



DEFINE YOUR DASH

Use perception to shape personality

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POET LINDA ELLIS SPOKE OF THE DASHES ON A TOMBSTONE — for example, 2005–2018. She said, “What mattered most was the dash between those years.” That punctuation mark, the dash, represents the way that the deceased person lived his or her life.

What does *your dash* represent? If you died today, what would parents, siblings, relatives, neighbors, peers, classmates, teachers, coaches, and other members of your school and church community say or think about you? Would they speak about how generous, caring, forgiving, helpful, cooperative, loving, easy-going, or approachable you were? Would they say you were a team player, loyal, faith-filled and faithful, and that you kept your word?

Instead, might classmates say (or think) that they did not really know you because you only associated with the “in group,” or that you were bossy, a troublemaker, or unreliable? That you put others down, made fun of others, spread hurtful gossip? That you were a bully?

Perception is the way you view yourself or how other people view

you. It is a useful tool if it helps to shape a positive personality.

1. If, after prayerful consideration, you can humbly admit that folks think well of you, continue to nurture those specific kinds of attitudes, behaviors, and practices.

2. If negative qualities surface during honest reflection, use them to set goals for the future.

Another’s opinion may not match yours.

It may even be inaccurate. Regardless, say to yourself, “If I want to change that perception, I can do this ...”

For example, if the perception exists that you are selfish and self-centered, choose to act the opposite way. Focus on others. Show interest in them. Compliment someone else’s efforts. Withhold your opinion until two others speak first. Look for ways to serve

and anticipate the needs of others. The good news is that each day you have a new chance to define yourself.

3. Let the following motto define your personality: “Good, better, best. I will never rest until my good is better and my better is my best.” Refuse to compare yourself to others.

4. Be proactive. Shape your “dash” one action at a time!

STUDENT QUESTIONS

■ What are three qualities or characteristics do your parents associate with you? Your siblings? Your teachers? Your friends?

■ Is there a peer who does not seem to like you? What three qualities or characteristics might they perceive about you?

■ Name one quality that you want to define your “dash.” In what practical ways can you nurture that personality trait? **T**

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