

Character and Leadership Packet #6

Taking Initiative

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. These are just a few examples of how you can help yourself.



There are also steps you can take to make school life better, for you and everyone. Taking initiative is one of these steps. Crushing a nasty rumor or initiating a fund-raiser for a student whose family just lost their home to a fire are examples of taking initiative at school. Leaders take action. They see a need to move things in a certain direction, just as a soccer player moves a ball toward a goal.

Initiative is the link between thought and action. Initiative connects thinking about something to actually doing something. Many students recognize a need but don't act on it. Instead of starting a report a week or two in advance they wait until the night before. Rather than making lunch for school in the evening they wait and do it the next morning just minutes before they have to be at the bus stop. A person may hope someone will be nice to the new student but they're too busy. Many have good intentions but only a few take the initiative to get the job done.

Leaders don't hesitate to step up and get something done. They are willing to take a risk that their efforts may fail. They'll say "hello" to a shy person even though they know they may not get a response. Leaders make it a point to spend a few minutes with a new student, even if others don't. They may see a book on the floor and take the time to pick it up and turn it into the office. A leader will let a teacher know if someone is being bullied. Leaders get involved. They don't worry about what others think since they are confident that what they are doing is right.

Stepping in to meet a need or prevent a problem shows leadership. School leaders don't stand

back when something needs to be done. When they aren't sure about whether to act or not act, they ask a teacher or administrator. Remember, the adults at school are there to give you guidance so that your efforts can be successful.

Taking initiative makes school a better experience for everyone. Can you imagine being in a school where no one bothers to be on time, gets their assignments done, or cooperates with the teachers?

The Importance of Taking Initiative

It's important to take initiative. You can take initiative at home when you keep your room clean or make your bed. Taking the dog for a walk or taking out the trash without being told is another way to show initiative. Getting your homework done without reminders from parents is a great example of personal initiative.

Being proactive at school is important too. If a teacher, whose arms are full of books, tries to open a door, a leader will help without being asked. Leaders don't let friends spread rumors. They would say, "Hey, what you're saying will hurt Beth's feelings! We don't need to say something negative about someone to make ourselves feel better, we're above this." Leaders listen and follow instructions when a teacher says, "Everyone needs to stop talking now," or "It's time to put your art project away and get out your history books."

Showing initiative promotes teamwork and cooperation. Qualities like these make for a better school experience for everyone. Students enjoy learning in environments where there are values like these. Teachers appreciate working in schools where there are considerate students. It's a "win-win."

School should not be a place where students have to be reminded to do what is right. Most proactive students already know what is right. They take steps to do what is right when others sit by. Student leaders are able to stand up to peer pressure. This is what makes them a leader. Schools need good role models who are willing to stand up for what is right.

Two Short Stories

Dontae the Dreamer

Everyone likes the new student, Dontae. He has a big smile and a contagious laugh. Right off the bat he impressed everyone with his enthusiasm. After just a few weeks of his arrival he wanted to start an Ecology Club. He then talked with the principal about raising funds for a new electronic announcement board.

He told his science teacher that if he would sponsor Ecology Club at least fifteen students would

join. Dontae even shared some of his ideas for ecology projects. “Hey, Mr. Lawson, I think a good ecology project for our new club would be to make birdhouses and nesting boxes and place them on school grounds. Then maybe we could talk with the school board and see if they would allow us to plant some trees native to our area on school property.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself Dontae, first let’s see how many students show up for the meeting on Friday,” said Mr. Lawson.

Later Dontae talked with his principal again about raising money for a new announcement board. “Mrs. Conway, let me talk to my dad and see if he can help us with this project. He’s a member of the Tremont Service Club here in town and I’m sure his club would be willing to help with this project.”

“That’s not a bad idea Dontae, why don’t you have your dad give me a call,” said Mrs. Conway.

As the three o’clock bell rang Dontae finished his conversation with Mrs. Conway by saying, “Don’t worry I’ll tell him to give you a call on Friday.” And off he went to get ready for baseball practice.

After practice Dontae told his coach that his mom would host the next team pizza party on Friday. “Hey Coach Stengel, my mom said she would love to be next to have the team pizza party. She’ll make the pizzas from scratch. It’s her mom’s recipe.”

Coach Stengel nodded his head and said, “Great, I’ll make the announcement, tell your mom thanks.”

The rest of the week was very busy for Dontae. He had a science test coming up on Wednesday that he hadn’t start to study for yet, a Scout meeting Thursday evening, and his aunt and uncle were coming to visit for the weekend. He was so busy that it slipped his mind to help with the organizational ecology meeting. And he forgot about asking his dad to call the principal. The biggest problem arose when the baseball team showed up at his house for pizza and Dontae’s mom had no idea she had been volunteered to feed the team.

Dontae was a great initiator but he didn’t do well at follow through. People need a plan. Without one, projects fail. Do you think Dontae ever meant to follow through? Or did he just get too busy and forget?

Jackson Takes Action

When Jackson isn’t in school he can almost always be found on the soccer field. He loves the sport and he’s an excellent goalie. He seldom lets a ball get by him.

His team won the city championship two years in a row. Jackson’s mom has a scrapbook with

newspaper articles highlighting her son’s accomplishments as goalie. The fireplace mantel attests to his success: his MVP (most valuable player) trophies are proudly displayed.

One doesn’t take home trophies like Jackson without lots of practice. Jackson’s life was school, soccer practice, dinner, homework, and bed—repeat.

Sunday, however, was his “breakday.” He had a chance to relax and hangout with friends. They spent hours on Sunday playing Pirates of the Caribbean and Monster Hunter on Jackson’s Wii. Sunday lunch often included some burgers and fries at a nearby fast food restaurant.

Mrs. Oakes, one of Jackson’s teachers, recently changed this routine. Jackson was comfortably “in a rut.” It was a good rut though: good grades, soccer and good friends. Mrs. Oakes, however, woke Jackson up to something completely hidden from his view, but in plain sight.

After one of those Sunday afternoons at the fast food restaurant Jackson ran into Mrs. Oakes outside the Southside Food Pantry.

“Hey, Mrs. Oakes, what’s going on?”

“Oh, hi Jackson, I’m headed home after finishing two shifts as a volunteer at the food pantry. You know we have a lot of people in town that are out of work and can’t afford much in the way of food right now. It’s tough enough on people when they lose their job. It’s even tougher when they can’t feed their family. It can result in depression and despair for those who experience such problems.”

“I guess I didn’t realize all of this.”

“The Southside Food Panty is what saves many people from going hungry.”

“Well, it was great seeing you Mrs. Oakes, I’ll see you tomorrow at school.”

“OK, Jackson, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As Jackson walked home he began to think about what Mrs. Oakes said. Then an idea popped in his head. He thought, “Maybe I can help organize a canned food drive at school for the food pantry.”

On Monday he approached Mrs. Oakes and asked if he could do just that. They talked about it and decided that they would suggest the idea to the student council. With Mrs. Oakes help, Jackson wrote a speech and made a presentation to the student council. The project was accepted.

The canned food drive was a big success. Jackson did a good job of helping to develop a plan

and making sure the work got done. Now the school plans to have an annual canned drive to help out those who use the Southside Food Pantry.

How to Initiate

Anyone can initiate something. You can start by taking action in your own personal life. Do you have good study habits? Are you in your seat with your books out when the bell rings? Do you follow instructions? Do you get to bed on time? Do you help with chores around the house? Once you have initiated some of these good habits you're ready to initiate more.

What about your elderly neighbor who struggles to mow his yard? You could offer to help. Several students might get together and ask the principal if they could organize a teacher's appreciation day in April and a custodian's appreciation day in May. Or you might ask if you can help break down the boxes from Market Day.

Remember, before taking on any leadership role make sure you commit yourself to the project. Don't start something and then not follow through. Dontae let a lot of people down by not doing what he said he would do. Remember: actions speak louder than words.

Famous Quotes

"Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit." -- Conrad Hilton, Hilton Hotels

"Things may come to those who wait, but only things left by those who hustle." --Abraham Lincoln

"Thinking is easy, acting is difficult, and to put one's thoughts into action is the most difficult thing in the world," -- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"An idea is worthless unless you use it." -- John Maxwell

"Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." -- William Jennings Bryan

"If your ship doesn't come in, swim out to meet it." -- Jonathan Winters

"The secret to getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one." -- Mark Twain

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Questions for Individual Students

Name _____ Date _____

These questions are based on the packet you have just read. Please think about what you have read and write thoughtful answers. There are no right or wrong answers to most questions. The questions are written to encourage you to think about the importance of character and leadership. Make sure you write clearly so your teacher can read your answers. You may use the back of this page if needed.

1. What does student leadership have to do with taking initiative? Explain.
2. What does taking initiative have to do with being successful?
3. What would school be like if teachers didn't take the initiative to create lesson plans?
4. Describe how you've taken action on something that has made you a better person or student.

5. How can you take initiative to make an improvement at your school?

6. How can you take initiative to make an improvement at home?

7. Why wasn't Dontae successful with what he was trying to initiate?

8. What advise would you give Dontae?

9. Dontae disappointed his teacher, principal, coach and mom. How do you think he might redeem himself?

10. Why is it always better to think first before taking action? Explain.

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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. Do you have to be a leader to take initiative?
2. What are some reasons we don't take action when we know we should?
3. Is all action good action? Was Dontae's leadership good? Why?
4. What did Jackson recognize as a need in his community that he could help with?
5. Why is "being too busy" not a good excuse for helping others?
6. Compare Dontae's style of getting things done with that of Jackson.
7. Explain why Mrs. Oakes and the student council were important to the success of the canned food drive?
8. Name some organizations in your town that help needy people. How do they provide help?
9. Why isn't it important to be successful every time one tries to be proactive? How can failure teach us a lesson?
10. What needs are there at your school that might benefit from the efforts of a group of proactive students?
11. How can getting teachers involved in a school project help ensure a better outcome?
12. Can anyone initiate something? If so, where might a person start?
13. Has reading this packet helped you realize the importance of taking initiative? Explain.
14. What do you think the quote by Conrad Hilton means?
15. Could Dontae have benefited by reading Mark Twain's quote? Explain.