ForeWord Reviews

Character-Centered Living in a Character-Starved World
Maynard Cowan III
Bookmice
978-1-930364-46-2
(Jan 15, 2000)

A stimulating discussion of personal values versus what people deem valuable is the overall premise of this book. What people honestly value versus what they should value is a thought provoking dilemma. The author makes the point with concise storytelling and by using actual examples of choices people have made. He begins by asking readers to make a list of their personal values, then differentiates between “things of value” such as home, money, etc. and “values” like honesty and integrity. He writes of personal responsibility and how everyone must take the responsibility for their own actions-both good and bad. The book lists Fourteen Character Management Maxims to follow in order to become a “character-centered, principle-centered” person. One of the most important of these maxims is “learn to forgive yourself and others.”

Using extensive quotations from such notables as H. L. Mencken and others Cowan shows the reader how to relate to the process of what he terms “Victimspeak” (It’s not my fault.) and what to do to correct this type of thinking. One of the steps to developing a better character when something goes wrong in life is to, “Go to your mirror, look at the image of yourself and blame that person, because that’s whose fault it is.” Another is recognizing that being a victim is “an addiction that begins with a personal choice.”

Universal principals such as trust, honesty and more are discussed in detail beginning with the statement: “when values erode, your character goes with them.” The author suggests keeping a journal in which people can list their values and keep track of how those values are compromised in daily living. Then he details what people can do to avoid that compromise by accepting the consequences of their actions.

The explanation of the difference between empathy and sympathy is comprehensive and interesting, and the advice about how to be “proactive” instead of “reactive” is motivating. For those who find that they face more and more difficult choices in today’s society and realize that just because “everybody does it” does not necessarily make an action or reaction right, or for those who feel the need to analyze their own character, this book is a good choice. Clear and succinct, the advice is well thought out and could benefit anyone seeking to enlighten or strengthen his or her lives.

S. Joan Popek