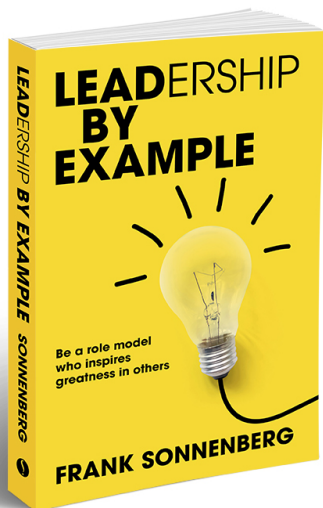


Leadership by Example

Enjoy this excerpt from *Leadership by Example: Be a Role Model Who Inspires Greatness in Others* by our friend, Frank Sonnenberg.



If You Believe You Can't, You Won't

What describes your way of thinking? Are you more likely to say, “Why them and not me?” or “If they can do it, so can I?” Your answer to that question will either motivate you to reach new heights or discourage you from even trying.

When you believe that something is possible, your chances of achieving it are greatly enhanced.

On the other hand, some people believe that success is beyond their reach and use that reasoning as an excuse not to try. Instead, they spend their valuable time pointing fingers, making excuses, and complaining that life isn't fair – because it's easy. Others are so afraid of failing that they lower expectations to shield themselves from embarrassment in case they do. Last, there are those who allow themselves to be conned into believing that people “like them” don't stand a chance. So sad!

Your mindset determines whether you have the wind at your back or face headwinds that hold you back.

The Sky Is the Limit

We all compare ourselves to others. But the way that we compare ourselves varies wildly.

Are you *constructive*? Some folks say, "If they can do it, so can I." They try to emulate the behavior of successful people.

Are you *destructive*? Other folks say, "Why them and not me?" They let anger and resentment get the better of them. Instead of looking for ways to build themselves up, they look for ways to tear others down.

When you believe you can achieve anything you set your mind to, your faith will give you strength, hope, and confidence. You'll have confidence in your ability and remain steadfast and determined until you reach your final goal.

Conversely, when you believe that others hold an unfair advantage and that the cards are stacked against you, this belief will discourage you from making the effort. Instead of taking the bull by the horns and accepting responsibility for your destiny, you'll fail to make the personal sacrifice, put in the hard work, and make the commitment required to succeed. In fact, you may even throw in the towel before you start – and then blame others for your misfortune.

If you fail to try, you'll succeed in failing.

Think of the people you surround yourself with. Do they bring out the best in you or are they holding you back? Do they inspire you to achieve greatness or do they drag you down? It's one thing for *you* to decide not to try, and quite another for others to rob you of the possibility. You have the ability to achieve anything you want in life. Don't let anyone

tell you otherwise.

The One Who Might Be Holding You Back Is You

You can achieve great things, but you must be willing to try. That will require hard work, sacrifice, and determination. Of course, there will be challenges and obstacles for you to overcome. But the power to achieve your goals is totally within your control. Your frame of mind can work for you or against you. Why handicap yourself and make your life more difficult than it has to be? Failing to achieve something is excusable; failing to try is not. You can blame others all you want, but the real path to success lies within yourself. Don't throw it away. The one who might be holding you back is you. If you believe you can't, you won't.

This post is excerpted from *Leadership by Example: Be a role model who inspires greatness in others* by Frank Sonnenberg © 2023 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved.

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Frank Sonnenberg is an award-winning author and a well-known advocate for moral character, personal values, and personal responsibility. He has written 10 books and has been named one of "America's Top 100 Thought Leaders." Additionally, his blog – *FrankSonnenbergOnline* – has attracted millions of readers and was recently named one of the "Top Self-Improvement and Personal Development Blogs" in the world and one of the "Best Inspirational Blogs On the Planet." Frank's newest book, *Leadership by Example: Be a role model who inspires greatness in others*, was released June 13, 2023.

Character Building with the Six Pillars of Character



*This article was originally published in the February 2023 edition of **Story Monsters**.®*

For over 30 years, CHARACTER COUNTS! has worked with parents, educators, and coaches around the world to help them instill the Six Pillars of Character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—in their students. These values serve as the foundation for our work, whether in kindergarten classrooms, middle schools, high school sports, or in the home.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a values-based program because values guide our decisions, and at its core, character education is

about helping kids make good decisions. Without intentional values, human beings tend to make decisions based on what is easiest or most emotionally satisfying. In fact, one could argue that we make decisions that way because we value what is convenient and feels good. However, this isn't a good decision-making framework. If we don't want to default to impulsive values, then we must have intentional values to guide our decisions. In CHARACTER COUNTS!, we want our decisions to be trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and demonstrate good citizenship.

The Six Pillars of Character are not exclusive. It's OK to have other values. Nor are the Six Pillars inherently better than other values. The Six Pillars are useful because they are universal, an important factor when working with diverse stakeholders. Regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or any other demographic factor, there are few if any people who hope their child is irresponsible.

There aren't many teachers or parents who wish they trusted their kids less. When we can align diverse stakeholders around a set of core values, then we can align our decision-making as individuals and as a collective. In other words, we can analyze whether our individual decisions and our group or organizational decisions reflect the Six Pillars.

Once the Six Pillars of Character have been identified as your values, the next step is to turn values into behaviors. Values can be vague. What is perfectly respectful to me, you might find abhorrent. We have to define what the Six Pillars actually look like for us in our specific circumstances. In some schools, responsibility might look like wearing your school uniform each day, while other schools don't have a school uniform at all. Sometimes definitions change based on age. In little league sports, fair could mean everyone plays the same amount of time. In middle school, fairness could mean everyone gets to play, but not necessarily the same amount. In high school, fairness could mean those who deserve to play the

most get to play the most. The point is, values must be defined so that we can turn stated values into operational values—what we do each day.

Many of the books featured in Story Monsters Ink provide exceptional opportunities to teach students how to use the Six Pillars to make decisions, but also define what each pillar looks like in action. For example, if a character in a book is asked to help a friend cheat on a test, how could the Six Pillars help the character determine what decision to make? Or, if a character in a story stands up for their friends, you can ask students which pillar the character is demonstrating. The same type of exercise can be done with any value you privilege in your family, school, or team.

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Story Monsters Ink is offering all CHARACTER COUNTS! supporters a free 12-month digital subscription. Subscribe here **StoryMonstersInk.com** and use code: CC12

*Learn more about **Story Monsters**.*

What is the Content of Your Character?



*This article was originally published in the January 2023 edition of **Story Monsters**.®*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may have stated it best when he wrote, “Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” That’s what we’re chasing as educators, as parents, and as a society—intelligence plus character. We want our kids to be smart and good. We want our students to maximize their intelligence and academic competencies, and we want them to be good people. Though schools and governments are always focused on intelligence and academic proficiencies, the focus on character education rises and wanes. And yet, we continue to return to this simple truth—to do our best work and be our best self requires good character.

Character isn’t simply what one does when no one is looking, as the oft-repeated saying goes. It’s also what one does when everyone is looking. In fact, our character is revealed in every action and decision. It’s what powers our performance, any performance, from practicing a sport or musical instrument to completing a group assignment or learning a new language.

After all, one is far more likely to succeed at any of those tasks if they demonstrate work ethic, discipline, a growth mindset, and other character traits.

Character also powers our relationships. Our relationships are far stronger when we are trustworthy, respectful, caring, empathetic, generous, and so on. At CHARACTER COUNTS! we work with teachers, staff, administrators, coaches, and other educators to help them teach, enforce, advocate, and model key character competencies so that their students can maximize their potential. Built on the Six Pillars of Character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—CHARACTER COUNTS! helps schools and organizations create, sustain, and enhance a Six Pillar culture that shapes the character of the individuals in that culture.

Thankfully, character skills aren't fixed. No one is eternally blessed or condemned with good or bad character skills. Like dribbling a basketball, writing an essay, or solving math problems, character skills can be taught, practiced, and improved, and CHARACTER COUNTS! provides resources and professional development to aid teachers in their work to develop students' intelligence and character.

For example, pick any book for any grade level. As your student engages with the book, ask them to consider:

- What traits are the characters demonstrating, and how do those traits impact the action in the book?
- Whether the decisions the characters make are trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and a demonstration of good citizenship.
- If they would make a different decision than the characters. Why they would make that decision?

No one has perfect character; we're all works in progress, but

the more we examine our character, reflect on our decisions, and practice putting good character traits into action, the more opportunities for success and positive relationships are presented. Intelligence plus character—that is and should always be our goal.

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Story Monsters Ink is offering all CHARACTER COUNTS! supporters a free 12-month digital subscription. Subscribe here **StoryMonstersInk.com** and use code: CC12

*Learn more about **Story Monsters**.*

Living the Golden Rule

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Everyone knows the Golden Rule. In fact, numerous religions espouse it, the most familiar version being, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The question is, if most

people know, and agree, with the principle, why don't more folks live by that standard? Do you abide by the Golden Rule?

When you do nothing, nothing happens.

If you truly want to live by this principle, the first place to start is to understand its *true* meaning and how to apply it effectively.

First, the Golden Rule should say, "Do unto others *as THEY want to be treated*" rather than "*how YOU want to be treated.*" Otherwise, you're imposing *your* preferences and values unto others.

Second, be empathetic. Don't *assume* you know what people need; you're not a mind reader. Everyone is unique; treat people according to their *individual* needs and desires.

How to Live by the Golden Rule

There are many ways to incorporate the precepts of the Golden Rule into your daily life. Here are 30 examples:

See the good in people. Make people feel special.

Be the first to give. Give for the right reason – and that is, give for no reason at all.

Play by the rules. Don't cut in line. Wait your turn.

Listen to others. Communicate. Don't just take turns talking.

Be unbiased. Never judge someone you don't know.

Keep an open mind. Search for the truth by listening to opposing arguments and letting others challenge your views and opinions.

Give people a chance. As you climb the ladder of success, reach down and pull others along with you.

Make every collaboration win-win. Never win at the expense of a relationship.

Be selfless. Put others' needs ahead of your own.

Tell it like it is. Don't say anything behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face.

Stop criticizing. Constructive feedback is helpful; criticism is hurtful and damaging.

Set the bar high. Be tough but fair. Don't demand things of others that you're unwilling to do yourself.

Work hard. Pull your weight rather than weigh down the team.

Have a heart. Stand up for those who are less fortunate.

Be tolerant. Don't force your views on others. You can't expect others to abandon their values any more than you would forsake your own.

Give with an open hand. Give with no strings attached.

Be available. Be a good friend in good times and bad.

Be informed. Listen to both sides of a debate before forming your opinion.

Build trusting relationships. Earn respect rather than demanding it.

Be compassionate. Help people get back on their feet. But don't make them dependent on your good graces.

Be even-handed. Consider whether fairness would still apply if the tables were turned.

Forgive and forget. Let it go. Seeking retaliation rather than forgiveness traps you in the anger.

Share the credit. Deflect recognition rather than hoarding it.

Hold out hope. Lend an ear or a shoulder to cry on.

Accept “no” for an answer. Respect people’s priorities rather than making everything about you.

Be willing to sacrifice. Raise your own hand rather than volunteering others.

Offer your unconditional love. Accept people for who they are, *not* for who you want them to be.

Earn your keep. You *don’t* get what you want; you get what you deserve.

Give up control. Put your faith in people rather than micromanaging them.

Be grateful. Show your appreciation and never take anything for granted.

The Golden Rule – Make It a Reality

The only thing required to live the Golden Rule is the will and desire to shift your focus from yourself to others – selfish to selfless. In doing so, it’s not only beneficial to others, it’ll benefit you in ways you’d never imagine. But a good intention is like an idea that you keep to yourself. If you don’t do something with it, it’s like it never existed.

The Golden Rule is not just a nicety; it’s a way of life.

Make the effort today, and then again tomorrow. As Edwin Markham, the American poet, said, “We have committed the Golden Rule to memory; let us now commit it to life.” The fact is, success is a game of inches. When you do something well day in, and day out, the cumulative impact is huge. Before you know it, you’re living the Golden Rule.

Excerpted from *The Path to a Meaningful Life* by Frank Sonnenberg.



Frank Sonnenberg is an award-winning author and a well-known advocate for morra

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Additionally, his blog – FrankSonnenbergOnline – has attracted millions of readers on the Internet. It was recently named one of the “Top Self-Improvement and Personal Development Blogs” in the world, and it continues to be named among the “Best 21st Century Leadership Blogs,” the “Top 100 Socially-Shared Leadership Blogs,” and the “Best Inspirational Blogs On the Planet.”

Social-Emotional Learning
Funded by ESSER



Social-Emotional Learning and Character Education can be funded by ESSER! An intentional focus on social-emotional learning and character skills has never been more important. Fortunately, the **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund (I and II)** provides funding for COVID-19 relief projects. This can include professional development, curricular resources, assessment, and support services for students' social-emotional needs.

Professional Development

Our professional development workshops:

- teach strategies on creating a positive school culture,
- provide best practices on how to teach, enforce, advocate, and model social-emotional skills,
- and help educators create a plan to provide sustainable SEL services.

Curricular Resources

We have a variety of curricular resources to help you intentionally and consistently focus on character and SEL

skills. Additionally, you can buy many of our digital materials as a perpetual license. Your school can use ESSER money on a one-time purchase that you can utilize long after ESSER funding runs out.

Assessments

Schools use culture and climate assessments to identify parts of their culture that may need attention. When taken annually, these surveys can illustrate how your social-emotional interventions are positively impacting school culture. Importantly, since you can use ESSER funds through September 2023, schools can gather two years of valuable data.

Get Started

We're dedicated to helping educators intentionally and consistently teach these important skills. For more information on using ESSER funds for CHARACTER COUNTS!, please contact Jason Lamping at Jason.lamping@drake.edu.

More information about ESSER:

- U.S. Department of Education Makes Available \$36 Billion in American Rescue Plan Funds to Support Students and Institutions

Support for afterschool and summer programs:

- Afterschool Alliance: COVID-19

Funding by state:

- Department of Education Announces American Rescue Plan Funds

Achieve and Avoid



Good communication requires us to respect each other. A tip for respectful conversations is to consider:

- what we want to achieve.
- what we want to avoid.

Achieve and Avoid

It is easy to focus too much on what we want to achieve in our conversations. For example, “I want to convince this person that I am right” or “I want to make this person realize that they are not considering all of the facts.” But, we should be putting the same focus on what we want to avoid during the conversation. We want to avoid insulting the other person, or even worse, ruining a relationship from a conversation gone wrong.

Before a conversation, if we think about what we want to achieve, we could want to:

- express our own opinion.
- give examples of our perspective.

We want to avoid:

- insulting the other person.
- making someone else feel insignificant or disrespected.

Approaching with Respect and Tolerance

It is important to remember that showing someone respect doesn't mean you are endorsing their beliefs. We don't have to agree with another person to give them respect and accept that their beliefs are valid to them.

Therefore, if we genuinely want to engage with someone who has different opinions, we need to approach them with respect and acceptance. A quick look at social media can show us that sometimes differences in opinion bring out criticism of people who think differently than we do. Criticism and judgment in those moments are precisely what we wanted to avoid. It will cause others to shut down communication and entrench them more deeply into their ideas and beliefs.

Your Next Conversation

Of course, we don't always prepare for each conversation and think through what we want to achieve and what we want to avoid. But, if we practice being aware of what we want to achieve and avoid, we'll get better at having respectful conversations that both people feel good about.

Connection, Character, and

Role Models



In our CHARACTER COUNTS! workshops, we discuss how being a positive role model is a key part of teaching good character. Think about a role model who made an impact on your life. Then, consider how that person was able to make such a positive impact on you. The answer we hear often is that the people who impact us take the time to learn about and connect with us. Connection is an important element of being a good role model and making a positive impact on others. Connection helps others trust us and believe in our integrity.

We hear amazing stories about people who make a positive impact because they connected with others and built trusting relationships. We learn about coaches who taught athletes how to overcome adversity in their lives, mentors who guided important, life-altering decisions, and teachers who inspired their students to become educators themselves.

Meaningful, sustainable connections aren't just the key to building relationships. Connecting with others also builds a positive culture, whether it be at home, work, school, or

another organization. An easy first step in building connections is asking questions. Be curious and engaged about the other person. Look for commonalities and express interest in your differences.

How can you make a positive impact on others? Get started by asking yourself these three questions:

1. Who made a positive impact on your life? In addition, how did that person make a difference in your life?
2. Who could you positively impact by making a deeper connection with them?
3. How can you make a deeper connection with those individuals?

Gratitude in Challenging Times

Navigating life's hardships (including a contentious election, a global pandemic, and the economic breakdowns caused by COVID-19) can be exhausting. However, there is still a lot that we can be thankful for.

Achieving Civility Through our Mindset



“I’m not allowed to get angry?” That’s a question that is raised in nearly every civility workshop we lead. Participants want to know how to have a mindset focused on civility when they’re feeling angry or frustrated. Our answer to that question is, “Of course you’re allowed to be angry. But, choose a mindset that helps you deal with the problem with civility.” It is our ability to understand the roles of emotions and mindsets that can help us maintain civility through everyday challenges.

While our emotions influence our mindsets, you can choose different mindsets for the same emotion. For example, if I’m feeling angry that my flight got canceled, I can choose a mindset that says, “This is the worst day ever! Why does this always happen to me? Nothing ever goes right.” Or, I can have a mindset that says, “I’ll get through this. There is a solution here. I can get this fixed.” The emotion is the same in both scenarios, but the mindset changes. When we lose someone close to us, we can feel that sadness for the rest of our life, but our mindsets may change and evolve over time. We

can be devastatingly heartbroken over someone's passing (emotion) and think about how grateful we are for the memories we have (mindset) at the same time.

Choosing your mindset, no matter your emotional state is an incredibly powerful tool because our mindset impacts our response. A negative mindset makes it less likely that we will choose the best possible response.

Our response to any situation is always entirely within our control. No matter how angry or frustrated we get, we can choose any number of responses – from violence, shaming, and name-calling to asking questions, seeking connection, and working to understand the other person. It is the same emotion, but different mindsets produce different responses.

The next time you are struggling to choose the right response in an emotional moment hit pause and ask yourself three questions:

1. What emotion am I feeling right now and why am I feeling it? Acknowledge the emotion. Acknowledge the reason for that emotion. Feel what you feel.
2. What outcome do I hope to achieve in this situation? You can't fix everything, but what outcome is within your influence?
3. What mindset and response give me the best chance to achieve that outcome?

By Jeff Kluever, Director of Programs

Achieve Through Character

Although our society puts a lot of emphasis on talent, talent

is just the minimum that we can achieve. In order to advance from talent to skill and then to achievement, we rely on our character skills like strong work ethic, leadership, perseverance, integrity, etc.