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The Courage to do the Right Thing

By Matthew Scott
UCF Forum columnist
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Courage is in all of us, waiting just beneath the surface for a chance to be displayed.



Courage is as simple as doing the right thing.

What does courage look like? It's a question that gets answered every day if you look closely. The simplest things we take for granted today took incredible courage to create.

The courage it takes to do a dangerous job, despite the hazards — in the face of hatred? People do it.

The courage it takes to walk to work through less-than-safe conditions, because people need to earn money to put food on the table? People do it.

The courage it takes to practice in the medical field with the risk of contracting a contagious illness at any moment, just to help others? People are still doing it.

We recently celebrated Memorial Day, when we remember those military members who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, our home. Imagine the courage it took to face possible death on the beaches of Normandy or in the jungles of Vietnam or in the sands of Afghanistan. We remember these heroes and thank them for their precious gift every single day.

Courage is in all of us, waiting just beneath the surface for a chance to be displayed. There are multiple ways to display it, but none harder than doing what's right. It sounds simple doesn't it? It makes for a glorious catchphrase: "Doing the right thing."

We tend to boil it down to being a clear-cut issue. Yet, when the time comes, doing what's right is hard. We've all seen a bully and what that experience can be like for victims. So why do some of us stand by idly and let those victims suffer?

There are a number of excuses I've seen people tell themselves. None is more egregious than "I'm glad it's not me." The right thing to do is to say something and to make sure that behavior is mitigated. This tends to be forgotten, but in 1867, English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill was correct when he said, "Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."

Are you standing by, looking on and doing nothing?

At the University of Central Florida, there has been a campaign championed by its police department the past few years: If you see something, say something and we'll DO something. If there's another victim of crime tomorrow, that is one more victim too many. It's why coming forward and telling authorities about something wrong is the right thing to do. And it's hard. I know.

"Doing the right thing demands a certain quality of character."

This is where that courage lying beneath the surface comes into play. Sitting aside and doing nothing helps no one. Each one of us has a responsibility to help those who are truly in need of it. How about that co-worker who comes to work with black eyes? How about that child in your kid's classroom with bruises on his arms, saying he is prone to falls? What about the time you saw someone slip something into a person's drink at the bar?

Some will see these things and say, "It's none of my business." I say that's where you are wrong. Seeing something you know to be concerning and reporting it saves lives. Many of the people in these situations are powerless to speak up for themselves and they need someone with courage that rises to the moment.

UCF Chief of Police Carl Metzger challenges each of us at UCFPD every day with a campaign of his own: Do the Right Thing. He says it to us in his emails, in his agencywide conversations, and even in passing in the hallways.

Doing the right thing demands a certain quality of character. In this mantra, Chief Metzger has drilled into us that the content of character as a police officer can be measured by these four words.

Because at the end of the day, Law Enforcement serving the citizens and victims of crime with professionalism, compassion and patience is right

So, the next time you see something you know is wrong, say something to someone who has the power to change that behavior. It can be anonymously, or it can be through an established reporting system. Have the courage to step forward and help someone in need. Rise to the challenge of doing what's right, no matter the circumstance.

There's no greater feeling than that.

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