

# Personal character and fitness go hand-in-hand

*Guest blog from our friend Mark Yontz with PE4Life. Check them out at [www.pe4life.org](http://www.pe4life.org)*

At first blush, writing about “what character means to me” seemed easy enough. But I’ve found it’s certainly not a topic you can take lightly, as honest reflection opens a floodgate of thoughts and ideas on how best to address this important subject.

I’ve watched over the years as the Character Counts In Iowa initiative has steadily expanded throughout our state and successfully reached the lives of thousands of people; not, by the way, an easy task. How so? Well, I know from experience that promoting an intangible thing like “character” – and then getting people to successfully integrate this mindset into the culture of their school or workplace – requires some creativity and effort, because there’s no quick fix when it comes to changing cultures, perceptions and attitudes!

Given this, I admire the work Character Counts In Iowa has done, especially when it comes to becoming a recognized entity (and brand) in schools throughout the state. From my perspective, this has been accomplished by consistently hammering home the relevance and importance of the Six Pillars, which stand as a simple yet effective way of conveying a positive message that incorporates rules to live-by – rules that form the bedrock of a mindset that’s applicable to everyone, no matter their race, age, gender, job, geographic location, socioeconomic status, etc.

My organization is also working with schools across Iowa to inspire cultural change and adopt new ways of thinking, but our focus is on physical education for kids. In short, we

stress that the “Old P.E.” needs to go away and be replaced by the “New P.E.,” which offers something for ALL kids, not just the athletically inclined. We advocate that P.E. needs to stress individual assessments, the use of technology, and the building of lifelong, personal physical fitness skills and knowledge. So the playing (and teaching) of team-related sports like football, basketball, softball and dodge ball that have traditionally dominated P.E. classrooms for decades needs to go away and be replaced by a more focused, well-rounded approach to P.E. that stresses personal fitness and skill building.

But no matter what we do to proactively promote the benefits of quality, fitness-oriented P.E., there’s still an element of individual RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY that’s required for any real changes to occur. First and foremost, people have to RESPECT themselves and who they are. This can be achieved, in part, through maintaining a healthy lifestyle – one that includes regular exercise and understanding the importance of taking care of oneself. Research shows that healthy, active, fit people are generally more confident, happy and content; and this state of well-being can only be achieved by taking personal RESPONSIBILITY to do the work necessary to live a healthy lifestyle and take personal fitness seriously.

Bottom line, the ultimate authority over your personal fitness and even living out the ideals of the Six Pillars on a daily basis all starts with YOU!