

# How To Really Help Your Kids Grow in Character

By Vicki Vaughn



Tom Landry, the former legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys, struggled to find success during the team's first six winless years in the NFL. Coach Landry was known for engineering innovative formations. Yet, a little-known story about Landry reveals that a strategic change in his focus during training eventually helped turn his disheartened, losing team's record into a twenty-year winning streak, including two NFL Super Bowl Championships.

Although NFL teams typically reviewed footage of missed tackles and dropped balls of previous games, Landry used a different approach. Landry's instincts told him that players would improve their performance if they could *see*, in slow motion, *what they were doing well*.

So, Landry combed through footage of previous games and created a highlight reel to show what each player had done well - naturally and effectively. Landry told his team, "From now on, we only replay your winning plays."

According to the story, Landry understood the power of praise and knew his team needed encouragement, but he was more interested in his players' *learning* from this unique activity. Landry's game plan worked! His intentional focus on what the players did well revolutionized the team's momentum.

The **HONORABLE CHARACTER™** story began with a similar intentional change of focus.

One day after school, an outgoing, talkative first-grade boy expressed discouragement to his mom, an educator. Sadly, the first-grader concluded his teacher didn't like him because "*I get into trouble a lot.*" As an educator, the boy's mom recognized his teacher's love for him, and she understood the necessity of controlling classroom behavior. As a parent, she admitted that her son, a delightful child, needed to develop more self-control in the classroom setting.

Then, the first-grader's mom had an epiphany about the school's behavioral management protocol. Knowing that teachers (and parents) tend to notice first what children do wrong instead of what they do well, questions surfaced in her mind:

- How many children internalize a distorted message about themselves due to standard behavior correction?
- What if educators and parents change their focus to notice and acknowledge students' positive character in real-time?

So, the teachers in the school changed their focus. They fine-tuned a list of 14-character traits that specifically seemed critical for students' classroom success. Next, they were determined to intentionally catch students in acts of honor, kindness, diligence, responsibility, etc. Like Landry's decision to shift his attention to what his players did well, the teachers began to consistently acknowledge the honorable character traits in students' actions and attitudes. The strategy worked well with students in the classroom, and the results surpassed everyone's expectations!

Affirming students' positive character encouraged the children, transforming the classroom and school culture into a more positive and productive learning environment. The students' growth in honorable character and consistent academic achievement convinced the staff that the paradigm shift in behavioral management was a great decision.

**The students at Covenant Christian Academy are thriving under the HONORABLE CHARACTER [Classroom Management System](#).**

The system provides schools and homes with a structured framework to highlight both moral and performance character traits in children throughout the day. Children trained by it develop positive interpersonal relationships and ethical behavior while realizing their potential for their life purpose.

#### **What is the bottom line in children's character growth?**

Cultivating character is more about recognizing, reinforcing, and refining what is already a part of a child's nature. When we center our minds on these character attributes and call them out, our children recognize excellence! This shift in mindset highlights the unique character pattern deposited within our children and reinforces the honorable things in their hearts and actions!

Therefore, whenever we see our children (or spouse, peer, employee, etc.) do something well, that is honorable, that is right, that is wholesome, that brings peace, that is admirable, if there is anything excellent and worthy of praise, we should think continually on these things, and

- recognize it,
- reinforce it,
- and refine it!

When we practice these things daily, peace and well-being will be a significant part of our schools, homes, and, most importantly, our children's lives. That's learning character - the Philippians 4:8, [HONORABLE CHARACTER™](#), and Tom Landry way!