

This year you have entered into high school, have turned 15, and are turning into a wonderful young man. As you are leaving adolescence and are stepping towards adulthood, you will begin to have more opportunities to be making your own decisions and choices at school, at home, and in your personal life. With that gradual freedom, will come the increased responsibility to make the correct choices. Those choices may be fun and easy decisions, and some may be challenges and distractions that will test your moral compass, and your integrity.

I am writing this letter to you XXX, because there are some things I want you to know and by writing them down, they can be more clear and more lasting than when spoken in conversation. And hopefully, you will keep this letter to refer back to in the months and years to come. As you are growing into a young man, I want to express to you our family values, so that you may use them as the cornerstone of who you are as build on them your own character and personality.

First of all, honesty and integrity are of prime importance. When faced with choices, always choose the right, correct and honest option. Never make a choice that is borderline or questionable. Usually such decisions are easy, but too often the consequences of a hasty decision can be regrettable. You have already seen the results of this at school, just recently. When your inner voice tells you that something may not be entirely correct, listen to your conscious. You will know the right thing to do. Or ask yourself, would your parents or your Headmaster approve?

Protecting your reputation and your character is important, too. Shakespeare is considered to be one of the greatest writers, in part because of the “truths of the human heart.” In *Othello*, the villain Iago touched on one of these truths when he said:

“Who steals my purse setals trash; ‘tis something, nothing’
Twas mine, ‘tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that fliches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.”

The point here is that the importance of Honesty transcends time and place as being of upmost importance. A poor choice can hurt one’s reputation, but over time it can be repaired. A dishonest choice may damage one’s reputation forever. With yourself and with others, always be honest.

The people with which you associate yourself will affect the choices you have to make, and will affect the way people see you. You will be judged by the company you keep. Choose your friends wisely and for the long term. Those who have sound principals and good moral foundations will be good friends for life. Those who lack moral fiber, you will find in time that you will have nothing in common with, and will fall by the wayside. You will wish you had spent more time with those friends who have integrity.

Secondly, people are important, and showing kindness and consideration for others is most important. What distinguishes a gentleman from an uncivilized lout is his consideration for others, his sense of compassion, and his sense of self-sacrifice. Having compassion for others is a manly trait; selfishness and a lack of compassion is cowardly and unbecoming of a man. Manners are merely an outward demonstration of your kindness and consideration for others. A gentleman is comfortable with his kindness and generosity to others, and manners are his way of showing his compassion with self-confidence. Furthermore, it shows to others who you are, and that you were raised well in a good family. Manners reflect first on you, and then on where you came from. Manners are a habit, to be used regularly, not just on special occasions. Be proud that you know your manners by using them with confidence and pride.

Thirdly, you will have times in your life when things go well, and times when things go badly, and life is difficult. As the old saying goes, we all make mistakes – it is what we do with our mistakes that set us apart. When life is good and easy, don't feel you can stray from your basic values without consequences – your values need to remain constant. That is what Integrity is. When things are not going well or if mistakes are made, remember that your family loves you and will want to do everything in our power to help you be successful. Remember that God loves you just as fiercely. Always talk to God. (I know you will, it's in your genes – *fides et spes!*) It is important to remember we are all answerable to a higher authority. Rules matter and respect for authority is important to maintain. You can always come to your mother and me. We love you fiercely, too! When things are not going well, talking it through will diminish the obstacle and help formulate a plan to overcome it. Your grandfather XXXXX always said, "Having a positive frame of mind is critical in maintaining good health, and in not letting life get the better of you. And being able to laugh at yourself is just as important, 'cause if you can't laugh at yourself, no one will want to give you the time of day." Your grandmother told me just today what to do when facing a difficult time: "Just pause, take a deep breath, and then get on with it." Knowing that came from someone who loved me and was able to laugh even when she had xxxxx last year, made me realize that few if any problems are too big not to be able to keep one's humor, which in turn helps keep it from being insurmountable. Simply put, keep your sense of humor, and stay connected to God, your family, and your mentors.

Lastly XXXX, know that your mother and I and your entire family love you, and are proud that you are our son (brother, nephew cousin, grandson.) We are all eagerly watching you grow into a smart, handsome young gentleman. Most of what I have put in this letter, you already know and live by. But as I said at the beginning, having this in writing helps us to better identify and adopt these values that we believe in. This is not a comprehensive list, but just some of the basics we try to live by.