

# How Do I Build a Good Reputation?

From the book "Starting with Me, Starting Today", by Bill Sanders

Much of your reputation will come from the things you do. When you are active in your church group, school clubs, or community efforts, you'll get known to people. If they see that you achieve well and that you make wise decisions, they'll think well of you. If you do things that don't earn respect, you'll earn a reputation for doing the wrong thing, for choosing unwisely, and people will not think highly of you.

Today lots of people may scoff at the idea that you need a good reputation.

When Rick encouraged Sally to have sex with him and she turned him down, he asked, "You don't care what other people think, do you?"

Sally thought a moment. She didn't want him to get the idea that she was influenced easily by others, but the fact was that she did care about her reputation. "Yes," she answered. "I guess I do care what others think. I have a strong set of values and beliefs that my family and I believe in, and I don't want to do anything that would make our family name look bad. When people know what I believe and see me doing something wrong, they will look at me as a hypocrite."

That situation made Sally think about why she dated Rick. If he thought having sex was okay, they didn't share an understanding of what was right and wrong. In a little while, she decided she didn't want to date Rick if it meant risking having sex with him.

Sally made a wise decision. She had been taught that a good name is better than fitting in for the moment. Though she missed Rick for a while, in the end she knew she could not have lived with herself if she had given in to his demands. As she spent time with her real friends at school, she felt encouraged that, though she had given up a few dates, she had self respect and the respect of others. "I don't have to date to like myself. If it's a choice between feeling good about myself and going out on a Friday night, I'll do the thing that builds my self-esteem," she shared with a friend.

For Fred, it wasn't a matter of dating, but of doing well in school. Though his teachers said he could get high grades, he never seemed to. There was always a game to go to, a friend who needed help, or a job to do at home. Homework always seemed at the bottom of his list.

Finally a counselor pointed out to Fred that his chances for getting into college were slipping away. "Sure you can go out and work, once you finish high school. But is that the kind of future you want for yourself? Getting a job at McDonald's seems fine now, but you can't support a family on what you'd make there, and you won't have many skills to offer an employer. You'll make more money once you have an education, and you have the brains to do it. I hate to see you waste your chances because you don't want to do homework."

Fred thought about that and started making some changes. He still kept in touch with his friends, but only after he'd finished his homework. Now instead of spending one hour studying for a test, he spends a whole night. The difference in his grades is startling, and so is the change in the opinion of his teachers.

"I knew you could do it," said his counselor. "You've got a lot to share with other people, as long as you do it the best way. I'd be happy to see you counseling people for a living-you seem to do it naturally-but don't let that get in the way of the goals you need to set today."

### **Changing Your Reputation**

Do you need to develop a new reputation? Start today, using a simple four-step plan.

*1. Discover what you have done wrong.* Fred and Sally had been making some unwise choices that they needed to change. Before they could change, however, they had to identify the problem. Don't be like Fred and wait for someone to walk up to you and tell you. Take a look at your own life and head off the problems.

Write out your thoughts and answers to these questions. Remember, these answers are for you to learn about yourself and help you become the best possible person you can become. Be honest and spend the time (delayed gratification) to answer these. What you put into this is what you will receive out of it. Please take their time and really think before they answer.

Q: Have people told you they think you're making a mistake?

Q: Have they tried to steer you away from a decision?

Q: Think through their advice and evaluate where you are today. Were they right?

Q: Do you find yourself in a place you hate, because you made a bad choice?

Q: Go back, look at your mistake, and see what you need to do to correct it.

2. *Make amends, if necessary.* Lyle had lied to his father about the places he went on Saturdays. Now they didn't talk about where he went on the weekends, but Lyle's relationship with his father was hurting.

After he attended a Leadership course offered at his school, Lyle knew he had to apologize to his dad.

"Dad," he said, "I know I've been wrong in the places I've gone and the things I've done on the weekend. I'm sorry for that-and I'm even sorrier that I lied to you about it. Can you forgive me?"

Lyle's father forgave him, but it took a while to reestablish trust between them. Every weekend Lyle made sure his dad knew what was going on. He even spent some time at home. When his dad saw that Lyle was where he said he'd be, he knew his son had changed. Now they have a better life together.

Q: Do you need to apologize, give back something you've stolen, or make up to someone for a mistake?

Only by admitting you were wrong and taking responsibility for your mistake can you bring healing to a broken relationship. You may have to give the other person time, just as Lyle didn't see the full measure of his dad's forgiveness for a while, but with patience and faithfulness, you may have a better relationship. If things don't work out, at least you will have the peace that you have done your best. Leave guilt behind and move on with your life.

These two points parallel salvation in the following ways:

Number 1 – Admit you've sinned (Romans 3:23)

Number 2 – Accept Christ's sacrifice (the only way to make amends with God; Romans 10: 9-10)

Salvation is an essential part of being a good leader – the best leaders are those who are striving to be like Christ.

Prayer: If you would like to give your life to Jesus you can pray this prayer right where you are right now. "Dear God, I know I have done a lot of bad things in my life. Please forgive me and help me live the kind of life that you would be pleased with. I accept the free gift of salvation as I ask Jesus to come into my heart to be my Lord and Savior and friend. Amen.

If you have just given your heart to Jesus please let me and others know so we can share in your excitement and encourage you to get into the word of God and share other ways to grow in your faith. I am so proud of you.

*3. Develop a new plan.* Once you know what you've done wrong and have identified your mistakes, make a plan that will keep you from repeating the mistakes. For Sally that meant deciding not to date someone who did not share her thoughts on saving yourself for your future spouse. "I thought Rick believed as I do, but I was wrong. What happened between us convinced me I need to choose dates more carefully. Now I get to know someone much better before I go out with him. If he does not share my values and beliefs, I feel free to turn him down." She may not date as much as before, but Sally is happier in her new plan. "When a boy treats you well, you have a much better dating relationship. Now that I'm seeing David, I know what was wrong between Rick and me."

Q: What area in your life do you need to develop a plan so you don't do the same foolish thing that has gotten you in trouble in the past?

Q: Who could you go to for advice in how to better handle this situation if and when it comes up again?

*3. Put your plan into action.* When Lyle decided to be honest with his parents, he made it a practice to call them when he changed his plans. It was a pain at times to have to stop and call, but it sure helped his parents trust him. If they needed to call him, they knew where he was. On the occasions when they did call, he proved he was trustworthy. Eventually the cost of a few phone calls paid a great bonus. The new relationship with his parents is something Lyle never thought could happen. "I couldn't give enough money to have this kind of family life," Lyle shared. "A short time of trouble is worth it."

Q: What plan are you going to put into action starting today?

Q: Write down 3 steps that you are going to do to make sure your plan gets accomplished?

4.

Discussion: Get with a friend or youth leader and talk about developing a plan to live a Christian lifestyle (Bible study, prayer, going to church, choosing Christian media, etc.)

Discussion: Talk about ways to put the plan for Christian living into action.

### Improving Your Reputation

Perhaps you don't have a problem with stealing, lying, or cheating. You don't need to have a "big" problem to get a reputation you'd like to change.

"I'd gotten a reputation for being a real snob," Beth shared. "People thought I didn't think much of them, but the real person I doubted was myself. *Will people like me?* I kept wondering, and I wanted them to. I just felt afraid to open up to them.

"Finally I took a look at what my life's really like.

"When I make friends, I keep them for a long time. People like me when they get to know me, but I make it hard for them to do that."

"Saying hello or adding to someone's conversation takes courage for me, but I try to do it anyway. Now I know I do have something to offer and that people want to know me, and I'm reaching out in spite of my doubts. You know, there are a lot of nice people out there-and I used to turn them off!"

Is your own attitude getting in your way? Take a look at the way you think about yourself and others-and how you treat people. Which of these describe you? Circle the numbers below that you best identify with.

### PEOPLE QUIZ

1. I like people and treat them as if they are important.
2. I am afraid of others and what they might do to me or say about me.
3. When others share their feelings, I listen carefully and give them good feedback.
4. When a friend has a problem and comes to me, he wants answers. I jump right in with all the advice I can give.

5. If someone compliments me for a good job, I say, "Thank you," politely.
6. When someone says I've done well, I respond, "Oh, anyone could do that."
7. If a friend is quiet, I try to invite her into my conversation.
8. I always have good ideas, so when I talk I tell others about them. If anyone else wants to say something, it's too bad.
9. I learn from other people, so I like to listen to their ideas.
10. Other people always have better ideas than mine. If my ideas are any good, someone else will eventually come up with them.
11. People who are different from me are interesting. I like to discover what they are like.
12. People who aren't my friends aren't my type. If I don't spend time with them, it won't matter.
13. My family is important to me. Even if it isn't perfect, I want it to be as good as possible. I'll spend time to make it that way.
14. My family doesn't matter at all, but my friends do. I won't be at home, if I can go out with my buddies.

Make an effort to develop the attitudes in the odd numbered answers on the above quiz. Do you:

- Listen carefully to others
- Encourage people when they feel down
- Share your own problems with friends
- Try not to complain about every little trouble
- Accept people who don't agree with you, look like you, or have your background
- Do what you can to develop a strong family life
- Appreciate people when they are kind to you or try to help you
- Understand that no one is perfect

If you focus on others, treat them with respect, and encourage them, you will build their respect. If you complain and tear them down, you will build a reputation for being difficult.

How do people see you? As easy to talk to, kind, gentle, and considerate, or complaining, angry, and belligerent? Which would you rather be? Now is the time to take stock of yourself and develop the leadership and communication skills that can help you for a lifetime. Maybe you need to learn to listen more caringly, share your own problems with someone who can help, or improve your own opinion of yourself.

Remember, you can change and become the person you truly deserve to be. Everybody matters and that means YOU. If it seems as if you have a lot of work to do, start now. You don't need to stay the same, and a better name is just waiting for you. It starts with you. It can start today. You are proving that you have what it takes by reading this book. If you haven't filled in the questions please go back and do it before reading on. This book isn't about how fast you can get through it, rather it is about you searching for and finding the real you. Only then can you do what you must to make the changes needed for you to be the kind of person you and others can admire.

Activity: Take and discuss the "People Quiz" with a friend or youth leader.

Scripture: Read over Galatians 6: 1-10 and highlight verses that you are challenged by, or that you feel God is calling you to memorize and put into your everyday life.

Discussion: The more you develop a Christ-like attitude (by following your plan), the better you will be at focusing on others and meeting their needs.

I want to hear from you. I am interested in your life and want to help in any way possible but for that to happen, you must let me know what you are struggling with and exactly what questions you have. Together we can find the answers and God will give you the strength to follow through.

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