

Character and Life Lessons: How will we respond when times get tough?

How will we respond when times get tough? This question is most appropriate to ask at this point in the school year. We are now five weeks into the school year; the newness of the year has worn off; our daily routine is in place; the schedule that many of us choose to keep is starting to catch up with us; our football team is continuing to establish their identity; and our band is getting closer and closer to their first official competition. All of these choices and activities increase the pressure that many of us feel. When times get tough how will we, as a school community and student body, respond?

In 1994, I was a high school assistant football coach in Coppell, Texas. One of my assigned duties was 9th grade head football coach. With this title came many extra duties. I dealt with parents, handled all paperwork, created daily practice schedules, made important game time decisions, and much more. I also supervised two assistant coaches who both were no less than 15 years my elder. One was the head baseball coach, who had taken our HS team to the state tournament numerous times, and the other coach was the HS assistant basketball coach. Both of these programs were always successful at Coppell HS. These two guys coached football because it was assigned to them, not because they had a passion to coach football. They did everything I asked and as true professionals showed me the same respect they showed anyone else regardless of my age. That year I learned many lessons about life and coaching. And, most importantly I learned about true character.

That football season the three of us had the privilege to coach one of the better 9th grade teams to walk the halls of Coppell HS. We won many games and when we won we usually won big. However, there was one game that year that has always stuck out in my mind. It was the game we played against the Terrell Tigers. We traveled to Terrell, Texas to play this game. We had heard through the coaching grapevine that their team was not very good. The whole evening was a disaster. We wrecked one of the school buses en route to the game. We lost in an embarrassing fashion. And, when our players were in the locker room getting ready to travel home, we had several of them lose their poise as they began to yell and blame their teammates for the loss. What an evening! What could I, or we, say that would make a difference? What could we say that would make these boys learn from their mistakes and improve? Really at the end of this game the concern we had was not about football. It was about character and more importantly it was about whom each of those young men was inside.

When we got back to our field house I would not let any of the players leave until we had a team meeting. In the meeting each coach addressed the kids about their lack of focus and poor performance that night. We knew we had a good football team. We also knew that the season could go south in a hurry if we didn't address the most important concern of all, which was the character of this football team. The head baseball coach said it best that night when he told the boys, "How you react when times are tough says more about your character than how you react when things are going your way. Anyone can revel in the good times and be happy due to success, but when times get tough how you react says more about you as a person than when times are good."

I have never forgotten those words. I also believe many of the players on that team never forgot those words and actually took them to heart. Our boys won the school's first 9th grade football district title. Two years later this same group of boys also beat the high and mighty Southlake Carroll Dragons. They were the first team in school history, or at least according to what we could find as a staff, to beat this

perennial powerhouse of a program. I contribute a large amount of the success this class had to that one horrible game in Terrell, Texas. The game which made all of us re-evaluate our character. Boy did I learn a lot that year about coaching, adversity, character, and myself. The two coaches who were assigned to help with the 9th grade team taught me, in many ways, what it meant to be a person of character. There was nothing I could offer these men that was going to help their programs; however, they treated me with the utmost of respect. In my opinion their behavior can be defined by the following quote by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe a German poet and novelist, "How do you treat others that you believe cannot further your career or cause?"

When times are tough this year how are we going to react? We will teach and mold our children so that they grow and become people of character? Or will we make excuses and find fault in those around them? I believe I know the answer, based on what I have seen thus far working in Sundown; however, the true answer will be revealed in each of our behaviors and actions as we encounter tough times.

Other thoughts and quotes to ponder regarding character:

Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses and avoids.
— *Aristotle, Greek philosopher (384-322 B.C.)*

What are you going to do when you think no one is watching?

One can acquire everything in solitude — except character.
— *Henri Stendahl, French novelist (1783-1842)*

Character is simply habit long continued.
— *Plutarch, Greek biographer (47-120 A.D.)*

Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.
— *Theodore Roosevelt, American adventurer and 26th president (1858-1919)*