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life advice

## How To Develop Character

Just because you are a character, doesn't mean you have character. Use these tips to help strengthen, develop and build character in your marriage.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



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There has been much talk lately about character, be that in connection with the upcoming presidential elections or on other political/financial fronts.

"Yes, I know, I know," you say. "That's all we hear about, so-and-so has character, so-and-so doesn't. So what? And what does that have to do with me?" A lot actually. For character, you see, is the basis for trustworthiness—yours, and that of the people in your life.

When someone with character says they will do something, you can rely on their word. When someone who lacks character says they will do something, maybe they will and maybe they won't. It's not necessarily that they are flakey, they may simply not have developed the muscle that character is.

Let's take a particularly unpleasant, yet very real, example. Let's say you vowed to your spouse that you would be faithful until death do you part, and yet your spouse finds you in bed with another. Betrayal! Pain! And you may say, "It was nothing, just a physical thing, you're the only one that matters, I didn't mean to hurt you," and indeed all that may be true, but the bottom line is you weren't able to respect your vows. And, your spouse doesn't trust you anymore. That's the real clincher. So the question is: How are you to re-establish trust with your spouse?

By building character. Yours. Character is the ability to behave according to principles that reflect your values. If you have a value of honesty, for example, you hold honesty as important, something to live up to. You have principles that reflect that value in your everyday life: you won't lie, you won't steal, you don't try to do the least work possible to "get by" at your job. Character is the degree to which you actually behave in accordance with your principles.

Most of the time, when we fail to live up to a promise it's because we lack character in that arena. We haven't done the work of determining what are our values and principles, so we have nothing with which to guide our behavior.

You see, the promise you live up to, when you promise to be faithful, isn't the promise you made to your spouse, it's the promise you make to yourself to live according to your values. It's your being trustworthy to yourself that allows you to be trustworthy to another.

How Do You Develop Character?

Figure out what is important to you, what you value, and think about the principles you could use to guide your behavior. For example, let's say you value respect. You think it's important to respect people. One of the principles you might develop which is in line with that value is to "listen to people when they speak to you;" another is to "be prompt, respect other people's time." Apply those principles to your spouse: practice listening attentively to your spouse, practice being prompt.

Let your spouse know what you're working on: that you recognize you had not consciously thought about your values, and that you are now deliberately choosing principles by which to live your life.

It may sound like a roundabout way to re-establish trust with your partner, but as you demonstrate to your spouse that you are behaving in accordance with obvious principles and living up to specific values, your general trustworthiness with your spouse will increase. Over time, you will become a person of character, one to whom your spouse can safely entrust his or her whole heart and being.

*Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., is a relationship expert, popular speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and author of nine best-selling books, including "[Your Man is Wonderful](#)" and "[Dangerous Relationships](#)." Dr. Nelson focuses on how we can all enjoy happy, fulfilling lives while accomplishing great things in love, at home and at work, as we appreciate ourselves, our world and all others. For more, visit [www.noellenelson.com](http://www.noellenelson.com) and follow her on Twitter [@DrNoelleNelson](#).*