

Committee for Integrity Enhancement Essay Contest 2016

Senior Division 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner

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### The Real Key to Success

I have found myself wondering many times, what can I do to get ahead? What I should have been asking myself is: am I doing what I know to be right? We live in a fast paced society that tells us to do whatever we can to be wealthy, popular, and have power. However, I have found that the real key to success is to have integrity. Integrity to me is having your actions reflect your morals instead of doing things for personal benefit. Having integrity shows respect to others, and I wholeheartedly believe it is a building block to a happy life.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Do what you feel in your heart to be right- for you'll be criticized anyway." Roosevelt was a leader of women's and civil rights. She was not afraid to speak about important issues and stood up for her beliefs. The Dalai Lama teaches Buddhist rules of life. He practices what he preaches, which is why he has been able to make such a big impact on the world. Both of these people have displayed exemplary integrity through their actions and have set the bar high for others.

To have integrity you must know what your beliefs are. If you stand for nothing, you will fall for everything. I view my morals as a compass that will lead me down the right path. Many teens make bad choices that impact them for the rest of their lives, because they are not grounded in their values. I knew from an early age that integrity was not just an option, it was

expected. I am grateful to my parents for taking me to church every week. Growing up, it was not singing gospel songs that built my character, it was the fellowship. Being surrounded by kind, caring people was a real asset to me. I am also glad my parents instilled in me to always be honest, be strong in my opinions, and respect others.

In my limited JV tennis experience, I have realized that there is nothing worse than playing a dishonest person on the court. In Tennis there is no referee making sure players are not cheating each other. Imagine a game is tied at deuce, and you are not sure if your opponent's return went in or out. If you win the match, you will move up in the team rank. In this situation it would be easy to call the ball out and win the game, but I know it is better to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. It is also better to lose a game than win by cheating.

"Whenever one person stands up and says, 'Wait a minute, this is wrong,' it helps other people do the same."-Gloria Steinem. Sometimes it only takes one person to make a huge difference. In high school it is easy to want to go with the flow and want to fit in. As a member of the Delaware County PRIDE team, I do performances about living a drug, alcohol, and tobacco free life. After a performance at an elementary school, a little girl came up to me and told me she wanted to be like me one day. That little girl's kind words brought more joy to me than any party could. I think the great thing about standing up for your beliefs is the fact that you never know how it can impact someone's life for the better.

School is competitive. I often feel a lot a pressure to do well, so I can get into college And have a good career. It would be easy for me to cheat on my homework or get answers for tests from other students. However, I believe that getting the highest grade is not nearly as important as the learning process. School teaches us so much more than the difference between a cation and an anion. It teaches us to overcome obstacles. I know that doing what is

easy is not always right.

Following rules can be difficult especially if you do not see a need for them. This year our school dress code became very strict. Girls particularly have found it difficult to dress according to code. Although it is hard for me to grasp why wearing shorts or leggings is a big deal, I know that the rules were put in place for a reason. I have chosen to not violate the dress code even though I do not necessarily agree with it. Once you start breaking simple rules, it becomes easier to break big ones. Now that I am used to following the dress code, it does not seem like a big deal.

“If you don’t want to find out, don’t do it.”- a Chinese proverb. It can be tough to make the right choices if you think you will not be held accountable for them. A person with integrity will do the right thing even if no one is watching. It is easy to get wrapped up in gossiping. However, my middle school years taught me that making another person look bad does not make you look better. When I feel the urge to say something bad about someone, I try to remember that it could get back to them.

Integrity is a daily battle. I would describe myself as a person of integrity, but I know integrity is something I will continually have to strive for. Some people will do anything to be successful, but how can you truly measure success? As an old woman, it will not matter to me if tons of money, did the popular things, or was liked by many people. When my time comes to an end, if I can say I lived my life according to my morals, I will consider my existence a success.