

Our inner character will stand the test of time

Mark Pavilonis



?Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.?

Albert Einstein

We all struggle, from time to time, with our purpose in life. We contemplate our role and our responsibilities. We stress over the little and the big things.

Parents can offer our children some guidance and gems of wisdom. Of course, given the whirlwind changes in society over the past decade, some of our ?wisdom??may be a tad out of date.

Even we 50-somethings are ill equipped to predict the future, or be able to adequately prepare our kids for an uncertain future.

I?am reminded, however, by my attentive 12-year-old daughter, that the future is not meant to scare us, and the past is not meant to harm us.

The beauty of our existence is that, like a fine wine, people do get better with age. We are better equipped to handle those curve balls life throws at us and we tend to be more practical in finding solutions.

But for my 16-year-old son, it comes as little comfort.

He's constantly struggling with his subject choices and is overwhelmed by planning a career strategy. We went to see a guidance counsellor/consultant who provided some assessment tools to narrow down career paths based on personal characteristics and strengths.

Liam would love to get involved in astronomy and maybe one day become an astronaut. Lofty plans to be sure. These require some university degrees and a lot of work. The future of the space industry is also tricky, with more being assumed by private enterprise.

He has also been toying with the idea of going to the Royal Military College and perhaps becoming a pilot. Sounds good to me. This route would require some intestinal fortitude and discipline, but these things never hurt anyone.

Liam is a good-hearted soul. He's also witty and quite smart when he applies himself. And yet, he gets bogged down in the ?process? and is easily derailed. He worries. He has no use for morons and always takes a logical approach.

We try to tell our children that ?book smarts??aren't the be all and end all. As Einstein pointed out, and Martin Luther King Jr. elaborated on, what's important is the content of one's character.

I?told Liam recently that we are not always remembered for our accomplishments or accumulated wealth, but by our compassion, love and dedication to our friends and family. My children ??all of our children ??will come to know these things one day.

Like any young adult, Liam is dealing with self-esteem and confidence issues. He's developing social skills and is trying to be patient and understanding. Again, these things take time, and a heck of a lot of practice!

?Show class, have pride, and display character. If you do, winning takes care of itself.?

Paul Bryant

My generation, and likely many of the Baby Boomers, didn't get much out of our parents in terms of solid pep talks or self-esteem tools. And so, we learned on our own. I?was a worrier too, in my teenage years. Despite the fact I did well in school, I stressed before every test and exam. I became outgoing and bit of a joker, to overcome my drawbacks. And it took me almost a decade to become comfortable and confident in my career and meeting new people day in and day out.

We all try to find our niche and our comfort zone. Some of us are still searching.

It's funny where you find peace and solace in life.

Liam is going on his third humanitarian mission trip shortly, with a small group from his high school. They go to the Dominican Republic, and work to assist destitute Haitian sugar cane workers. The experience is eye-opening, challenging, sad at times, and joyful at others. It puts everything into perspective in a very real way.

It is there, in a small facility run by the Daughters of Mary, where Liam finds himself. He sheds all stress and tension of this society, to focus on the needy. Not only does he rise to the challenge each day, he exceeds all expectations and is never shy to roll up his sleeves and do what needs to be done.

I?joined Liam this past January to see for myself. As a writer, I can describe the conditions, geography, political climate and even the looks on the faces of the children who lined up for food or clothing donations. But it's the feeling, deep inside one's soul, that sometimes defies explanation. I would strongly recommend a humanitarian trip or project to everyone.

I?often think about the Dominican and Haitian children we met. I?know they are survivors. They are resilient. I?can't help but think there is always more to do and more to contribute to such ?causes.? I want to return. I?want to help make their lives better. I?want them to succeed, go to school and become the leaders of tomorrow. It's really easy to give, almost addictive.

Helping in a meaningful way takes character.?But it also takes money. That's a reality of our world. The mission trip is not subsidized, so students and their parents have to come up with the money every year. A portion of the cost goes directly to the ?troops on the ground? to carry on their good work. Last year, I?received donations from many King residents and I delivered the funds directly to Sister Maude, the diminutive powerhouse of determination who leads her congregation.

Our donations mean the world to her, and her charges ? the workers in the field, the school children and seniors under her care. She stretches every dollar as far as she can to help others. She makes a difference.

You cannot help but be touched by such altruism.

If you would like to help Liam and his group deliver much-needed aid, please contact me directly (editor@kingsentinel.com, mpavilons@rogers.com).

?Character is what God and angels know of us.? Thomas Paine