

What Character Means to Me

~Sandra W. Spivey, Ed.D.

As a leader, I like to ask people who work under my supervision to think about what they would like for people to say about them at the end of their careers (or even at the end of their lives.) I ask them to think of one word that they would like to hear as people describe how they will remember them (or what they would like for people to say about them after they are gone.) I tell them that, when I was younger, I think I believed that there would be some big accomplishment or some big events that would define my legacy; however, the longer I live, the more I have come to believe that the legacy we leave behind is determined by the little things. It is our day-to-day actions that tell the story of who we really are. On the wall of our main office at DMS, you will see the following quote: *“Watch your thoughts, they become words. Watch your words, they become actions. Watch your actions, they become habits. Watch your habits, they become your character. Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.”* I often have students read this saying as we are working through various issues. I want them to know that they are shaping their character each and every moment of each and every day as they make decisions about how they will respond as they face different choices.

When I ask others what word describes how they would like to be remembered, I take the time to reflect on this as well; I have always selected the same word — *INTEGRITY*. I recently read an article that listed the 12 personality traits of people with true integrity: (1) *they put other people’s needs above theirs*; (2) *they are honest*; (3) *they are authentic*; (4) *they are humble*; (5) *they are kind*; (6) *they always take responsibility for their actions*; (7) *they apologize with grace and sincerity when they have made a mistake*; (8) *they always see the good in others*; (9) *they always try to help those that are less fortunate than themselves*; (10) *they talk through things in a civil manner*; (11) *they do not take advantage of others*; and (12) *they do not want to waste anybody’s time*. In reading this list, I am reminded of what I often tell people: “I am a work in progress, and God is not finished with me yet.” But, these are all traits that I aspire to have in my list of personal characteristics. Having integrity is what character means to me, and it is the most important aspect of all of my personal and professional relationships. When my career (and life) comes to an end, I hope that people will be able to see at least some of these qualities in the legacy I leave behind.