

Becoming an Excellent Person

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Chapter 1

Understanding Character

INTRODUCTION

Understanding character is vital in the process of finding a relationship partner and developing a strong and vibrant relationship together. It can certainly be very frustrating and painful to invest a lot of time and effort in a relationship only to find out later that the person has serious character weaknesses. The frustration and pain are especially difficult if the discoveries occur after engagement or marriage. Many people go through multiple, short-term relationships before even getting to college, some of which end in heartbreak or sadness. Rather than being tangled up in meaningless dating knots, knowing yourself and how to observe a person's whole character and compatibility with you can keep you closer to love and farther from heartache.

This book is about a new, more empowering way of approaching relationships. You are taking charge of yourself and building a good foundation. If you thoroughly know and develop your own character, you will be prepared to be an excellent partner. Through studying about character, and developing your own character strengths, you will also gain the character knowledge and skills necessary to observe a partner's words and actions and assess his or her character quickly and effectively. When you prepare your character, you can successfully be confident while single and build a fulfilling friendship-based relationship which may someday lead to marriage.

As you gain a clear picture of your character strengths and areas in which you need to grow, you can choose how you want to grow and change. This personal understanding and development is vital to begin before being with a partner. As you proceed, you will also begin identifying what character qualities will help you succeed in a relationship.

Developing and changing yourself helps you grow and mature into being a good and responsible adult with healthy relationships with others. It's not wise to change yourself just with the motive of attracting someone else, such as friends or a potential partner. You may please people by becoming who they want you to be, but that change may turn out to be temporary. Not only is it not a good choice, but it makes you someone you are not. If you are not confident in who you are, relationships will be difficult. Change for the good because you want to better yourself and, through that mindset, you will better yourself for future partners, whoever they may be. Shallow change may not last, but character strengths are always beneficial and in all areas of life.

UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER

You may or may not be familiar with character. Simply put, **character is:**

- The sum of all the qualities you develop throughout your life as you make choices about how to speak and act; character affects the majority of your words and actions
- The spiritual essence of who you are as a human being
- Your moral compass or ethical strength that provides the unwavering drive to choose what is right, even when that choice could cause you difficulties, and even if no one else is watching you or knows what you are doing

Page 19:

Here is another illustration:

Jeremiah, a student at a local college, adamantly disagrees with how one of his new professors runs the class. Jeremiah misuses assertiveness by speaking up loudly in class and arguing with or criticizing his professor in front of the other students. He objects to daily quizzes and demands formal study groups to help students improve their grades. Because he knows his fellow students are frustrated as well, he feels justified in being assertive on their behalf as well as his own.

Jeremiah's grades in this course are going down, and he is very sure he is right in speaking up. However, he just does not know how to get his message across effectively. He decides to ask his close friend Sarah to help him consider what to do. One evening over dessert at the college cafeteria, Jeremiah shares his concerns about this situation. Sarah helps him to see that he is causing harm by being excessively assertive, when what he really wants to do is encourage the professor to do things differently. Jeremiah realizes, as they talk the situation through, that he has been making the situation worse with his rude comments and behaviors. He also begins to understand that he has not been fair or respectful to his professor, who is new to the college and probably doing his best to adjust.

Together, Sarah and Jeremiah work through how he can practice moderation and compassion to adjust his practice of assertiveness. They decide his professor may listen to his suggestions if Jeremiah requests a private meeting instead of openly criticizing him in class. Jeremiah can practice respect, tactfulness, and courtesy both in this private meeting and in the classroom. He can take responsibility for his behavior and apologize for disrupting the class. He also realizes that he can further improve the situation by being friendly and encouraging.

Understanding this concept of character quality misuse will contribute to your character growth, and you will learn to spot character quality misuses in a friend or partner as well. You and a partner can help each other learn how to practice character qualities more appropriately, communicating in a common language and with common understanding of the principles involved. If, instead of getting angry about your partner's behavior, you understand it as a misuse of a character strength, you will be much more effective in addressing what is happening and directing your emotional response constructively.

HELPFUL ACTIVITY

Together with a friend or a group, create a quick skit (short impromptu drama) showing someone misusing a character quality and causing a problem. Then, create a new skit using helper qualities so that the person's words and actions are effective instead. Discuss together what you observed and learned.

~ Reflection ~

1. When have I caused harm by practicing a character quality at the wrong time or place? What was the outcome? How can I prevent a reoccurrence?
2. When have I practiced a quality both excessively and at the wrong time and place? What was the outcome? How can I prevent a reoccurrence?

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Date: _____

Worksheet 1: Understanding Your Character Choices

Purpose: To begin the process of understanding the character choices that you have made and how they have affected your relationships with others.

Instructions:

- A) On the first table below, note a few actions that you have taken that had a positive result in any relationship. Consider friends, family, partners, or spouses. Note the effect or outcome of your actions. Then identify a character quality from Chapter 1 or from Part 3 that you demonstrated in that situation.
- B) On the second table on the next page, note your actions that have had a negative result and the outcome in those situations. Then identify a character quality that you could have practiced that would have improved the outcome.

Positive Actions (Higher Nature)

Action	Effect/Outcome	Character Qualities That I Practiced
Example: Gave girlfriend a birthday present	She felt appreciated and happy	Thoughtfulness Generosity

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The book contains this level of detail on 58 character qualities

6 ~ Commitment

Commitment is making and keeping a reasonable promise or binding agreement to oneself or to others, including setting and meeting certain goals, standards, or expectations and completing tasks to which one has agreed.

Someone practices Commitment effectively when he/she:

- Meets agreed-upon expectations and keeps his/her word and promises, following through by doing what he/she says he/she will do
- Accepts and fulfills the responsibilities that accompany an agreement or decision
- Stays firm on a planned or agreed course of action or works to improve himself/herself or a situation, even when it becomes difficult to do so
- Makes appropriate choices to move forward in healthy relationships or situations even when feeling some fear or anxiety based on previous experiences or the experiences of others
- Keeps pursuing a course he/she has promised to follow

Someone needs to strengthen Commitment when he/she:

- Breaks promises, failing to honor his/her word or stated intentions
- Fails to make or to follow through on agreements or resolutions
- States agreements in such a vague way that there is no accountability
- Ignores the responsibilities necessary to fulfill an agreement
- Regards relationships or situations as short-term conquests without looking at the long-term consequences or larger picture
- Sabotages relationships, plans, or situations
- Refuses to engage in constructive problem solving when issues challenge a relationship

Someone misuses the strength of Commitment when he/she:

- Behaves in an inflexible, rigid, close-minded, or stubborn manner
- Refuses to renegotiate promises or situations even when there is good reason to do so
- Keeps commitments unwisely even when they clearly endanger health, safety, or relationships