

Positively Speaking

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On Reputation and Character

Your reputation is what people think of you – It's who you are when others are watching.

Now, it's a wonderful thing to have a good reputation. According to the Bible, it is one of the marks of effective leadership. When followers do not respect the leader, he/she has lost the right to lead. This is true of sports teams, businesses, churches, educational institutions, and governments.

With respect, a leader can achieve amazing results. Without it, nothing can be accomplished.

A good reputation takes a lifetime to build, but it can be lost in a moment. One stupid act might wreck and destroy all the good will that has accumulated for years. One hasty reaction, inappropriate behavior, or careless word may wipe out everything.

Thus, it pays us to value our reputation, and to make sure we are following the golden rule: doing unto others as we would have them do to us. Thomas Paine observed that character is "much easier kept than recovered."

Yes, your reputation is important – but it is NOT the MOST important thing. Character is FAR more important than reputation.

Your character is who you are when nobody is watching. It is your true essence – and not merely what others think.

As Abraham Lincoln said, "Reputation is the shadow. . . character is the tree."

The real thing is the tree – not the shadow.

If we are consumed with building a good reputation, but do not possess solid character, we are merely playing a silly game. We are only acting a part – and the drama is sure to have a sad ending.

You can fool all the people some of the time. You can fool some of the people all the time. But you cannot fool all the people all the time. Only a fool would try to do that.

It is possible to pretend for a while, but who you really are on the inside is going to leak out eventually. You can't fake it forever. Sooner or later, the veneer cracks and the truth is known. The Bible says what is done in private will be shouted from the housetops. It also declares, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

Character, like reputation, is not made in a moment. (Of course, it is DISPLAYED in a moment of crisis – but never made there.) It takes years of honestly seeking what is right, good and true. "Character," said the Greek biographer, Plutarch, "is simply habit long continued."

Sooner or later, your character and reputation will match up. If you fail in integrity – your reputation will eventually be a failure too. However, if you take care of your character, your reputation will take care of itself.