

The issue of Character Education has gained prominence across the United States in recent years. It became part of the S.A.V.E. legislation in NYS last summer. At the heart of any character education initiative is the issue of values and how to teach them. The values we teach our children are an integral part of their upbringing and one of the most important things we do as parents. When we impart values as a part of their formal education in school, there typically is the issue of whether the school is teaching religion.

Such is the case in the High School with a book entitled Life's Greatest Lessons by Dr. Hal Urban. Dr Urban presents 20 lessons or ideals that he has grown to believe are the most important things we should teach our children.

He quotes the Bible and discusses his own spirituality. He mentions Buddha and Gandhi and Ben Franklin. He also paraphrases St. Paul. He states that having faith is one of the cornerstones he found important – calling for a balance between physical, intellectual, and spiritual health.

Teaching religion in a public school can be an explosive issue, as the Constitution demands a separation of church and state. However, the Constitution does not forbid the mention of God or even a description of the Bible, or the Koran, or the Torah, or the teachings of Hinduism. It does forbid the promotion of one faith as superior to the others.

The ideas Urban presents represent a great deal of common sense. But they are the ideas of one man, with which we can agree or disagree. Some people have argued that his book does not belong in the High School because it teaches or promotes religion. Urban promotes the need for faith as it helped him in his life. He also tells the reader that he or she must determine their own beliefs, whether they agree with his own or not.

The list that follows presents the gist of each of his chapters. Read them and let me know what you think!

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Chapter 1. Success is more than making money

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Overview: This chapter does not state that money is evil, but that it can be a part of success if our success is reaching our potential for good.

Quote: Success means doing the best we can with what we have. Success is in the doing, not the getting – in the trying, not in the triumph. (Wynn Davis)

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Chapter 2: Life is hard ... and not always fair

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Overview: Life is not obligated to making us happy, we are responsible to accept life as it is and make the most of it.

Quote: Expect trouble as an inevitable part of life and when it comes, hold your head high, look it squarely in the eye and say, “I will be bigger than you. You cannot defeat me.” (Ann Landers)

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Chapter 3: Life is also fun ... and incredible funny

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Overview: We need to have fun, to laugh at our world and at ourselves. It helps maintain a balance in our lives.

Quote: Of all the gifts bestowed by nature on human beings, hearty laughter must be close to the top. (Norman Cousins)

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Chapter 4: We live by choice, not by chance

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Overview: I have spoken to students routinely when they are facing discipline or some other crisis that they don't always have a choice about what happens around them. But they do have choice about how they will respond.

Quote: The greatest power that person possesses is the power to choose. (J. Martin Kohe)

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Chapter 5: Attitude is a choice – the most important one you'll ever make

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Overview: This chapter is closely aligned to the previous one. We choose our attitude towards life. Urban cites a study from Harvard that found 85% of our success I life is due to attitude, 15% is due to ability.

Quote: Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. (Viktor Frankl, concentration camp survivor)

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Chapter 6: Habits are the key to all success

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Overview: We need to recognize positive and “winning” behavior and practice them so consistently that they become habits.

Quote: We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. (Aristotle)

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Chapter 7: Being thankful is a habit – the best one you’ll ever have

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Overview: Urban encourages us to list 5 things for which we are thankful and keep that list in front of us.

Quote: It’s not how much we have, but how much we enjoy. (Charles Spurgeon)

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Chapter 8: Good people build their lives on a foundation of respect

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Overview: There are 4 pillars of respect that provide the foundation for our lives: 1. Manners 2. Language 3. Honoring the Rules (Urban argues that they are NOT made to be broken, but to maintain society), and 4. Appreciating Differences

Quote: Our rewards in life will always be in exact proportion to the amount of consideration we show toward others. (Earl Nightengale)

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Chapter 9: Honesty is still the best policy

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Overview: Urban talks about the meaning of integrity and the cost of dishonesty. He gives 6 reasons for being honest that really are common sense.

Quote: This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. (William Shakespeare)

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Chapter 10: Kind words cost little, but accomplish much

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Overview: This chapter presents lessons from Franklin and Lincoln to explain the power of positive orientation to our activities.

Quote: Kind words do not cost much, yet they accomplish much. (Blaise Pascal)

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Chapter 11: Real motivation comes from within

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Overview: This chapter denounces the packaged “feel good” programs that were prevalent in the 80’s and 90’s. Instead, he asserts that people need desire, a belief in themselves, and a mental picture of what they seek to accomplish. The essence of the chapter is reflected in the comment from an anonymous student: “If we are always looking for excuses for why we can’t do things, then we’ll never find the

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reasons why we can.”

Quote: Motivation starts with a sense of desire ... when you want something, you become motivated to get it. (Dennis Waitley)

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Chapter 12: Goals are dreams with deadlines

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Overview: Goals are important because they give purpose to our activities. He distinguishes between goals and dreams through explanation of the chapter’s title.

Quote: Virtually nothing on earth can stop a person with a positive attitude who has a goal clearly in sight. . (Dennis Waitley)

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Chapter 13: There’s no substitute for hard work

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Overview: Urban lists 10 rewards of hard work and ties the thoughts together with the previous two chapters.

Quote: Of all the unhappy people in the world, the unhappiest are those who have not found something they want to do. True happiness come to him who does his work well, followed by a relaxing and refreshing period of rest. True happiness comes from the right amount f work for the day. (Lin Yutang)

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Chapter 14: You have to give up something to get something

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Overview: This chapter is about self-discipline. This is defined as being in charge of yourself.

Quote: Decide what you want, decide what you are willing to exchange for it, establish your priorities, and go to work! (H. Lamar Hunt)

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Chapter 15: Successful people don’t find time – they make time

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Overview: The ability to use time effectively is a key for success.

Quote: Time is life. It is irreversible and irreplaceable. To waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make the most of it. (Alan Lakein)

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Chapter 16: No one else can raise your self-esteem

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Overview: Urban talks of real vs. short-lived self-esteem. He encourages development of the deep-down feeling of self-worth and how to accomplish it.

Quote: Self-esteem is the reputation you have with yourself. (Brian Tracy)

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Chapter 17: The body needs nutrition and exercise – so do the mind and spirit

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Overview: Chinese and Greek philosophers spoke of the balance required between the body, the mind, and spirit to live a full life. They agreed that as we developed these parts of our nature, “we grow in understanding, become more complete as human beings, and live more fully” (p 139).

Quote: Mind, body, and spirit act in concert to determine health and well-being. (Dr. Carl Thoresen)

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Chapter 18: It’s OK to fail – everyone else has

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Overview: Everyone is an expert at Failure! The important part is what we do with our failures. Do we learn and move further towards a goal, or do we give up and sulk?

Quote: The world breaks everyone, and afterwards many are strong at the broken places. (Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms)

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Chapter 19: Life is simpler when we know what’s essential

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Overview: Urban presents 6 simple rules that guide his life. He encourages the reader develop his or her own rules.

Quote: One cannot participate in this mysterious act of living with any hope of satisfaction unless one understands a few simple rules (Og Mandino)

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Chapter 20: Essential #1 is being a good person

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Overview: Being a good person is the essential element to emotional and spiritual health.

Quote: Do all the good you can, by all the means you can. (John Wesley)

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