

*It all begins with courageous discussions...  
first on our commonalities...and then our differences!*

~ Joseph P. Maloney, Ph. D., Executive Director, Center for Youth Citizenship



## Courage In Times of Change



*Jackie Robinson  
and Branch Rickey*

Developing literate, thinking, responsible and self-disciplined individuals has long been a major goal for public education. Add the ability to 'get along' effectively with others and we have a responsive agenda for today's youth. Acquiring these abilities is essential for preparing for any productive career, reducing youth problems and fulfilling the everyday expectations and required actions for all citizens. All individuals and groups, including youth themselves, must help our young people achieve these goals!

Youth's success should be automatic if we all accept our inherent responsibilities, work together in partnership, and become role models that act out the

desired traits and appropriate behaviors! If this process is so simple, then why all the current fuss? Have we collectively dropped the ball and lost our ability to work together? Are we just lacking enough good, courageous role models? Or, have we declined our responsibilities and chosen instead the easy, quick, and more comfortable path? Granted, it is extremely difficult to 'practice what we preach,' but it may be harder to close the growing gap between our exemplary and demanding ideals and our 'me first' practices and culture.

As citizens, most of us are committed to developing a solid foundation for ourselves and our families. Our footing in this regard is rooted in proven principles and common values that promote human qualities and distinctions, and it is these qualities that then provide the parameters for self-interest as well as the guideposts for constructive social behaviors, civil interactions and group welfare. Given that we follow the rules of our shared society, positive forces should easily overpower those pursuing greed, unrestricted competitive advantage, and exclusive self-benefit. So, why are anti-social, bullying and other 'predator type' behaviors so prevalent today?

To paraphrase my grandson's TV-watching inspired questions, are the 'evil-doers' winning or losing to the 'good guys?' Some may contend that this question is too simplistic for today's world, or simply not practical. It is, some say, 'not how the world really

works!' Based on this contention, the 'evil-doers' are really not 'bad guys,' but are just doing what's needed to get theirs (i.e. what they are entitled to). With this line of thought, courageous role models are no longer needed to remind young and old of core character traits, acceptable group behaviors and social standards. Instead, an 'everybody does it' view helps explain the silence of the majority (an ironic type of peer pressure for both adults and our kids) as well as an increase in ethically challenged and duplicitous actions.

Hopefully, the character and courage that has helped us connect our diverse citizenry, build public trust, create optimism, and inspire active participation, are not really the stuff of 'old school' thinking? These 'right things to do' are still essential for advancing justice, equity and opportunity. It may be that because we are seemingly working longer, harder and in more stressful, competitive and uncertain environments, we have become more reactive – seeking comfort, justification and respite from information overload, hard questions and even harder decisions. Some may say that we are just 'morally tired.' Accordingly, Martin Luther King Jr., a role model for many in our country, stated it well when he said, 'the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.'



We should maintain our classroom efforts for our youth and new citizens to learn the ‘rules of the game’ or the ‘civic basics.’ And, of course, we must all work to make sure the rules are clear, fair and equally enforced; especially as used by our public ‘role models’ that are charged with setting standards and supervising the process to ensure fairness and openness of ‘the game.’

But this may not be enough today to meet our ambitious educational goals. It may take working differently, with courage and in partnership, to expand the scope of responsibility and the number of positive role models. It may take gallantry to speak out and work together toward closing the gap between our exemplary principles and our actions and practices. We may need to raise our expectations for positive behavior and good citizenship, just as we have for student academic performance.

Most of us would say that they have learned and know the difference between right and wrong! As parents and teachers, we also know that our youth learn more by observing our actions than through merely listening to what we say. Robert F. Kennedy captured the power and impact of role modeling and courageous actions when he stated, ‘Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.’

On May 15, 2008, the Center for Youth Citizenship (CYC) produces its fifth annual Highest Office: Citizen Forum around the theme of ‘Courage, Responsibility and Change.’ Throughout history, sports and sport figures have been effective in the teaching of character and citizenship.

This kick-off activity re-tells the story of a significant, courageous partnership between Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey that ended discrimination and segregation in baseball.

By walking onto Ebbetts Field, ‘#42’ transformed not only sports, but American society as well. Robinson’s remarkable story of courage began two years before, and was greatly aided by his partnership with Branch Rickey, President of the Brooklyn Dodgers. They shared a vision, desire and the courage to open the door to minorities in baseball and to take a step toward equity. Rickey’s ‘great experiment’ for baseball proved a success and helped to spur on the Civil Rights Movement, almost a decade before Brown vs. Board of Education declared segregation illegal and unequal.

Citizens of all ages need to hear and re-tell this story. We, both young and old working together courageously, are the future role models that can make a difference in our schools, neighborhoods and communities. Come join us to hear and tell the stories of our past that will re-ignite the courageous actions necessary for our healthy and hopeful future. This year, expect character, courage, and everyday good citizenship!

*Joseph P. Maloney, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Center for Youth Citizenship (CYC), an organization committed to preparing personally responsible and community-minded youth. CYC’s Character-Based Citizenship® partnerships help schools and communities teach youth the fundamental behaviors, habits, skills and actions that are essential for academic success and full participation in our democracy. Highest Office: Citizen takes place on the evening of May 15, 2008, at the Crest Theatre in downtown Sacramento and is the kick-off event for CYC’s year of courage, responsibility, and change. To learn more or join this partnership, Contact Dr. Maloney or CYC at [cyc@youthcitizenship.org](mailto:cyc@youthcitizenship.org) or (916)228-2322, or visit [www.youthcitizenship.org](http://www.youthcitizenship.org).*

*Find the  
courage  
necessary  
to take  
responsibility  
for change.*

