

The MASKS of Character



In an article in “psychcentral,” Therese J. Borchard writes: “*While our coping strategies are as varied as our personalities, here are ten of the most typical masks we wear.* She suggests that we ask ourselves the question “*which mask do you wear?*”

- *the cool guy*
- *the humorist*
- *the overachiever*
- *the martyr*
- *the bully*
- *the controlfreak*
- *the self-basher*
- *the people-pleaser*
- *the introvert or,*
- *the social butterfly.”*

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-10-masks-we-wear/>

For this blog, I am adding two MASKS to Borchard’s list but discussing one.

- The MASK of Protection (Virus) – have you been wearing one?
- The MASK of Character

My intent is to say a few words about each the seven character MASKS (strengths/virtues) that are related to our current environment, and testing our character and mental toughness.

My suggestion: Create a unit on MASKS with two or three lesson for each of the character strengths that follow.

The MASK of Commitment

Zig Ziglar says: “*It was character that got us out of bed, commitment that moved us into action, and discipline that enable us to follow through.”*

Three synonyms for “commitment” are also value-words that should guide both teachers and students. They are duty, responsibility, and obligation.

Larry Ferlazzo, a renowned high school teacher and writer, asks and answers this question, *How Would You Define Success This School Year?* (Posted September 2, 2020)

His answer: “*These are my criteria [duty/responsibility/obligation] for success this year in 100% distance learning.*

- *Do students come to my class?*
- *Do they learn something valuable?*
- *Do they feel coming to my class makes their lives better?*
- *What realistic suggestions should be added (only from people doing distance learning)?*”

The MASK of Responsibility

Sir Josiah Stamp writes: “*It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities.*”

As I have said in the past, the word “character” has two Cs in it; one stands for “choices” and the other for “consequences.” Living a life of good character doesn’t happen by chance, nor does it happen by circumstance. It happens by the choices one makes.

Our **responsibility** as teachers and parents is to help young people learn to make good, positive, ethical choices by learning to take **responsibility (response-ability)** for their actions; be willing to accept the negative consequences of their actions/behaviors and to do something about them.

Professor Thomas Lickona (2012/Center for the 4th and 5th Rs) created a **Respect & Responsibility School Culture Survey** instrument of 29 questions developed to assess the extent to which everyone at a school acts with respect and responsibility toward others.

Retrieved from: <http://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/1398c968-7af6-43bb-9ec9-076f78107a19.pdf>

The MASK of Kindness

“Kindness is a behavioral response of compassion and actions that are selfless; or a mindset that places compassion for others before one’s own interests.”

Kristen Fuller, M.D.

The turmoil and uncertainties of the pandemic are likely wearing on you as a teacher, parent or student. I found an article in *Scientific American* (February 26, 2009) titled “Forget Survival of the Fittest: It Is Kindness That Counts.” The article features an interview with Dacher Keltner author of *Born to be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*. Keltner noted that humans have remarkable tendencies “**toward kindness, play, generosity, reverence, and self-sacrifice.**”

In her book, *Kind is the New Classy*, Candace Cameron Bure writes: “*In this book, we will talk about character traits (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).*” Her six characteristics for choosing friends are “*friends who are kind, strong, loyal, gentle, encouraging, and principled.*” **Kindness**, compassion, and empathy are values we can all get behind regardless of whether we agree on every issue.

The MASK of Gratitude

“*Gratitude and attitude are not challenges; they are choices.*”

Robert Braathe

Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., the world’s leading scientific expert on **gratitude**, writes: “*You literally cannot overplay the hand of gratitude; the grateful mind reaps massive benefits in every domain of life that has been examined so far. There are countless ways in which gratitude could pay off in the workplace [and in homes and schools.].*”

Practicing gratitude during times like this (Covid-19, online teaching and learning)) may seem tough, but studies have shown that people who experience gratitude have more positive emotions (joy, love, happiness) and exhibit fewer negative emotions (bitterness, envy, resentment.) Not only does the “**gratitude experience**” contribute to feelings of connectedness, relationships, and better physical health, it also helps people recover more quickly from trauma, adversity, and suffering. “*Gratitude reminds us of all that is good and right in life, renewing our sense of hope.*”

Researchers at Berkeley surveyed 400 students ages 12-14 in which they found that students “*who were more likely to be grateful to others showed higher academic interest, grades, and extracurricular involvement, and had lower interest in risky behaviors.*” Positive parent relationships was also associated with **gratitude**.

A teacher told me that he has his students write down three to five things that they should be grateful for every day. At the end of each week, he asks students to review their list and write a summary of what it meant to them. He asks: *“Is there anyone you need to thank?”*

The MASK of Perseverance

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

Maya Angelou

Perseverance is sticking with a course of action in spite of obstacles. Perseverance is a skill that one learns. It helps build self-confidence, improves performance, creates trust, helps one work through relationship issues, and opens the door to “resourcefulness.” One author noted that *“as educators, we can provide opportunities for students to pursue their passions, see persistence pay off, and be mindful about their goals and limits.”*

Angela Duckworth calls a combination of perseverance and passion—“grit.” To encourage “grit” among students, she suggests that teachers **“MODEL IT! CELEBRATE IT! ENABLE IT!”**

“Grit predicts accomplishing challenging goals of personal significance. In most research studies, grit and measures of talent and IQ are unrelated, suggesting that talent puts no limits on the capacity for passion and perseverance.”

Janet Arnold, a Behavior Consultant, writes that *“someone with good resilience is a person who can bounce back. Research shows that children who develop resilience and persevere, are better equipped to learn from failure. They are also more likely to adapt to change.”*

Marilyn Price-Mitchell (2015) writes, *“Children who develop resilience are better able to face disappointment, learn from failure, cope with loss and adapt to change. We recognize resilience in children when we observe their determination, grit, and perseverance to tackle problems and cope with the emotional challenges of school and life.”*

The MASK of Empathy

“If you want to make a difference in someone’s life, you don’t need to be gorgeous, rich, famous, brilliant, or perfect. You just have to care”

Karen Salmansohn

Researchers Dan Goleman and Paul Ekman report that there are three different ways teachers (and others) must address the teaching and learning of empathy:

- Cognitive empathy: the act of knowing how another person feels.
- Emotional empathy: the capacity to physically feel the emotions of another.
- Compassionate empathy: the combination of cognitive and emotional empathy to take action about what one feels and thinks.

Especially during this pandemic, it is important to help children and youth understand and practice what it means to be **empathetic**. Among other things it means non-judgmentally listening; it means acknowledging the importance of how others feel about things; it means putting oneself in another's shoes; and it means taking action. That is, to help them realize that they have the power to give back, to respond to the needs of others at home, in school, and in their community.

The MASK of Faith

This virtue *"is an expression of hope for something better. More than a wish, it is closer to a belief, but not quite. A belief is rooted in the mind."*

Faith is based in the heart. All that we hold precious rests upon a faith in people, their potential not yet fulfilled. The evidence of history points us in a different direction—the world is full of ugliness, brutality, and injustices. Yet there is also tenderness, kindness and concern and that takes the bigger part of our hearts."

Psychology Today, September 28, 2012

Have **faith** (an inner conviction/belief) that things will work out and that things will return to "normal" soon.

Have **faith** in the compassion and healing powers of our healthcare workers.

Have **faith** that our scientists will create a vaccine soon.

Have **faith** that we will be back on our jobs and that our children and teacher will return to school.

Have **faith** that we, individually and as a society, will have learned lessons from our living through this pandemic.

Faith will help each of us feel more hopeful and optimistic.

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What do you think of this blog? We'd love to hear your **thoughts, questions and feedback**: character@sandiego.edu