

“How is good fitness related to strong character values?”

By Elijah Ammen

Everyone wants to be fit. No one desires to be overweight, lethargic, and unable to be active. At the same time, most people desire to be good citizens- respected, well grounded, and generally admired. However, while so many people yearn for these fruits, they often fail to realize how fitness and strong character are bound together in an inextricable knot. Too many people attempt to have one or the other, but never see how both fitness and good character are intertwined and necessary to achieve each other.

This past fall I became a member of my local YMCA. Until that point, I thought I was reasonably in shape. I was active, I had played sports most of my childhood, and I predominately ate healthy food. After my first few workouts, I realized how far I still had to go to reach my optimum level of fitness. For the next few months, I devoted myself to a regimen of working out consistently and gradually increasing my personal fitness standards.

One of the most interesting things I noticed during my workouts were the people that would come in, throw on a large amount of weights, do two or three reps and then move on. These people lacked the consistency needed to achieve their goals. I quickly realized that discipline and consistency were absolutely vital to any improvement. I had to make a commitment and stick with it.

Strong character values are not merely related to good fitness, they are inseparably bound to them. No one gets a healthy body without discipline and consistency. As every great athlete can attest to, it was only through countless hours of

hard work that allowed them to become what they are. Only in Hollywood can one wake up a superstar.

Michael Jordan, one of the greatest athletes of my generation stated, “I’ve always believed that if you put in the work, the results will come. I don’t do things half-heartedly. Because I know if I do, then I can expect half-hearted results.”

However, not only are good character qualities necessary to good fitness, but good fitness can also lead to positive character qualities. A person with a healthy and fit body usually has a better self-image, and in turn, is less susceptible to certain societal pressures. When individuals have a positive perception of themselves, they don’t feel the need to find acceptance in other things, such as drugs, sex, or vandalism. As Dr. Kenneth Cooper, Founder of the Cooper Aerobics Center said, “research has found that 30 minutes of exercise, five days a week, works as well as medication for mild depression... Exercise improves self-image.”

There’s a reason why programs utilizing physical exercise are so successful- because people are substantially affected by their perceptions of themselves. A vast assortment of problems stem from negative self-perceptions, from clear-cut cases like bulimia and anorexia, to less obvious situations like smoking, where most addictions start at an early age due to peer pressure.

Essentially, a person cannot have good fitness without strong character. There is no way to cut this Gordian knot. Strong character qualities are necessary to establish the diligence and perseverance needed for good fitness, which can establish proper self-esteem, which in turn promotes good character qualities. Those who try to separate one from the other will, in the end, acquire neither.