



"Initiative" vs. Idleness

"Recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I'm asked."

I will:

- do what is right before being told.
- not put off until tomorrow the things I can do today.
- contribute to the success of the whole team.
- be a part of the solution rather than the problem.
- look for ways to help others.

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What is Initiative?

Initiative has the root meaning of beginning something, always with the ability to finish. A person with initiative takes an idea and turns it into action. He or she will weigh the risks and take wise steps, not stepping into another's area of responsibility. To be effective, a leader has to have initiative. A group is successful when its members show initiative.

Memory Work

"I will look for needs that I can meet before somebody asks.
I will not wait till tomorrow To complete my present tasks.

I will do what's right before I'm told,
And when the day gets stressful,
I will work toward a solution
So the team will be successful!

My character is what will make
A leader out of me!
So next time through, let's say it more
ENTHUSIASTICALLY!"

Paperclip Chain

Make a chain of 10 paperclips. Try to push the chain. Now take the end paperclip and pull the chain. Which is easier?

That is how it is with leadership. It is hard to push a group forward, but when a leader takes initiative and acts first, the entire group will move forward.

Character First Education

Initiative in Nature

Long graceful necks, jet black bills and snow white bodies. The Tundra Swans are some of the first birds to migrate to the Canadian North during the spring migration. Sometimes the swans only have eight weeks from the time they arrive in the spring until the lakes freeze over in the fall. This makes their season for laying eggs, hatching them, and raising their young shorter than most birds.

The swans call back and forth as they wait for the first one to take flight. Their eagerness prompts them to take the initiative and be the first birds to leave for their summer nesting grounds. With strong, steady wing beats, they lift gracefully into the clear blue sky. Seeming confused, as first they circle each other flying first one way and then another as their instinctive homing device turns the flock north.

One of the older, more experienced birds takes the lead. One by one the swans form their characteristic "V" shape, with each bird flying slightly to the side and behind the one in front. The lead bird is the only one who has to face the wind head-on. The others benefit from the one in front of it who helps shear the wind. As the lead bird grows weary, it will fall to the side and take up a rear position to rest while another bird takes the initiative and moves to the front.

A swan flying alone would only cover 470 miles that first day. But the flock flying in formation will make it 800 miles before needing to land to rest. Do you take the initiative? When you see a need, do you meet it without being asked? We can learn from the Tundra Swans. When we take the initiative, we take some of the burden off of someone else allowing them to be refreshed so that together we can all accomplish more.

To see how the "V" formation works, arrange volunteers in the shape of an inverted "V" giving each a book to hold. Placing the leader in front with the others standing behind and to the sides, direct them to rest their books on the shoulder of the person in front of them. This makes it easier for everyone except the leader. When the leader gets tired and can't hold the book any longer, allow him or her to switch places with someone else. Another way to demonstrate the same principle would be to go on a bike ride and instruct everyone to follow the leader. As the leader gets tired he or she can fall in behind someone else and allow them to shear the wind for a while.

By Kelly Sorge

Lessons from the Swan

--adapted from Character First



- -Use what you have
- -Work with others and accept leadership to carry the load
- -prepare yourself
- -watch the time

George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver's eyes followed the long rows of cotton as his train flew along the tracks. All he could think about as he viewed the sea of cotton was how the land had been robbed of all its strength. It was no wonder that the farmers here were struggling. At that time, 1896, there was much suffering. People suffered from poor education, poor housing, and even poorer food. As George saw the problems he asked himself, "What can I do to help these poor farmers?"

That's the kind of man George Carver was. He was always looking for ways to help others. He approached every problem with the attitude of "I Will".

He was headed to Tuskegee Institute. His assignment there was to make the land a model farm. At 4:00 a.m. as Carver slipped out of bed, as was his habit the remainder of his life, ideas flooded his mind.

The thirteen students at the farm hauled away load after load of rubbish. The 19-acre "Experimental School Farm" was the first of its kind. Carver encouraged his students saying, "This is the worst land in Alabama, but we can make it fruitful". Skeptical at first, the students brought loads of decayed leaves and muck from the surrounding forest and spread them on the field. Professor Carver got behind the plow and started plowing the muck into the depleted soil. Neighboring farmers laughed! Carver smiled and kept plowing.

Did you spot the "I Will"?

Working in the field he became part of the solution while setting an example for his students.

"Cowpeas!" cried the students. Cowpeas were for throwing to the hogs! Nevertheless, cowpeas were planted on the experimental farm. After the harvest, Carver treated the students to pancakes, potatoes, and mouth-watering meatloaf made from the harvest of cowpeas.

Carver explained to his students that planting the same crop year after year tires out the land: "Just as a man gets tired after working all day, you must let your soil rest and be refreshed." That year they planted sweet potatoes. Finally, after two years of letting the land grow different crops, cotton was once again planted in the regenerated soil.

At the harvest, the experimental farm was the topic on every farmer's lips. Five hundred pounds per acre! Carver's healthy cotton plants spoke for themselves. Those who had laughed at his foreign techniques now gained deep respect for Professor Carver.

Did you notice the "I Will"? The whole team of Southern farmers benefited from this success.

Upon returning home, Carver realized that even though the farm experiment had been a huge success, it only benefited those that were able to go to it. The poverty-stricken people that could not go and see did not know how to manage their land.

The idea slowly formed in Carver's mind. "There must be a way to do more. If they can't come to the school, I will take the school to them!" The School on Wheels caught immediate attention as it rolled into town. Each time it came, there were new demonstrations. First it was the wire chicken coop, then a cream separator that was cranked by hand. Next, the demonstrations were about new seeds, new paints, new recipes, or new tools. People could not wait to see what the wagon would bring next time.

Did you spot the "I Will"? George did not put off until later what could be done that day.

Later, Carver's students began doing the demonstrations, passing on to others the things they had learned. Everywhere they went, the spirit of Professor Carver went saying, "I see what you need. Here, let me help you."

written by Kelly Sorge
Concept Provided by Character First



What Will Stop Initiative?

- Leaving projects unfinished with clutter.
- Assuming someone else will do it.
- Losing others' trust by failing to act or acting without thinking.
- Meddling in the affairs of others, without respect to their assignments.
- Laziness.
- Waiting for the perfect time, which never comes.

--adapted from Character First, Series 2, Booklet 3, page 3.

[Click here for more on Initiative--](#)