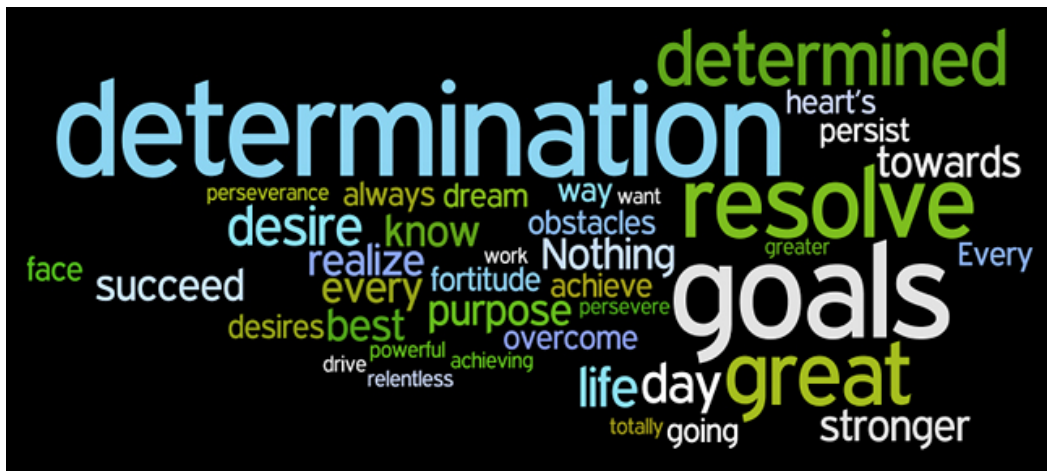


Character and Leadership Packet #3

Determination

Introduction

There are many ways you can make your life better. For example, you can keep your teeth healthy by brushing, flossing and getting check-ups. Exercising and eating right can help keep your body healthy. You can even improve your mind if you're willing to study and learn more. Studying can improve your grades too. And being polite to your classmates can make it easier to get along with them. These are just a few examples of how you can help yourself.



Having “determination” can also improve the quality of your life. It has been said that determination is one of the greatest assets a person can possess. With determination you can accomplish much, without it life can be more challenging and less satisfying.

Determination is especially important when facing obstacles. A student who struggles in a math class will be more likely to succeed if he or she is willing to try harder or ask for help. A student who didn't make the golf team this season might have a better chance next year if he or she is willing to practice more or take lessons. Even poor grades can be improved with determination and a willingness to work harder.

Just what is determination? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “determination is the act of deciding definitely and firmly.” A person with determination has made up his mind to fully commit himself to something. A commitment usually consists of two parts: the first is a person's decision to do something, the second is the action needed to accomplish one's goal.

Dieting is a perfect example of why determination is essential for success. One must commit to making better eating choices and more exercise to reach a weight goal. A person must have determination if he or she is going to meet challenges and achieve goals.

Someone who wants to be a lawyer but lacks the determination to take challenging classes, study hard and finish law school will never reach his goal. Even if a person graduates from law school he still needs to completely commit to his work. A person might be a talented lawyer but still fail at his job if he is not willing to devote long hours.

Great things can be accomplished with determination. For example, in 1883 an engineer named John Roebling had an idea to build a bridge that would connect New York with Long Island. Many respected engineers told him it couldn't be done and that he shouldn't do it.

Roebling, however, held onto his dream of building the bridge. He thought about it constantly and he knew in his heart he could build it. He managed to convince his son, Washington, a promising engineer, that the bridge could be built. Together they figured out how to overcome many of the obstacles that stood in their way. With a great challenge in front of them they hired a crew and began to build their dream bridge.

When the project had been underway only a few months there was a bad accident that took the life of John Roebling. His son, Washington was injured so badly that he could not walk or talk.

Most people thought the project should be stopped, and made comments like, "We told them they were crazy from the beginning." But in spite of Washington's serious injuries he was still determined to finish the project.

Suddenly, Washington had an idea about how to communicate. All he could do was move one finger. By moving it slowly he was able to develop a code for communication. He tapped his wife's arm with his finger, indicating he wanted her to call the engineers again. Then using a single finger, with his wife as an interpreter, he was able to tell the engineers what he wanted to have done. The project was re-started and for the next 13 years Washington taped out his instructions on his wife's arm. The bridge was finally completed in 1883.

Today, over one hundred years later, the spectacular Brooklyn Bridge stands in testament to the unstoppable spirit and determination of a father and son. Over 130,000 vehicles cross the Brooklyn Bridge daily.

Thomas Edison's teachers once said that he was too stupid to learn anything. He was fired from his first two jobs for being "nonproductive." As an inventor, Edison made more than 1,000 unsuccessful attempts to invent the light bulb. When a reporter asked him how it felt to fail 1,000 times, Edison said that he didn't fail all those times, but that the light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.

Two Short Stories

Nate Overcomes Fate

Nate's left arm ended in a mass of scar tissue just below the elbow. He was in eighth grade when he lost his left hand and most of the same arm in a car accident. It wasn't until after his fourth surgery that the sores on his arm began to heal. Although the physical pain was starting to subside the mental pain from others who stared or whispered was almost unbearable.

His love was basketball. Before the accident he was an excellent guard. With quick hands, Nate could steal a ball before his opponent had time to react. On offense he was able to spot an open player out of the corner of his eye. A quick pass to a forward or the center would almost always result in a basket.

After the accident Nate gave up on almost everything, including himself. He thought basketball for him was over. He figured no one would want to be his friend again. His self-confidence plummeted, especially after his doctor said, "Nate, you need to realize your limitations here. There are lots of things you can still do but basketball is not going to be one of them. Think about sports like bowling or track. Running might be a great choice for you with your quickness."

With the help of his basketball coach he began to once again build his self-confidence. Coach told Nate that basketball could still be in his future. "After all Nate you can still dribble a ball and it doesn't take two hands to shoot or throw a pass," he said. Nate's eyes lit up as he listened. "But keep in mind, Nate, this will take an awful lot of work on your part. You'll have to compete against players with two hands. Now, go get a ball from the storage locker and start shooting."

He practiced and practiced. He was determined to play again. With encouragement from fellow players, he continued to work hard. He knew it was a long shot to make the team but he was willing to work harder than anyone else. Teammates spent their weekends practicing with Nate. His height, at six foot two inches, gave him the advantage he needed to work his way to the basket, spin and ease in a nice soft hook shot. He learned with his quickness he could guard almost anyone, even with just one hand. Nate thought about the words of his coach, "Remember, defense starts with your feet." And Nate's feet were plenty quick. Frequently, Nate would surprise his opponent with a quick steal and a break away pass.

After a summer of hard work on the court Nate thought he was ready for fall tryouts. He was in good shape and his coach and teammates offered him lots of encouragement. Nate wasn't picked as a starter but he did make the squad. This gave him a new goal, "I know with more hard work I can be a starter. I've come this far, now I want make it into the starting line-up."

It wasn't long before Nate was introduced as one of the team's starters. His hard work and per-

sistence paid off. At one point he thought his basketball career was over and now he had earned one of the top spots on the team.

Nate is now playing for a private college in Illinois. He recently told a sport's reporter, "In a way losing my hand and part of my arm has been a blessing in disguise. It has taught me that we can live and also thrive with handicaps. I've had parents come up to me and say, after seeing me play, that they now realize what might be possible for their own handicapped child. I'm happy that I can be an inspiration for others."

Frank's Not So Freaky After All

Frank always liked a challenge and he was curious about everything. Before he was seven years old he could change the brake pads on his bike and repair a punctured tire. By the time Frank was in fifth grade he was repairing toasters, blenders and other appliances. Lawn mower and snow blower repairs were the most fun since they had gears.

When he was in eighth grade his dad got him his own computer. Frank quickly forgot about working on lawn mowers, bikes and blenders. He devoted all of his time to figuring out how computers worked. It wasn't long before he had experimented and studied enough to fix almost any computer problem a person might have.

His relatives and neighbors called on him to fix their computer problems. At school, the teachers asked for his help. He even asked for and received permission to start the school's first computer club. It wasn't long before he was given a nickname: Everyone at school was calling him "Geeky Frank."

The more the other students saw him hanging around the computer lab or hovering over a computer with a small screwdriver, the harder they found it to relate to him. Frank, in their opinion had a one-track mind.

Frank taught himself various programming languages and helped to re-work his school district's website. His classmates were now beginning to think he was weird. Some were even bullying him. "Hey Frank do you know where the word geek comes from?" said Dennis.

"No," said Frank. "Well, a geek was a carnival freak who bit the heads of chickens. You're getting pretty freaky yourself hanging around computers all of the time." As Frank turned to walk away Dennis knocked a laptop computer from his hands.

Frank picked up the computer and walked into his math class only to catch yet another hurtful comment. "Frank, don't forget about the big game tonight against Southgate, if we win tonight we go to the finals."

"What game?" said Frank.

“It figures, Frank, you wouldn’t know because the only thing you know about are computers,” Sara said.

No one likes to be bullied or ridiculed, not even Frank. “Maybe,” he thought to himself, “If I go to the game everyone will see me as more normal.”

But once he was there he heard Dave say, “Hey, look who’s here, Freaky Frank the Geek.” He ignored the words and watched the game. But he couldn’t help but over-hear what Sandra said to Dave.

“You’re being RIDICULOUS Dave! What does it matter if someone is a geek? What’s the big deal about how they dress, or what they’re geeky about? A geek is someone who is passionate about something. Geeks come in all shapes and sizes, all levels of attractiveness. This sort of prejudice infuriates me. Grow up Dave!” said Sandra.

After the game Frank saw Sandra walking toward the front of the building and thanked her for standing up for him. “Hey Sandra, thanks for what you said to David. I guess I am a geek but I can’t help it. I just love computers. It was really nice of you to say what you said.”

Sandra replied, “I’m just tired of people who start calling others names because they are different in some way. Good luck Frank.”

Frank continued to hear nasty remarks throughout junior and senior high school but he never gave up his love of learning about computers. In spite of being made fun of he was determined to reach his goal of earning an Information Technology degree.

Frank finished college and is now working for one of the largest technology companies in the world. He has been credited for helping to create one of the fastest computer chips available. This year he has decided to donate money for a new state of the art computer lab at his old junior high school.

Determination and Obstacles

Did you ever want something but gave up on it because it seemed to require too much effort? Did you ever set a goal for yourself only to hear someone say that you didn’t have what it takes to achieve it? Most people have had experiences like these. In some cases they quit before they ever got started. But sometimes comments like these have made people even more determined. Being told, “no” or asked, “What were you thinking?” can motivate some people to achieve great things. You might be one of them.

Think for a moment about the Brooklyn Bridge story. John Roebling had a dream that he never

gave up on even when he was told that his idea was foolish. He stood by his convictions until he died. His son was also committed to the project, even when he was unable to walk or talk. John and Washington faced plenty of set backs and hardships but with persistence and determination their dream was finally realized. Think about Nate. He could have easily given up on his love of sports had he listened to his doctor. And Frank put up with a good deal of teasing but he never let it stop him from pursuing his goals.

Many goals, especially big ones, aren't reached without stumbling blocks and hurdles along the way. Prior to the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 there was a significant setback. A launch pad fire killed three people. However, the determination and hard work of NASA scientists and engineers finally paid off. The three-man crew of this historic mission arrived on the moon after a four-day journey and safely returned to earth.

When you set a goal for yourself which one of these statements do you say to yourself?

No Matter how hard I have to work, I'm going to do it.

Well, I'll try to do it but if it's too hard or it takes too much time I'll let someone else do it.

Have Determination on Your Side

When you are determined many things are possible. Determination can be one of your greatest personal assets. It is considered to be the best predictor of success in one's life. It can even trump ability. Determination gives you power. Here are some of the ways that being determined can help you.

- It can help you prevent and overcome failure
- It can give you the motivation to get a job done and to do it well
- It can help you reach your goals
- It can bring out the best in you
- It can give you a sense of pride
- It can help you build your self-confidence
- It can motivate you to achieve great things
- It can help you face and overcome challenges

Famous Quotes

“A leader, once convinced a particular course of action is the right one, must have the determination to stick with it and be undaunted when the going gets rough.” -- Ronald Regan

“Desire is the key to motivation, but it’s determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal—a commitment to excellence—that will enable you to attain the success you seek.” -- Mario Andretti

“Ability is what you’re capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.” -- Lou Holtz

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.” -- Winston Churchill

“You’ve got to get up every morning with determination if you are going to go to bed with satisfaction.” -- George Lorimer

“The difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a man’s determination.” -- Tommy Lasorda

5. Is there a difference between determination and ambition? Explain.

6. Why is having determination one of the greatest assets a person can have?

7. What do you think is more important for success, ability or determination?

8. Why was the building of the Brooklyn Bridge a story of determination?

9. How is the story of Apollo 11 a story of determination?

10. List some areas where you might need to have more determination.

Determination

Questions for Classroom Discussion

These questions are designed to provoke discussion and encourage students to see the value of character and leadership. Teachers are invited to modify, add or delete questions at their discretion but the copyright must remain.

1. Why is it important to have determination when you face challenges in your lives?
2. What evidence is there that John and Washington Roebling were determined men?
3. What obstacles did Washington overcome in order to get the bridge built?
4. How was Nate able to overcome his handicap?
5. What role did Nate's coach play in helping Nate reach his goal?
6. What lessons do you think Nate learned from meeting his challenge?
7. How was Nate an inspiration to parents of handicapped children?
8. Why was Frank being picked on?
9. Who stood up for him? What was her message to Dave?
10. How did Nate become so successful? How did he give back to his community?
11. How can being determined help in your life?
12. Is there a difference between being determined and being motivated? Explain.
13. Explain the quote by George Lorimer.
14. What is the relationship between determination and success?
15. How can failure motivate you to be even more determined? Why do some people just give up after they fail at something?