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## PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY AND SHOW IT TO YOUR PARENTS

April 6, 2006

Dear Student,

I've been asked to conduct a special session for a group of about 50 students. Though the circumstances leading to this assignment are unfortunate, I want you to know that my goal is to provide you with an interesting and useful learning experience.

The four-hour session will require you to be actively involved. We will talk about issues like honesty and responsibility, but my primary focus is on leadership. We will have discussions and activities to help you discover and use your leadership power to improve your life and the world around you.

### How to approach this class

It's possible (probably, likely) that many participants will approach the class session with low expectations, if not outright hostility, and that all you want to do is endure it so you can move on.

You may believe that this is simply a punishment. After all, the requirement that you attend was triggered by the judgment that you made an unwise and unethical choice. In fact, completion of the class is an alternative to more severe disciplinary action.

I urge you not to think of the class as a punishment but as an opportunity to learn some things that will be useful to you. If you choose to make the best of it and approach the class ready to learn, you will find the experience valuable — ***just do what you are asked to do with sincerity and an open mind.***

I assure you that if you come to this program with a positive attitude you can even *enjoy* the experience. You may even find it a life-changing experience — it's all up to you.

Remember, your school could have simply punished you and left it at that. Instead, they invested a great deal of time and money to provide you with a positive learning experience. They care about you and believe in you.

### What to expect

Out of respect for you, I will not patronize you and treat you as kids. I will work with you in the same way I work with Olympic athletes and coaches, police chiefs, politicians and top corporate executives.

I will expect that you will have done your homework seriously and that you will put forth your best efforts in every class assignment. Reminder: Your homework must be completed and turned in when you report for the session. There will be no excuses. ***If you do not have the homework completed in an acceptable way you will be sent home and not be permitted to attend the class.***

—CONTINUED—

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*The Josephson Institute of Ethics is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, public-benefit organization working to improve the nation's ethics with programs, publications, consulting services and such educational projects as CHARACTER COUNTS!, CHARACTER COUNTS! Sports and Ethics in the Workplace.*

## Ground rules and consequences

Out of respect for those who are ready to learn, it's my job to create a positive class climate.

There are only five ground rules for our session:

1. **Be on time.**
2. **Take the homework assignment seriously and turn it in at the beginning of the session along with your parent questionnaire.**
3. **Make a good-faith effort to participate and do your best in all aspects of the class.**
4. **Be honest.**
5. **Communicate respectfully.**

**1. On Time.** First, you need to be on time at the beginning of the class and when returning from breaks.

**2. Homework.** You will be given a packet of reading materials that includes questionnaires and mini-essay assignments for you and your parents. You should be able to complete the assignment in less than three hours, but **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO DO IT.**

There may be parts that you do not understand fully, and you should allow yourself plenty of time to get guidance. If you have any questions about the assignment, please call Margaret Bryant at 310-846-4800.

*You must turn in all assignments at the beginning of the session. No excuses will be permitted.  
If the homework is not completed properly you will not be admitted to the session.*

**3. Good-Faith Effort.** The class will include discussions, activities and role-play opportunities that will work only if the members of the class participate in good faith and do what is asked of them. You will be expected to participate and respond fully both as a volunteer and when you are called on (yes, it is likely you will be called on). I will never try to embarrass you but I will push you to a level of thought and performance that you may not be used to.

I'm sure this will be unnecessary, but please know: ***If I conclude that any member of the group is not making a good-faith effort, I will ask him or her to leave the class.*** This is not to punish the person who is asked to leave but to protect the ones who remain.

**4. Honesty.** Another ground rule is honesty. Don't say what you think I want you to say or what you think your teachers or parents want you to say. Yes, I may try to persuade you to think of things in a different way, but I will never try to force you into a point of view you do not accept.

**5. Communicate Respectfully.** The honesty ground rule encourages you to say whatever is on your mind even if it is critical of the school, your teachers, the class or classmates. You will not be punished for anything you say ***so long as it is communicated respectfully in tone and language.***

I truly look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Michael Josephson

April 6, 2006

Dear Parents:

The grade-change incident that occurred at your students' high school was very disruptive and had a negative impact on students, teachers, and administrators. We are looking to learn from what occurred at different levels: The administrators want to tighten security of school records; the teachers want to maintain the integrity of their graded evaluations; and the students want to prevent their reputations from being tarnished ever again.

Our District desires to help students examine what took place and prevent future occurrences of this nature. For this reason a special workshop with your student in mind has been developed for the District by Michael Josephson. Michael is the founder and president of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, an organization devoted to helping people make principled decisions and live with greater integrity. **Please note that this training is MANDATORY.**

A great deal of thought and preparation has gone into providing students involved in this incident with effective skills to rely on when confronted with similar circumstances. With that in mind, please remind your students that they are required to participate in this training in a serious and respectful manner. If they do not, they will be asked to leave and there will be serious consequences. Please discuss their approach to this

workshop with them. We encourage each student to take full advantage of this opportunity to strengthen their character.

This packet includes this cover letter, a parent letter/questionnaire and a student letter from Michael Josephson and a student reading/writing assignment. **The parent questionnaire and the student writing assignment are critical. Students MUST bring these completed items with them to the workshop on April 18. Students who do not bring the questionnaire and assignment will not be allowed to attend the workshop and there will be serious consequences.**

It is our most sincere hope that these students benefit from this occasion to reflect and redirect their future.

Sincerely,

## Parent Letter & Questionnaire

April 6, 2006

As you know, the school district asked me to create a special program for the children involved in the recent grade changing incident. I want you to know I intend to use this opportunity to provide an important learning experience for your child, but I need your help.

Students who do not do a good job on the homework and in class participation may be asked to leave the class and they will be subject to serious discipline so it is to their advantage that they take this class seriously.

Please be sure your child shows you the letter included in their homework packet and that they do not wait until the last minute to do the homework. Please note that your child must be on time and that the homework assignment and the questionnaire on the bottom of this letter (filled out by you) must be turned in at the beginning of the class on April 18, 2006. No excuses will be accepted. If you have any questions, please call Margaret Bryant at 310 846-4800. Thank you for your cooperation.

**This must be turned in by your child at the beginning of the class session**

Print Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of child attending the special class: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions (you may use the reverse side of this paper or additional paper if you need more space).

1. Do you understand that your child has been accused of a form of cheating?  Yes  No
2. Do you fully understand what your child is accused of doing?  Yes  No
3. Have you discussed the situation with your child and expressed your opinion about this sort of cheating?  Yes  No
4. Do you understand that the workshop on April 18 and the related homework and this questionnaire are mandatory and if not completed, the school may impose serious discipline?  Yes  No
5. Do you regard the conduct your child is accused of as serious or minor? Please explain:

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6. Will your child be facing consequences at home besides those imposed by the school? Please explain:

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7. What lesson would you like your child to learn from this experience?

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## Student Readings

*99% of the failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses.*  
George Washington Carver (African American scientist 1864-1943)

One aspect of leadership is an ability to take charge of a situation, to be in control and be responsible for making things better. There is no better place to demonstrate and develop this ability than in school and in a special 'class' such as this.

Effective leaders don't wait for the conditions of success, they create them. You can do the same in your life if you accept the fact that ***you and you alone are ultimately responsible for finding positive lessons and developing the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will determine your ability to achieve your own personal life goals.***

The crucial point is: regardless of your opinion as to the quality of any aspect of this homework assignment or the class, you are required and expected to learn. Based on the principles of leadership and personal responsibility, ***you will be held accountable for acquiring the knowledge and skills you need to know.***

*In hiring people look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. But remember, if they don't have the first, the other two will kill you.*  
Warren Buffet (multi-billionaire, president of Berkshire Hathaway)

Please read each of the following articles. They are all true and current stories. At the end of this reading packet is a homework sheet with questions. **If you fail to complete the homework and turn it in at the beginning of the class you will not be permitted to take the class.**

### **1. The Miami-Dade County School Board voted to fire six teachers and accept resignations from 26 others.**

March 20, 2006

Thirty-two teachers in Miami, Florida lost their jobs because they all purchased continuing education credits from a former teacher who set up a phony business providing teachers with false documentation that they had completed course work to earn their educational credits transcript scam. The teacher who sold the academic credits without requiring the work was sentenced to two years in prison.

Florida requires credentialed teachers to complete 6 credit units of continuing education every five years. These units sustain their credentialed status and, in some cases, qualify them for pay increases.

Six of the teachers were fired outright and 26 were forced to resign.

For many, the biggest surprise in this story is that the decision to fire the teachers only passed by a vote of 5-4.

The strongest argument against the firings came from parents and educators who said that the terminations would cause discontinuity in the students' education. A difficulty in finding qualified replacements for them was also a factor.

Some people want the teachers who gained financially by receiving pay raises for their fake credits to pay that money back to the school district and pay additional fines for contractual fraud in addition!

The question is: what message does it send to young students if teachers caught cheating on their own education were allowed to continue teaching and be paid for it?

The best teachers are not only good teachers but good role models for their students. A teacher who teaches Social Science well but also tells her students that it's okay to smoke pot has disqualified themselves from the privilege of working with young students in the classroom.

Teachers who cheat on their own education have committed an even greater crime: they have undermined the integrity of the very vocation that they were hired to represent.

## **2. Marathon cheating**

March 19, 2006

A company called JeansMarines was banned from being a partner in further marathon races because the organization's coach helped runners cut a portion of 26.2-mile race and falsely claim they had completed the full course.

In a letter signed by officials of Running USA, Road Runners Club of America, and USA Track & Field sent to entire running community said, "recent reports of participants cutting marathon courses and thereby not completing the full distance of an event -- yet claiming they have -- disturb us greatly. This is particularly troubling when finishing has certain rewards, such as finisher medals, and the recognition of being called a 'marathoner.'"

The "Big Three" magazines appealed to all participants to play fair and not cheat.

What drives people to cheat in running is the same characteristic that drives people to cheat in the workplace and everywhere else in life. We live in a society that awards highly successful people, through financial incentives and public recognition. We live in a society that way too often stresses and rewards the win-at-all-cost philosophy.

JeansMarines is a program out of Toronto created to take out-of-shape women off the couch and train them to complete a marathon in less than a year. In many cases, it worked. But in many other cases (they do admit on their Web site that at least eight cheated at Marine Corps marathon), the program only set up good-intentioned people for failure. The group admitted guilt -- after they were caught, of course.

## **3. Student Letter to School Newspaper**

March 25, 2006

Dear Editor:

"Excuse me- please don't cut the line. We were here before you."

"I was here."

"No, no you weren't. I saw you cut."

"He was saving my spot."

"No, no he wasn't. Please don't cut."

"Look, I have a meeting, I don't have time for this."

This conversation actually took place. It took place yesterday. And the day before that. And the day before that. It took place today and it will take place tomorrow. It's what I, and others, have to go through simply to get lunch.

After third period, four days a week, I go to my locker, put away my books, and go off to the Milkhouse to join the lunch line. Sometimes its a long line, sometimes it's short. For many people, however, the length of the line has absolutely no importance at all- since they simply ignore those waiting patiently to get lunch and cut right to the front.

It happens every day. Everyone has either seen it happen, or done it themselves. Many just find a friend or someone they know waiting in line, and go up to them, acting as if they were already there, and increasing the wait time for all the people waiting patiently behind them.

I've tried to argue with these people. I've exchanged possibly every conceivable argument. They have a meeting, they say, which they can't be late for, thus giving them the right to cut the line. They were there

the whole time and never cut the line at all. Worse, some freely admit to cutting the line, and simply rebut with: "So?"

I find, in my battles with these people, that I'm often alone. Friends waiting behind me encouraged me to give up the fight, and just let them cut. Or even to cut the line myself. No one was willing to take a stand and admit that cutting the line was wrong.

"So what?" you say. They aren't hurting anybody. So you have to wait a few extra minutes, big deal, right? Well, in my opinion, small injustices are just as wrong and important as large ones. So, we'll say, it's okay to cut the line if you have a meeting and are in a hurry. Does this always apply? Is it okay then, while driving, to ignore a red light or a stop sign simply because you are in a hurry? Does your schedule give you the right to inconvenience, or worse, endanger others?

I know this letter will make little difference. People will still cut the line, and our community will continue to accept that as the way things are. If I can, though, I would like to encourage everybody, not just as a community of students, but as a society of future citizens, to do the right thing and not cut in line. May be that will teach people to be a little less self centered when driving or going about their lives. Maybe people will be a little less angry, a little less ignorant when approaching a stop sign, and a little more willing to take a stand against small injustices as well as large ones.

Someone once said, a little goes a long way.

Sincerely,  
Benjamin C. Wszalek, '09

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#### **4. Off the Court, an Odd Lesson in Ethics**

March 22, 2006

WE interrupt March Madness to bring you this report on a really interesting ethics class taught at the [University of Connecticut](#) this year.

Everyone gets to take it, and the students get to grade the administrators. And though most students don't seem too bothered by it, most of them seem to think that the university flunks.

The issue, as most basketball fans know, has to do with a supremely talented point guard named Marcus Williams, probably the most important player on the team favored to win the [N.C.A.A.](#) tournament. As he showed again last weekend by playing a crucial role in two tough games UConn was in danger of losing, with him UConn is regarded as the most talented team in the tournament. Without him, its season is probably over.

There is, however, a small problem. Last summer, he and another player, A. J. Price, were arrested and charged with trying to sell at pawn shops four laptops stolen on campus from other students and valued at \$11,000. Both faced multiple felony counts, were placed in a special probation program for first-time offenders and received university penalties as well.

Mr. Price, who was also charged with making a false statement to the police, and who was not certain to play at all this year, got a year's suspension from basketball. Mr. Williams was suspended for 11 games at the beginning of the year, mostly tuneups against second-tier opponents. He then — voilà! — returned in time for UConn's first Big East conference game and the real season.

Life is complicated. Was the difference in punishment entirely due to who was a star and who wasn't? Probably not. Did Mr. Williams pay a price in public humiliation, probation and community service? Sure.

But did the university treat a star athlete the way it would treat a normal student? Did it provide an ethical example students could be proud of? Did it do the right thing? On a campus of fervent Huskies fans, almost no one seems to think so.

Seth Voytek, a senior from Wallingford, Conn., said, as did most others interviewed, that he probably would have been expelled for the same offense.

"But you know what the food chain is, you know your place on the totem pole," he said at the student union on Monday. "We're a basketball school. It's not a question of justice; it's all about who's worth more to the school — me being a liberal arts major or someone bringing in all that money."

For others, the notion that athletes might get special treatment at the university drew a resounding, "Duhhh."

"It's not fair, but like my dad says, life isn't fair," said Rich Hunter, a senior from Barkhamsted, Conn.

University officials say the penalties were comparable to those in other theft cases, and since campus judicial cases are private, there's no public information that allows for fair comparisons.

Yes, he wants to win and knows that's more likely with Mr. Williams playing. No, he doesn't want to win the wrong way. And, no, he doesn't think he would still be in school if involved in the same offenses. He says a yearlong suspension, while bad for the team, probably would have been the right thing to do.

"I'm a hard-core Huskies fan; like everyone else I want them to win the national championship more than anything," he said. "But personally I don't think they can win it without Marcus Williams, so you have to ask yourself, O.K., maybe you win, but at what cost? So now maybe people look at UConn and they say, 'What kind of administration are they running there?'"

But then, on the other hand, there's a game to play on Friday, Mr. Williams can help UConn win it, and, hey, you can ponder this stuff for only so long.

## **5. Senior at Naval Academy Expelled After Cheating on Exam**

A last semester senior at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland made a fatal bad choice. Under pressure to complete all his work, the cadet (who will remain nameless in this article) decided to cheat on an exam.

After determining his guilt the student honors committee recommended that the cadet be expelled from school. As a result he lost all chance of becoming an officer and his parents are being forced to pay the government over \$100,000 to reimburse them for his education/

The government pays for the education of future military officers only if they successfully and honorably complete the program and graduate. By being dishonorably discharged this young man lost that right and he and his parents must pay the money back.

## BY MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

### **6. WHY PEOPLE LIE**

Last month, RadioShack CEO David Edmondson -- make that former CEO -- was fired for lying on his resume about Bible college degrees he didn't actually have. And so he joins a football coach, a poet laureate, a school superintendent, the first woman chairperson of the United States Olympic Committee, a California judge and a host of executives who lost their jobs and blackened their reputations by lying about their past.

But why do so many successful people risk everything by lying -- usually about matters that have little to do with their essential competence? It's easy. First, when they initially told the lie -- often decades before discovery -- they thought it would make a difference. Second, they thought they'd never get caught.

Lying is wrong and unwise, but it's not irrational. After all most lies work -- at least in the short run. Though lies have a tendency to work their way up to the surface to cause havoc with relationships and careers, some lies do stay buried forever.

According to surveys by professional resume writers and checkers, anywhere from a third to just under a half of all resumes contain major inaccuracies. People lie about their educational background, job titles, salary history and dates of employment. Obviously, most are getting away with their fabrications and they are willing to build careers on an unstable foundation.

Besides, even if they are caught, many take comfort from the example of prominent liars, including Pulitzer Prize winning historian Joseph Ellis and Bausch & Lomb CEO Ron Zarella, who survived embarrassing revelations with their jobs intact.

For people who do not treasure the notion of personal honor, to lie or not to lie is simply a matter of weighing risks against rewards. And most underestimate the risks and overvalue the rewards.

It's worth noting that with new tools for verifying claims, lying is much riskier today than it was. But the worst thing about lying is that it makes you a liar.

### **7. HURRAY FOR AUDREY**

When Audrey Lin entered a highly competitive high school in Northern California, her goal was to earn straight A's and become a valedictorian. After four years of hard work she proudly received that distinction when she graduated. Last week, driven by a different sort of pride, she gave back her award and relinquished any claim to the title.

This extraordinary act of contrition was the culmination of events set into motion when she told a reporter last winter that cheating was common in her school and that she, herself had cheated. This resulted in bitter criticism from people who said she was unworthy to be a valedictorian.

Audrey resented the criticism at first because almost every student she knew cheated -- most a lot worse than she (she copied homework twice and accepted advance information about a test twice). But eventually she came to agree with her critics.

Audrey told me she turned herself in and forfeited the award because she wanted to convey the message that cheaters shouldn't prosper. She also wanted to put the spotlight on systemic cheating and administrative indifference.

When Audrey first talked to Stuart Kew, the principal at Mission San Jose high school in Fremont, about the article on cheating, he shrugged it off joking that cheating was a form of teamwork. Later, after Audrey surrendered her title, instead of praising her courage and accountability and pledging to adopt

reforms to discourage cheating in the future, the principal told the newspaper, "where there's so much pressure and competition, there will be cheating . . . it's probably endemic to the whole system."

Gee, with that attitude it's not hard to see why.

Hurray for Audrey, a true role model and shame on the principal who accepts cheating as inevitable.

## **8. THE SELF-PORTRAIT CALLED CHARACTER**

While I was on a radio call-in show talking about cheating, a listener I'll call Stan mocked my concern. He cheated to get into college, he said. He cheated in college to get a job. And now, he occasionally cheats on his job to get ahead. In fact, he concluded, cheating is such an important life skill that parents ought to teach their kids how to cheat.

Evidence is mounting that lots of people share Stan's amoral pragmatism. Because they define success and happiness in terms of getting what they want when they want it, ethics seems irrational. After all, in a world where cheaters so often prosper, why should anyone give up the benefits of dishonesty?

Well, for one thing, the Stans of the world have no idea the price they're paying for the little they're getting. A life without principles is demeaning and self-defeating. The Stans of the world are cheated as often as they cheat others. What's more, they cheat themselves. As they scrape and struggle to fill their lives, they give up their chance to lead fulfilling lives.

The happiest people I know are those who find purpose and meaning pursuing a grander vision of a good life measured in terms of worthiness, not net worth. Virtue is not a tactic, it's a life philosophy.

We paint the self-portrait that we call our character by our values and actions. We can choose to paint that portrait in the pale watercolors of shallow successes and short-lived pleasures or in the deep, rich oils of honor, spirituality, peace of mind and self-respect.

The enduring impact of our choices is not what we get but what we become.

## **9. LYING IS LIKE RECKLESS DRIVING**

Sometimes lying makes our lives easier. If you want the day off, just call in sick. If your boss asks if you've finished a report, say you left it at home. And if an irate customer calls, just make up a good cover-up story. Sure, "technically" these are lies, but since no one is hurt, what's the big deal?

We tell ourselves these sorts of lies are harmless. But are they really? Telling lies is like drunk driving. If we're lucky, we won't get caught and no one will get hurt. Still, drunk driving is wrong because it's irresponsible to recklessly endanger human life. Most lies are wrong because they recklessly endanger human relationships. What's more, lies are habit forming. The more lies we tell, the easier it becomes, so we tell more lies.

Self-serving lies that help us get out of a jam or look better are like land mines. Many of them may lie dormant but, sooner or later, some of them will explode, damaging both credibility and reputation. The ethical duty to be worthy of trust does not bend to our needs, convenience or desire to avoid unpleasant consequences. Besides being dishonest, lying is disrespectful because it deprives the victim of true information needed to make sensible decisions.

Lies damage personal and business relationships because they generate suspicion and distrust. Once lied to, most people think, "What else will he lie to me about?" This is not a healthy basis for any relationship.



9. Do you see anything wrong with punishing the two athletes differently based on how valuable they are to the team? Why or why not?
  
10. Where is the U.S. Naval Academy?
  
11. As a result of the cadet cheating, what did the parents have to do?
  
12. The president of what company was fired for lying about his background?
  
13. Why did Audrey Linn complain about cheating at her school?

Essay Questions:

1. Considering the articles you were asked to read as homework. Write below which article had the most impact on you and why. You must choose one.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Think of the person you admire the most in terms of character. It can be someone you know, a historical figure or any other hero or idol. Below list at least three characteristics of that person and briefly state why you admire him or her.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Many adults are very upset about the grade changing incident. Some are calling for very strict penalties such as expulsion and disqualification from all senior activities including graduation ceremonies for the senior. Below write why you think so many people are demanding such harsh penalties and what penalties or responses you would impose if you were in charge.