

Foundations for Life Essay Contest 2005

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Responsibility and Doing What's Right

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In my infinite wisdom I decided that if I were going to homecoming, it would probably be a good idea to buy tickets. Well, in doing so, I had forgotten to pay the students behind the desk. After I realized that I had not exchanged the required amount for my ticket, I explained to my lunch table what had happened. I was astonished at their response. They suggested that I do not return the money, and instead use it for something else. Having twenty dollars in limbo suddenly makes people very interested in what you are going to do next. What I cannot understand is, why were my friends not even interested in doing the right thing?

As Potter Stewart (1915-1985) an American Supreme Court Justice once said: "There's a big difference between what you have a right to do, and what is right to do." You do have the right to do almost anything you want to in any given situation. But the sign of a responsible and mature person is always striving to do what is right, no matter what that situation.

So how is it that people can be so blatantly irresponsible? Who, or what, is the cause of all this? Look in a mirror. We are the only ones to blame. You cannot accuse someone else; you cannot say that we are irresponsible because some sort of societal osmosis has subliminally forced us to be that way. We are the cause and the solution packed into the same box.

Let's start where irresponsibility is most obvious, in the media. You hear all the time on TV how responsibility is "good" and how "important" it is in our lives. Then, ESPN Magazine comes out with an article on how Jake Grove from Virginia Tech was an "effective player" on the team because he kicked Dan Klecko from Temple University, in the groin. This caused him to retaliate, and presto, first down Virginia Tech. Grove fouled Klecko, then to add insult to injury, a foul was called on Temple University. He was called an "effective player" for using excessive violence to achieve his goals.

Do you see what I am getting at? People act that way because they can, and they try to get away with it, no matter what the cost to others. And the media praises this as responsible action!

In addition to the media, our absolutely sincere, truthful, and of course honest government, and the people we deem as important, affect how we view responsibility. Presidential candidates make promises and then as soon as they are elected, they break those promises they made to the people who voted for them. While campaigning Senator Chris Dodd joked, "Eight more days, and I can start telling the truth again..." Well, at least he was honest about something.

An article by John Leo in the October 20, 2003 edition of U.S News and World Report, states some of the negative things that the general public has overlooked in some of the popular people of today. R. Kelly was out on bail for 21 accounts of possessing child pornography.

Dick Morris was dishonored in politics when he allegedly let a prostitute listen in on a conversation between him and former President Clinton. He is now a respected political commentator.

Let's not forget Al Sharpton, a social activist in New York. He was part of the Tawana Brawley rape hoax, and fed a clash between a Jewish storeowner and a black patron. On his National Action Network, supporters and sometimes even him, yelled anti-Jewish phrases and threatened to burn down the building. To cap it all off, one protestor ran into the store, shot four people, and then started a fire that killed seven others. This man was a presidential candidate.

People we see all the time in respected public positions are not willing to take responsibility for their actions. If today's leaders and role models aren't responsible, then why should the people that look up to them be held accountable for their actions?

How can we propel ourselves through this? How can we work through this as a people? I can tell you how; start with yourself. Begin by realizing when you are not being responsible. Now this may take some time, and you are not expected to catch yourself every time you do it, but just by starting to review yourself, you have begun to combat irresponsibility. When, in fact you do find yourself being irresponsible just say "Hmmm... I am not taking responsibility for my actions," it is as simple as that. Then begin taking the steps to actually take responsibility for what you have done. Stop the white lies and the half-truths, blaming others and the stupid excuses.

Another important thing to do on your quest of responsibility is to tell people when they need to take responsibility, Now, this is not going to be easy or very fun, and sometimes some people will get angry, irritated, and alarmed. But it's going to have to happen if we are willing to change society. Now you are being responsible for responsibility! You break the spiral of irresponsibility and maybe even change the course of someone's life.

After examining the problems, causes, and solutions of irresponsibility, we have discovered that, yes it is possible to be a responsible person in today's society. So next time you don't finish your homework assignment at home, instead of copying a friend's, take responsibility and own up to the fact that you did not do it. Talk to the teacher and see if you can turn it in late. I promise, you'll feel better about yourself and others will respect you more, too.

So... what did I end up doing with the homecoming ticket money? I did the right thing. I gave it back of course, like any responsible person would do.