

# Do the Right Thing

## Engage in self-assessment.



by Howard L. Millman

WHEN YOU ARE ASKED IF you want to do the right thing, you likely say, "Yes, of course." Then why do you frequently do the wrong thing?

When you perceive that your self-interest is at stake, you tend to act in a manner that is greedy, mean-spirited, hurtful to others, harmful to the environment, illegal, unethical or immoral. So ask yourself: "Is my self-interest the most important issue, or are moral, legal and ethical questions more important?"

Healthy children, teens, and adults learn that sensitivity to others and doing the right thing matter. The opposite is developing an anti-social personality, where self-interest is the only thing that counts and the welfare of others is meaningless. You can then justify your behavior: "Everyone does it," "If I don't do it, someone else will," "Winning is the only thing," "Anything goes in order to survive." Your judgment becomes impaired, and you do not do the right thing.

Some people experience anxiety and insecurity and develop an authoritarian personality. They become relatively close-minded, rigid, conforming, intolerant. "Selective sensitization" and "perceptual defense" suggest that we see what we want to see—what fits our belief system. We are defensive



and closed to ideas or facts that threaten our beliefs. Since you are prone to this, you need to consider whether you are open-minded. Yes, *the truth shall set you free*, if you are open to reality.

You may perceive yourself as doing the right thing, or being virtuous, as defined by your beliefs, even as many others see your behaviors as negative, even as evil. Denial is a primitive defensiveness. Others can see abusiveness, anger, greed, arrogance, or selfishness, but you deny their reality.

Once you set the goal of being virtuous, you start a lifelong mission to stay on track. If you see doing the right thing as a priority, you must engage in regular and rigorous self-assessment.

Young children may be brought up in an environment where doing the right thing is an everyday event. Parents should be models of virtuous attitudes and behaviors—of kindness and compassion and helpfulness. If children see and hear anger, complaints, envy, selfishness, bullying and teasing, they adopt such behaviors even if they are taught kindness.

What's your main purpose in life? Is it making money, becoming famous, being popular, having a family, making a contribution, helping others, being educated, not having regrets? These and other aims can be achieved by feeling joyful by doing the right thing. This requires vigilance, living in the moment with full awareness. The welfare of others and the condition of our planet then become your main purpose. PE

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**ACTION:** Focus on doing the right thing.