

## **The Power of Personal Character**

As a longtime homebuilding executive who has built over 5,000 high-end homes over a 20-year period, I've learned a thing or two about the importance of a solid foundation.

A good home with few problems and allows you to enjoy living there must be built on a solid foundation. The same is true of a good life; it must be built on a solid foundation of personal character.

Personal character is the combination of all your attributes and characteristics. Being a person of strong personal character is essential to having a good life.

Without strong personal character, any success will be short-lived. No one is perfect, but getting clear on these traits and what they mean will help you improve your personal character and avoid making a life-altering mistake.

I learned this early from observing my dad. He was very personable; I can almost guarantee that you'd have liked him if you'd known him.

But he had a serious flaw - his drinking. He also lacked discipline and self-control and was irresponsible with his money. And his irresponsibility put our family in a tough position.

I'd contrast my father with my grandfather, Daddy Buck, who had solid personal habits and made good decisions. These habits resulted in a happy family life and personal success. He was a man who had strong personal character, which made all the difference in his life.

You could say that building your life, and your career is like growing a Chinese bamboo tree. Like any plant, the Chinese bamboo tree needs sunshine, water, and nutrients to grow. You plant it, water it, nurture it, and see no visible growth for the first four years.

You begin to wonder if you're wasting your time. But then, in the fifth year, the bamboo suddenly grows very quickly and dramatically, up to 100 feet in only six weeks.

How does this happen? For the first four years, it grows its root structure, unseen by those of us aboveground. It establishes a system of deep roots that anchors and nourishes it for years to come, roots that make its future growth possible.

Without this root structure, the tree simply would collapse, just like a home built on bad soil, a marriage built on infidelity, or a business built on a lack of integrity.

A big part of your root structure is your personal character, and it takes a lot of patience to create that root structure.

So, where do you start? Just ask Brian Kelly, the widely acclaimed head coach of the University of Notre Dame's football team.

Kelly knows firsthand that success doesn't come simply from applying a few useful tips from people who have reached the top. It takes something much more fundamental.

I happened to be watching Kelly's first press conference at Notre Dame in 2009, when he became the new head football coach. The school's program had been in decline for more than a decade and desperately needed someone to turn things around.

Not surprisingly, the first question at the press conference was: "Coach, how are you going to get Notre Dame winning again?"

No one expected his answer.

"Well, Kelly said without hesitation, before we can start winning, we have to stop losing." Everyone laughed at what seemed to be a joke. But Kelly wasn't kidding.

Then he explained:

In order to stop losing, we first have to stop doing all the things that undermine our success. When our players have bad eating habits, don't give their best in practice, show up late for team meetings, don't listen to coaches, get lax on personal discipline, don't do their classwork, or don't encourage their teammates - we lose. Before we can start winning, we have to stop doing all the things that cause us to lose. Then we can start winning.

Kelly knew that each of the basic activities he mentioned—all of which flows from personal character had to be in place before he could accomplish anything of value on the football field.

Although there are no cheerleaders, no big scoreboards, and no scheduled practices, being successful in real life is a lot like being successful in sports. You first have to eliminate (or minimize) your bad habits and then go to work developing the good habits that will put you on the road to success.

And just as there are fundamentals in football that lead to success, such as blocking, tackling, conditioning, and teamwork, there are also clear principles in life that lead to success.

These principles haven't changed over the past 2,500 years and are timeless. They represent the most important and basic requirements for success.

They are a big part of your root structure, and they are the good habits that stop us from losing, so we can start winning.

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