

October 2005  
Vol. 34 ■ No. 2

# leadership

for student activities

## Do the Right Thing

- 8** What Works  
in Character  
Education
- 14** Brave Heart
- 20** SHARPen  
Your Vision

**NHS & NJHS Edition**

# SHARPen Your Vision

A lifestyle mission statement can guide student leaders and advisers in daily decisions of how to live their lives.

By Dave Small

**M**any leadership classes and books teach us that a mission statement is important for planning and living our lives. Mission statements generally cover goals, dreams, and ideals. My thoughts about a mission statement are a little different. A mission statement should not only help set goals and plan for the future, it should also help a person get through each day. I call this a "lifestyle mission statement."

We will all leave a legacy—actually many legacies—throughout our lives. How will you live your life? What will your legacy be? Is it important for you to be remembered as a great high school athlete, administrator, or teacher? Or do you want to be remembered as a person who made a difference, who made a mark not on a plaque, but on the hearts and lives of people?

I was always mystified by Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, who stated that his mission statement was only one word, but he would never say what that word was. How can a mission statement be only one word? Then, I had my own epiphany—a personal mission statement that was only two words!

My lifestyle mission statement represents how I want to live my life: Be SHARP! These two words are actually an acronym for the full mission statement, but it is easier for me to remember.

**Service.** The "S" stands for Service or Serve—contributing to the welfare of others. Isn't this what educators do every day, every time they interact with a student? Whether you are teaching a class, advising a student leader, or supervising an activity, service is a part of every day. Perhaps as educators it is in your very nature to serve. Your motivation

in whatever endeavor you pursue, the underlying cause that keeps you going, must be something more than just money and fame, it must be to serve. Isn't an attitude of serving a quality we need to instill in all of our students?

I think Arthur Ashe defined a hero when he stated, "True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost." Most of us do our jobs with little or no fanfare, mostly because we don't want or need it.

**Honor.** The "H" is for Honor—honesty and integrity in one's beliefs and actions and having respect for worth, merit, or rank. In today's society, honor is one of the qualities I miss most. The lack of respect many people show to others is amazing. We as leaders, people who have influence, must respect and honor others. We know how to show respect to position and title, and we generally honor our students and others when they are in need. For me the rule is simple: Treat others the way I would like to be treated and treat them more highly than myself.

**Attitude.** The "A" is for Attitude—manner or disposition toward a person or thing. Attitude is what keeps us on course. It is also something that must be constantly evaluated, like a plane flying from Los Angeles to New York. The pilot knows where he intends to land, but must make constant corrections to his course throughout the flight for wind and weather. Our attitudes are exactly like that. We must evaluate our attitudes throughout the day to make sure we will be able to reach our "destination."

How can you tell what your attitude is? Are you angry or bitter? Is it easier to find fault rather than compliment? Do you find yourself making comments under your breath

that you really don't want others to hear? Do you find that others tend to avoid you at times? If any of the above get a "yes," then maybe you have a bad attitude.

One of the areas in which we have the greatest ability to make the right choice is in our attitude, how we respond to situations and people. Keep a good, positive attitude and you will not only have greater joy in your life, you will also be a source of joy to others.

**Responsibility.** The "R" stands for Responsibility—having moral, legal, or mental accountability and being able to answer for one's actions, conduct, and obligations. I recently retired as a career firefighter and in our fire department we had a truck with compartment doors that open. They are great in the rain because you can stand under them and stay a bit drier. One bright morning as I was checking the inventory on the fire truck, I left a compartment door in the up position while I got into the cab to answer the radio. While I was there, I thought I would just ease the truck out of the building so I could pump it. The door came crashing down. I quickly jumped from the truck to see the door now on the floor rocking ever so gently. My yearly evaluation was being written at the time of this incident and I had at least three choices: run, blame it on the person calling me on the radio, or take responsibility for my actions. I chose to take responsibility and even offered to write my own reprimand.

As educators, your jobs come with tremendous responsibility. The young people who depend on you to help them in the everyday situations they find themselves in can be a heavy burden of responsibility. Student leaders also have a burden of responsibility that comes with their position. Students they may not even be aware of are watching them. Their peers learn what is acceptable and what is not by watching them.

We must be willing to take responsibility for the things we do wrong and learn from them. We must also be willing to accept responsibility for the things we do right. Be bold enough to take responsibility when appropriate and learn. Failure only happens when we do not learn from our mistakes. Also, be willing to accept responsibility when it is earned through good deeds.

**Passion.** Finally, the "P" stands for Passion—an emotion or feeling of a compelling or overpowering nature. I've had several different words to go with the "p"—pride was one of them because we must take pride in what we do—but passion is really the only word that makes sense in the end. The definition of passion uses the word *compelling*, which means *to force or drive as a course of action*. Passion is the fuel that keeps us going. It is really the factor that pushes us beyond average and mediocre and into excellence. Mary Lou Retton, the gold medal winning gymnast said, "Each one of us has a fire in our heart for something. It's our goal in life to find it and keep it."

What is your passion? What motivates and drives you? If you could do anything, knowing that you would not fail, what would you do? Would you become a great scholar, or possibly seek a profession in engineering or medicine? Maybe you would like to build the best cabinets in the world or study photography, or be the best spouse or parent ever.

My fear is that too many times we seek careers and jobs for the wrong reasons. Pressure from friends or family, bills, debt, and other responsibilities can all lead us away from our true passions in life. I encourage you, even when the just mentioned reasons dictate your directions, find your passion and pursue it with all your heart. Only then will you find real contentment and fulfillment in life.

**Serve** others. Those who want to be raised up, must learn to serve.

**Honor** everyone and they will honor you.

Keep a good **attitude**. It makes all the difference in the world when it comes to how high you will soar.

Take **responsibility** for your actions, good or bad. It is the mark of a man or woman of integrity.

Be **proud** of all you accomplish; keep your vision and focus pure. And above all else, be **passionate** about the incredible life ahead and the goals you have set.

### Living Your Mission

Now that I have my own personal lifestyle mission statement, I think about it often. My hope for you as you serve your family, career, students, friends, and community is that you do it with the attitude of a servant, honoring those you touch, showing them the respect they all deserve, and doing it with responsibility and pride by doing it to the best of your ability. Above all else, pursue your passion. ■

---

David G. Small ([dgsmall@peoplepc.com](mailto:dgsmall@peoplepc.com)) is a recently retired, 21-year veteran of the Hobbs, NM, Fire Department. He has also worked with youth for more than 15 years through Ground Zero Youth Ministries. He currently teaches courses on leadership and communications, and provides motivational and keynote presentations.