IDEA #117

Pursue Excellence!

OVERVIEW: Students discuss what it means to pursue excellence and why it is important.

PREPARATION / MATERIALS: none

PROCEDURE:

Ask: What does "pursuit of excellence" mean?

Field answers and tell them: It means giving your best to any task you do or to any relationship you have. Each of us has unique talents. And we each have a responsibility to develop these talents — to find out what we can do well, and then to use our special skills to help others. When you practice excellence, you aren’t necessarily competing with others to be better than them. You are trying to be the best that you can be. No matter what you’re working on, excellence means you’re doing all you can to do your job well.

Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance.

— Samuel Johnson
18th-century English public philosopher and scholar

Tell them that pursuing excellence is being and doing our best with big things and little things, with the jobs we do and the people we know. Conduct a discussion on what it means to pursue excellence, making sure to include the following:

- striving to learn from mistakes
- not being content with giving less than what we’re capable of giving
- paying close attention to all parts — both small and large — of any task we accept
- not leaving a task unfinished
- finding what we can do well and then learning to do it even better

Ask: Why is it important to pursue excellence?

Solicit responses and conduct a discussion on why doing one’s best is important. Mention the following points in your discussion:

- Excellence is what leads to success. But it takes courage to pursue excellence. People who are afraid they might not succeed sometimes don’t try very hard. Then if things don’t turn out well, they say, “It doesn’t matter. I
- People who give up easily don’t have very exciting or fruitful lives. They act as if nothing matters very much — as if they don’t matter very much.

- Doing your best helps you find out what talents you have. Doing your best helps you find out who you really are.

- When you pursue excellence, you can make a difference in the world. And that feels good!

To conclude the activity, tell them: When you pursue excellence, you keep working at your task until you’ve got it right. If you stick with it, you will be amazed when you look back and see how much you’ve done. Sometimes it takes a long time . . . but don’t give up! Often the best rewards are the ones you have to wait for.


We have more power than will; and it is often by way of excuse to ourselves that we fancy things are impossible.

— Duc Francois de La Rochefoucauld