

CHAPTER 1

THE UNFAILING FOUNDATION: MORALS AND STRONG CHARACTER



“Always do what is right. It will gratify half of mankind and astound the other.”

– Mark Twain

While Mark Twain’s quote may be true, you shouldn’t do what is right in life just because you’re worried about what others may think. You should do what is right because it’s the right thing to do! Throughout your life there are lots of choices and decisions to make. They obviously warrant a lot of your time and attention. There’s been a lot written about the decision-making process. I’ve summed it up as simply as possible. It’s a five-step process and it goes like this:

- 1) think
 - 2) act
 - 3) think what has been learned
 - 4) use that knowledge to build into your next decision (which may require adjusting course)
 - 5) be kind...
- ...and repeat.

If you are kind and try your best, you will never be a failure. The more times this five-step process is conscientiously carried out, the sooner you will live the successful life you hope for. In this vein, you can look at life as a long, drawn-out experiment where we continually think and make decisions, act, re-evaluate, and possibly change course (actions and thoughts) based on the outcomes of our previous decisions. All of this occurs continuously as you grow and change as a person in the face of changing life circumstances. Pretty important stuff to ponder!

Morals and strong character are the all-important unfailing foundation that will always keep you grounded and give you a safe and trusted truth you can depend on as you travel through life making decisions. Everyone will make their share of bad decisions. We are all human and mistakes are a part of life. As you carry out this five-step process over and over throughout your life, if you have proper morals, you will always have a built-in support system to guide you through difficult times. Morals and strong character are the foundation for you to build your future success on. Integrity and a principled life exist in every truly successful person.

So, here's what it means to have proper morals: be responsible, dependable, honest, respectful, tolerant, fair, and caring. That's a lot to think about! But don't just gloss over these words. You have to understand them and realize why they are the foundation to a successful life. If you don't live a principled life, *everything else means nothing*.

Numerous problems in life result from a lack of proper morals. For many kids, morals are taught in the home. But some kids don't learn morals because their home life is less than ideal. It's extremely difficult to learn to behave properly with a whirlwind of bad behaviors going on around them. Many young kids become a product of their environment and have a hard time seeing beyond their upbringing. If this describes you, I have high hopes that, because you are making the effort to try to better yourself, you'll be able to learn from this book and make the necessary adjustments to your life.

That is the intention of this book: to help all teens from all walks of life learn how to be successful.

Doing right for yourself and for others, from this day forward, has to become your reality, if you want to be successful. Sit quietly without distractions and reflect on what it means to have proper morals. Think about how great your life will be, having a core unfailing foundation always with you. In the short term, you may lose a few friends over your commitment. However, you will gain many more great friends throughout your life and set yourself on course for living a successful life. This process will take time, patience, and faith that you are doing the right thing. I can assure you that you are!

Life isn't always fair. Your home environment could be less than ideal, or maybe some bad things have happened to you. Take the high ground and commit to doing what is right, in spite of your circumstances. When things aren't going well, it's hard to see past the present. It's important to understand that things never stay the same in life. Times will change for the better as you get older, but only if you're committed to making that happen.

When you are young, you still have to depend on those taking care of you. So many things in your environment will be beyond your control to change. Even so, you can still decide and make a commitment to being the person that you wish to become and a person that you will be proud of, despite any negative circumstances. As you grow older, you will have more control over your choices—where you want to live, the people you choose to surround yourself with, and more. These choices you make for your life will ultimately determine your destiny.

A lot of young people misbehave because that's the example that's been set for them, or because bad things have happened to them, or a combination of both. If this describes you, I hope you will see the merits of changing how you're thinking and how you're behaving, despite your current circumstances. This takes a lot of courage

and faith. It is the foundation to building a great life. It's been said many times, it's not about the cards you're dealt but how you play the hand. Even if you are, or have been, a victim of bad occurrences, you can still make the choice to become a person you can be proud of.

Many people compromise their morals and blur the lines of what's proper and what's not because they think they may benefit from doing so, especially when there's money involved. Many people act out of desperation to get what they want right away. Taking shortcuts to immediate gratification creates the thieves and dishonest people of the world. If you're going to truly commit to becoming a successful person, a life of crime, violence, and lies is not an option.

It's fantastic if you understand right from wrong and are behaving accordingly. You are building a solid future for yourself. We need more people like you in this world to do the right thing and show others the way. This is how life should be lived, and you have set yourself up for much success. Hopefully, if you already know the virtues of living a life with proper morals, you're not misbehaving because you think it's cool or think it's a way of being accepted by others. Despite the influences around you, if you know in your heart that what you are doing is wrong, then you obviously should not do it.

All the great religions teach proper morals, and often the threat of being punished in the afterlife, if you do not behave properly in this life. But what about the notion of living according to the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," because it's the right thing to do? It shouldn't have to take a religion or the threat of punishment to motivate proper behavior. Everyone should want to live a kind and virtuous life for the simple fact that it is the right thing to do. I'm pretty sure all people would prefer a life void of lying, cheating, stealing, and violence. What needs to happen is for everyone to behave in a manner in which they would like to see others behave. And it starts with *you*. We must truly be the change we wish to see in the world.

All you have to do is think about how you would like others to behave and how you would like them to treat you, then act that way and become that person. Be the example that other people can look up to. Be friendly, kind, and helpful. It's not complicated. Do what you're supposed to do and do away with excuses. Don't be a victim of circumstances. Cut the excuses out and be responsible for your life. Now!

- Be the person others can count on. Be true to yourself and be responsible for your thoughts and your actions. No one can make this happen but you.
- Be honest. It's the only way to be (a clear conscience will always be your softest pillow). Don't be influenced by the dishonest people around you.
- Respect others. This is how you would like to be treated. It is what all people should do.
- Be tolerant. Just because someone is different or has different ideas, doesn't mean they should be treated differently. Diversity makes life interesting. You can learn from everyone around you. You don't have to agree with everyone, but you can be tolerant of others' differences.
- Be fair and caring. Help others and treat people fairly. Wouldn't you want others to do the same for you?

The world would be a lot better off if people had proper morals and strong character. I've talked a lot about proper morals, but what about the strong character part? That just means that, once you have decided to live a virtuous life, you should not be persuaded to bend your morals because of circumstances. You have strong character. Stay true in being that person and be conscious of keeping yourself surrounded with like-minded people who are also honest, fair, caring, dependable, and tolerant. This will become your world and it's the only road to a successful life. This is your unyielding foundation and it will always be your truth.

Once you commit to being a person with strong morals who lives by the Golden Rule, you will have a solid foundation in place. Your self-confidence and self-esteem will soar. This will be your base from which to grow a life of unlimited success and

abundance. It's there for all those who are willing to commit to it. A great life starts with being a teenager willing to do the right thing.