

# LESSON 2: CHARACTER BUILDING

*“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”*

Abraham Lincoln



Being successful means more than merely having money, power, and other things that show your accomplishments. These things are merely signs that you have achieved something. They do not show what kind of person you are on the inside. Character building is one way to work on your inner self. It focuses on working to improve your beliefs and attitudes about yourself and others.

## **Charles Lindbergh's Story \***

Charles Lindbergh was one of the most famous heroes of the 20th century. He was the first pilot to fly an airplane nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean between the United States and Europe. Lindbergh was a shy, quiet young man when he accomplished this feat. Many people remember him only for this heroic flight. But, Lindbergh was also someone who had many personal difficulties in his life. For example, he and his wife had a baby who was kidnapped and murdered.

In spite of his personal successes and problems, Lindbergh worked throughout his life on his own personal character. That is, he thought about his personality and his beliefs about things and kept working to improve himself. The following is his own description of his character building technique.

### **Lindbergh's Character Technique \***

At night I would read off my list of character factors, and those which I had fulfilled satisfactorily during the day I would mark with a red (X); those I had not been called upon to demonstrate that day would get no mark. But those character factors which I had actually violated each day I would mark with a black (X). I began to check myself from day to day and compare my (marks) from month to month and year to year. I was glad to notice that there was an improvement as I grew older.

Charles Lindbergh

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How do you think people develop character? Where does it come from?
2. What are some kinds of situations that can affect our character for the better? For worse?
3. What kinds of character do you think helped Charles Lindbergh accomplish his famous flight? (Look through the following "Six Pillars of Character" for ideas.

\* From Mosley, (1976), p. 51.

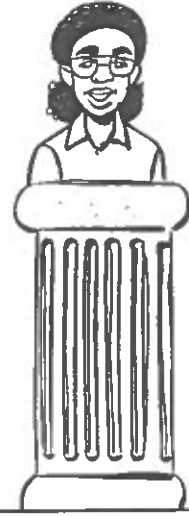
# The Six Pillars of Character



**Trustworthiness**



**Respect**



**Responsibility**



**Justice & Fairness**



**Caring**



**Civic Virtue & Citizenship**

# Applying the “Six Pillars” to Our Lives

Under each of the following Six Pillars, you will find “Do’s” and “Don’ts” that show us how we can apply each of these character traits to our lives. Take one Pillar at a time and explore each example under it. Both you and your counselor should try to think of a time when you or someone you know showed this aspect of the Pillar. Perhaps you can complete a discussion of one Pillar during each of your meetings together.



# Showing Character

## I. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Worthy of trust, honor, and confidence

### Honesty

#### Do's

- ☞ Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
- ☞ Be forthright, candid, and frank.
- ☞ Be sincere—say what you mean, mean what you say.
- ☞ If you find property, try to return it to its owner.

#### Don'ts

- ⊘ Don't betray a trust; strive to meet the legitimate expectations of those who trust you.
- ⊘ Don't lie (purposely misrepresenting facts or opinions).
- ⊘ Don't deliberately deceive or mislead by any means (concealing, distorting, telling half-truths).
- ⊘ Don't be devious or tricky.
- ⊘ Don't withhold important information in relationships of trust.
- ⊘ Don't steal another's property.
- ⊘ Don't cheat, defraud, or engage in tricks or deceptions.

### Integrity and Courage

#### Do's

- ☞ Stand-up for your beliefs about right and wrong. Be yourself and resist social pressure to do things you think are wrong.
- ☞ "Walk your talk;" show commitment, courage, and self-discipline by doing the right thing regardless of personal cost.

## ***Promise-Keeping***

### **Do's**

- ☞ Be reliable, keep your word—pay your debts, return what you borrow.
- ☞ Make only those commitments that you firmly intend to keep and reasonably think you can keep.

### **Don'ts**

- ⊘ Don't use tricky, unreasonable, or bad faith interpretations of the language of an agreement to evade commitments.

## ***Fidelity and Loyalty***

### **Do's**

- ☞ Keep confidential information confidential; be discreet with private information that could be embarrassing or harmful to others.
- ☞ Within the limits of your other ethical obligations, be loyal by standing by, supporting, helping, and protecting your family, friends, teachers, employers, school, community, and country.

### **Don'ts**

- ⊘ Don't talk behind people's backs, spread rumors, or engage in harmful gossip.
- ⊘ Don't violate other ethical principles in the name of loyalty—lying, cheating, stealing, or harming others to keep or win a friendship or gain approval.
- ⊘ Don't betray your loyalty by asking a friend to do something wrong to keep your friendship.

## II. RESPECT

Regard for the dignity, worth, and autonomy of all persons (including self)

### Do's

- ☞ Treat all people with respect by being courteous and polite.
- ☞ Respect the autonomy of others. Taking into account their age and maturity, respect the rights of individuals to make decisions about their own lives.
- ☞ Be tolerant, appreciative, and accepting of individual differences.
- ☞ Judge all people on their merits, not on their race, religion, nationality, gender, physical or mental condition, social or economic status, or any other improper factor.

### Don'ts

- ⊘ Don't insult, abuse, demean, mistreat, or harass others.
- ⊘ Don't make inappropriate or unwanted comments about a person's race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.
- ⊘ Don't use, manipulate, exploit, or take advantage of other people.

## III. RESPONSIBILITY

Acknowledgement and performance of duties to others and self

### Accountability

#### Do's

- ☞ Think before you act—consider the possible consequences on yourself and others and decide whether the act is honest, fair, caring, and respectful to all who will be affected.
- ☞ Be accountable; accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions and inactions.

- ☞ Be reliable; perform your duties.
- ☞ Set a good example with your own conduct; act as if someone whose respect you want is always watching.
- ☞ Take the initiative to make your society, school, or home life better for yourself and others.

### **Don'ts**

- STOP Don't blame others for your mistakes or take credit for the achievements of others.

## ***Pursuit of Excellence***

### **Do's**

- ☞ Do your best; make everything you do worthy of your pride.
- ☞ Be perseverant; meet your responsibilities even when it is difficult to do.

## **IV. JUSTICE & FAIRNESS**

Making decisions that are just and fair.

### **Do's**

- ☞ Treat all people fairly.
- ☞ Be open-minded, listen to others, and try to understand what they are saying and feeling.
- ☞ In making decisions, fairly consider all relevant information, including opposing viewpoints.
- ☞ Make decisions with impartiality based on consistent and appropriate standards.



### **Don'ts**

- **STOP** Don't take unfair advantage of the mistakes or ignorance of others.
- **STOP** Don't take more than your fair share.
- **STOP** Don't let personal feelings interfere with decisions that should be made objectively.

## **V. CARING**

Regard for the well-being of others

### **Do's**

- ☞ Show that you care about others through kindness, caring, generosity, sharing, and compassion.
- ☞ Live by the Golden Rule—treat others the way you want them to treat you.

### **Don'ts**

- **STOP** Don't be selfish, mean, cruel, or insensitive to the feelings of others.

## **VI. CIVIC VIRTUE & CITIZENSHIP**

Recognition of and living up to social obligations

### **Do's**

- ☞ Obey laws and school rules.
- ☞ Do your share; stay informed; vote; protect your family and community; and report crimes.
- ☞ Be charitable and altruistic.

## Optional Activity

Use the Lindbergh method of character building. Make several photocopies of the "Six Pillars of Character" (see pages 9-15) and punch holes in them so they can be clipped in a three ring binder. Each day (or week), use one color pen (or marker) to check off which items you fulfilled. Use a different color to indicate those which you violated or make two lists each day, one of any character traits you fulfilled, the other of any traits you violated. Periodically, look back to see if you have made an improvement over time.

