Resourcefulness

Without Resourcefulness, Who Would Meet Daily Situations?

Who Would Devise Ways and Means to Get Things Done?

When parents and teachers do their best to help young people learn the meaning of resourcefulness, make the trait so enticing that children and teenagers want to embrace it as their own, and then help them put it into action on a consistent, daily basis, we will have far less frustration in our homes and schools – far less need to purchase items.

RESOURCEFULNESS SAVES MONEY!

What is resourcefulness? Resourcefulness is action flowing from an understanding that life is not perfect for anyone, and a corresponding determination to meet challenges with ways and means to solve the imperfections.

It is a character trait that requires a willingness to be creative. The exercise of resourcefulness defies lazy thinking, and uses the imagination to “change lemons into lemonade”.

This character trait has increasingly been laid aside in our industrial age. Young people, especially, live as though life’s problems should always resolve themselves, and should do so in the space of 30 minutes, just as a television sitcom does. Daily situations should be no more unpredictable than their video games, which quickly become obvious, calling for no resourcefulness.

Young people fall easily into the trap of believing any need should be solved by a purchase.

- Take young people camping without the latest cooking equipment, and many will go hungry for lack of resourcefulness.
- Give teenagers a few basic art supplies with an assignment to decorate the room, and many will complain that they cannot do the assignment without more.
- Ask teachers to work with budget cuts, and many will argue that they have to totally cut this class or that, one project or the other.
**Resourcefulness** does not respond this way. Resourcefulness quickly combines creativity with a commitment to wring the most value from every dollar, every supply, and every situation.

**Resourcefulness is characterized by an enterprising spirit.**

How easy is it for a youngster to learn resourcefulness?

We lived in a rural city of Japan some years ago, at the end of a small dirt lane that boasted four small homes. In the home just east of ours lived a young couple with their 3-year old son. I’ll call him Matt (not his real name).

Matt loved chewing gum, and his mother bought it on occasion, but she always tried to hide it, saving it as a special treat. Since Matt was very short, as are most Japanese 3-year olds, his mother usually chose a hiding place that was high.

One day, shortly after returning from the little corner store, Matt saw his mother hide gum on top of the refrigerator. It was a short refrigerator by some standards, barely 5’ high. It should have stopped a small child in his tracks.

But not Matt. Matt wanted that gum. He wanted it badly enough that he exercised resourcefulness. The home held no chairs, being a traditional Japanese home, and no stepladder, but that obstacle did not deter Matt.

Waiting until his mother went outdoors to work in her flower garden, Matt carried a small plastic stool from the bathroom and set it by the cupboard. Climbing on it, he opened a cupboard drawer and hoisted his little body into it. From there, he moved to the cupboard top. Getting the gum, he made his way back down, and left the scene, stuffing his cheeks as he went.

Matt devised a way to get something he could not otherwise have. He used resourcefulness, but sacrificed several other character traits.

Little children will understand resourcefulness when you give them a clear definition, with examples like Matt. Try modeling your definition after a definition on the back of one of the Character Companions® Series of books. **Resourcefulness is knowing what you want to have or do, understanding that it is not easy to get or do that, and taking action to make it happen without doing wrong to get it.**

Be sure children understand that resourcefulness is not always easy. Work with them to understand that we make ourselves think to be resourceful. We think of NEW ideas when the old ones won’t work.
1. **Resource**

**What is a resource?**

In teaching this character trait, begin by helping young people understanding what a resource is. Have those who are old enough look up the word in several dictionaries or Internet sites. If you are teaching younger children, discuss the word and its meaning with them. A couple of definitions are given here for your convenience.

- That which can relieve a need
- a source of aid or support that may be drawn upon when needed
- a source of supply
- available means

You will want your students (your own children if you are the parent) to understand that a “resource” is an available means of providing “relief”.

- Natural gas is a resource, an available means of relieving the need for fuel.
- The local library is a resource, an available means of relieving the need for information or reading enjoyment.
- Water is a natural resource, an available means of relieving thirst.
- A teacher is a resource, an available means of relieving the need for instruction.
- Law officers are a resource, an available means of relieving the need for safety.

Help your students list as many resources as they can, working to instill the idea that ... a resource can relieve a need.

2. **Resourceful**

**What does it mean to be resourceful?**

Once students understand clearly what a resource is, build on that knowledge by discussing what it means to be resourceful. Point out the “ful” suffix on the word. Explain that this means “filled up” with resources. A clear understanding may be hastened with a few of these object lessons.

- Fill a glass to the brim with water, and state that it is “waterful” – filled up with water.
- Stuff a bag with pillows, and ask volunteers to make a word that expresses the bag’s state. The answer should be “pillowful”.
- Show a photo of a squirrel – cheeks stuffed with nuts. The squirrel is ______. It is “nutful”.
- Ask how we would describe a nation filled with peace. “Peaceful”.
- Someone who is filled up with pride is __________. Prideful.

Once you are sure they understand the concept, and the use of the suffix “ful”, return to a discussion of resources. Ask:
3. **Resourcefulness**

**What is resourcefulness?**

One more suffix must be understood: the suffix “-ness”.

This suffix appears in many character trait names. It refers to the state, condition, or quality of. You can return to your previous examples and object lessons to help young people get a clear understanding of this.

- The local library is a resource that can relieve the need for information. The local library is filled up with information. It is “informationful”. The library has a quality of being filled with information. That is its condition. It has “informationfulness”.

- The air around us is a resource that can relieve the need for oxygen. The air is filled up with oxygen. It is “oxygenful”. The air has a quality of being filled with oxygen. That is its condition. It has “oxygenfulness”.

- A good teacher is a resource that can relieve the need for joy in a classroom. That teacher is filled up with joy. He is “joyful”. The teacher has a quality of being filled with joy. That is his usual condition. He has “joyfulness”.

- An honest girl is a resource that can relieve the need for truth in any situation. She is filled up with truth. She is “truthful”. The girl has a quality of being filled with truth. That is her usual condition. She had “truthfulness”.

Use as many examples as are needed to be certain your young people make the progression from resource to resourceful to resourcefulness.

4. **Exercising Resourcefulness**

**How should we exercise resourcefulness?**

It does little good to understand a character trait’s meaning if we cannot link it to actions. You will want to help children and teenagers understand how resourcefulness is exercised. You will want to convey the concept of digging deep inside yourself to produce the ways or means of relieving a need – even when it seems as though there is not way.

Set problems before the students, and help them work through each one, showing how resourcefulness is exercised. Here are a few examples.

- **MacGyver**, a TV show that ran from 1985 to 1992, featured resourcefulness. MacGyver could solve almost any problem, relieving the need for safety by using science and his wits instead of violence. To stop a nuclear missile before it destroyed an entire nation, MacGyver quickly chewed a piece of gum, fished a paperclip from his pocket, and short-circuited the missile. He
could use a candy bar to stop a highly dangerous acid leak. If a lady friend was willing to
donate her handbag, MacGyver could work wonders using just the contents of her bag. He
always used his ingenuity rather than brute force – and always just in the nick of time. Teenage
students will enjoy watching an episode on video or DVD, and will readily see how they can
exercise resourcefulness.

- MONEY TALKS – and talks loudly to teenagers. Have a panel of teenagers lead a discussion
  on the need for resourcefulness when it comes to paying for a large ticket item WITHOUT a
  credit card – or funding a college education WITHOUT a student loan.

- MONEY TALKS to middle school and younger students also. They will be able to see how
  resourcefulness is exercised in earning money when too young for official part-time jobs.

- Engage middle school students in a discussion of how resourcefulness might help improve
  grades when a student is not doing well despite listening in class.

- Discuss with any age child, in appropriate terms, how resourcefulness can be exercised to
  relieve needs following a major storm. If a family has no shelter, and no money for a hotel
  room, how can they exercise resourcefulness to relieve the need for shelter?

**Why should we exercise resourcefulness?**

Some students will see little reason for resourcefulness. They have been raised with the belief
that it is up to the government, local, state, or federal, to relieve any needs they encounter. If a
storm causes need for shelter, the government must provide. If they have no money for college,
the government must give them a free education. If they have no food, the government must
provide abundant food stamps.

Older students should talk with you about why it is a lack of character to always depend on others
to meet your needs. Why is it a sign of character to exercise resourcefulness rather than rely
entirely on others? Why should we build this character trait into our lives?

If you, the teacher or parent, do not have answers to these questions, take time to think them
through carefully. Exercise your own resourcefulness to relieve any need you may have for more
information that will answer the questions fully. Resist the temptation to simply ask someone else
to give you the answers. After all, if you are going to TEACH resourcefulness, you must build the
trait in your own life so that you can model it.

**Resourcefulness – Build it with Books!**

**Stories remain a time-honored way of building character.**

Here are some book ideas for teaching resourcefulness.

Children 3 to 8 years of age will learn resourcefulness from the examples of the
lovable animals in the **Character Companions® Series** of books. Read the
stories together, and talk about things such as **Christopher Cat’s**
resourcefulness in relieving the need for character in the barn yard. Talk about
how the parrot used resourcefulness in **Little Zoh’s Submissive Trunk**. How
did resourcefulness help **Pandora Puppy’s** mother get Ping-Pong off the
clothesline – and how will it help us – in exercising compassion? How did
**Stinky Skunk** use resourcefulness in her attempts to make others like her?
Children 9 to 11 or 12 years of age will learn resourcefulness from the examples of Charlie and Hailey in *The Character Mystery Series*. They’ll love each mystery, and learn how vital resourcefulness is when trying to solve one! They’ll also learn how important resourcefulness can be to a person’s safety.

Teenagers and pre-teens will get caught up in learning resourcefulness from the riveting teen novels in the *Character-in-Action® Series of books*. Although they won’t want to stop reading about Andrew and his siblings, or about Valeta and her boyfriend, they will be learning how essential resourcefulness was in each life – how it could even save life!

**QUOTES**

1. “Remember you will not always win. Some days, the most resourceful individual will taste defeat. But there is, in this case, always tomorrow -- after you have done your best to achieve success today.” *Maxwell Maltz*

2. “If necessity is the mother of invention, then resourcefulness is the father.” *Beulah Louise Henry*

3. “Americans developed the resourcefulness and wisdom to solve the problem of organizing a nation in the midst of war and crisis, one of the greatest achievements of modern political history.” *Henry Steele Commager*

4. A true anecdote: When three Illinois pioneers started on a trip to Missouri in 1833, they had to find ways or means to transport their three horses across the wide Mississippi River. The men had canoes for themselves, but you could not put a horse in a canoe.

   Resourcefulness came to the rescue. The men constructed a wide platform, and enclosed it on all sides with a wooden railing. They then rested the large platform on their canoes, and led the horses onto it. The unique craft safely transported its passengers and equipment to the west bank of the mighty Mississippi.