worth that grow as responsibilities are met.*

****Make a card** for your mirror that reads, "I am a responsible person because I _____."

****Smokey Bear says, "Only you can prevent forest fires."** Taking care of our world is an important part of being a responsible individual. *What are your responsibilities to the environment?*

Kid's Corner

Being responsible means I try to not blame others when things don't go the way I want. I have to own up to my own mistakes and try to correct them. It also means trying to do what is right even if no one else is. It's me being in charge of me, my own future and its consequences. I like this story:

There was an immigrant that newly arrived in the United States and he went to a cafeteria (not a restaurant) and sat down at an empty table, waiting for a waiter. No one came to take his order. Finally another person sat down next to him and explained how a cafeteria worked. The immigrant later said, "I soon learned that is how everything works in America. Life's a café here. You can get anything you want as long as you are willing to pay the price. You can even get success, but you will never get it if you wait for someone to bring it to you. You have to get up and get it yourself."

Bryan Nicholson, age 15

Pleasant Grove High School

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