

Growing up in different neighborhoods, meeting a variety of people, and witnessing the hardships of being in a low income household, have all shaped the character I am today. One characteristic of being who I am is the strong ethical standing I try to maintain. Ethics are the values on which your life decisions are based. I am very proud of the ethics I have and the impact they have on my life and future. I have seen both good and bad ethics in my life and have chosen to live the good ethics.

I grew up in a troubled house with my three other siblings and single mom. Like most households with low incomes, we were surviving off of food stamps. Our household was abusive and hard to live in. Most of my childhood was spent at my aunt's house living with my cousins. I never got to stay at an elementary school for more than a year because of the constant moving, so my friends were little, if any. I struggled all through middle school with good and bad ethics.

There was a situation in middle school where I battled between good and bad ethics. A friend of mine invited me to do drugs with a group of his friends. I chose to go with them but chose not to participate. His groups of friends were older kids from the local high school. The situation scared me so much that I ran home. I still regret the decision to join them because I gave in to peer pressure and bad temptations. When I got home that day I made the decision that I would never partake in that ever again.

It wasn't until the last year of middle school that I began to learn what good and bad ethics were. I joined the National Jr. Honor Society in 8th grade because I saw that those were the kids who were not making constant trips to the principal's office or getting bad grades. For the first time, I was around people who, although they were young, had outstanding manners,

morals, and ethics. After my 8th grade year we moved yet again to the Centennial Hills area where I lived out my freshman year.

The summer after my freshman year my mother went on a cycle of alcohol abuse and neglecting her psychiatric medications. My older sister made a life changing phone call after my mother beat my 7 year old brother in a fit of rage. My siblings and I were removed from the home and placed in Child Haven, a place for kids that were removed from their homes to stay and be taken care of. My aunt and uncle were the saving grace to our family. They pulled us out of Child Haven and gave us their home to stay in. At that moment it felt like the happy easy fairytale world I was in came crashing down hard. The ethics my mother held were not for the interest of the family. Now that I am older I see how wrong her ethics were. If she had a strong ethical grounding, then we might not have been subject to the abuse and neglect that shaped our childhood.

Once we got situated in our new home with our aunt, we were enrolled at Palo Verde High School and the Air Force JROTC program. To my surprise the AFROTC program was the best thing that ever happened to me. The values and qualities of the young men and women in the program were second to none on campus. Over the past three years however AFJROTC has changed who I am and given me good ethical values to live by. They have instilled in me their core values: respect: willingness to show consideration or appreciation and treating others as you would like to be treated; responsibility: being capable of making moral or rational decisions on one's own, thereby answerable for one's behavior; integrity; an unfaltering devotion to honesty, truthfulness, doing one's duty, and doing what is right; courage: the quality of mind and spirit that enables a person to face difficulty or danger with firmness despite fear; patriotism: devoted love, support, and defense of one's country; competence: having the skill, knowledge,

and experience require to accomplish the task; tenacity: to persist in anything undertaken in spite of difficulty or obstacles; and service: the giving of oneself for the welfare of others. This list of values are my ethics in life. They are the morals that shape my everyday decisions whether it be showing chivalry through manners or planning for my future.

My goal in life is to graduate college and be successful. In order to achieve this goal I have joined the Army Reserves and will be leaving for my basic training in August 2013. The Army is going to pay for my college and I will be enrolled in the Army ROTC Program at The University of Nevada Reno. My basic training and job training; however, is before I leave to college in the Fall of 2014. My hope is that the experiences I have at basic training will further the growth of my character and leave me with even more outstanding ethics that I can some day pass on to my children and grandchildren.

On Small-Scale Cheating

It is close to impossible to properly prepare for pop quizzes. When these dreaded pieces of demon paper are collected, someone in the room is sure to be sulking with a horrible mark and a deflated ego. But, with every daunting task comes devious souls trying to circumvent it, even if the one at hand is nothing but a minimally-weighted examination of academic progress.

There was only one version to the quiz in front of us. Our desks were technically separated, although they might as well have been right next to each other thanks to the perverse overcrowding in public schools. The horrendously overworked teacher stood behind the lectern, head down, frantically marking up an assignment and was completely oblivious of us. As I cautiously finished up my solution to the last problem, I looked up briefly and saw a student (who shall remain nameless) with his head crooked in an unnatural angle and his neck stretched forward like a grazing giraffe. His eyes were locked on the desk directly to the right of him, whose occupant, having finished, was leaned back on his chair and staring into the ceiling, consequently allowing his work to be in public display for all eyes to see. The cheater's diagonal vision and quick penmanship worked feverishly to rapidly transfer the work of his unsuspecting target onto his own paper, and proudly turned in his quiz with the grin of a maverick when time was called.

Cheating has to be one of the most classic ethics violations -- a taboo that has lasted almost since civilization first began. Combined with tough anti-cheating policies and the unrelenting social stigma, I was supposed to be compelled by the ethical standards of our society to feel compelled to report the incident. Instead, all I did was raise my eyebrows in recognition

of the student's actions and shrug nonchalantly before moving on with my life. To be blunt, I could not care less.

At this point, it might be tempting to brand my nonchalance as "wrong", since, like everyone else I was and still am expected to uphold the society's ethical values. Realistically, however, the boundary between right and wrong is blurry and undefined, and the only individuals who are entirely devoid of all sin are deities in ancient legends, heroes in the stories of children, and maybe Mother Teresa. I cannot imagine a single person who can claim perfect academic integrity -- just about everyone who has ever been to school has cheated on an exam, copied homework, or plagiarized papers, and if even half of these were reported, principal's offices across the US would be packed. Of course, this has not occurred because most people, like me, do not bother reporting these "ethical infractions",

When encouraging people to report cheating, nobody ever scores any points by talking about how wrong cheating is; instead, the message is usually something along the lines of "why should he get a higher grade than you when you worked hard and he cheated?", which, to a degree, shows the real forces at work behind our so-called ethics. In an alternate perspective, plagiarism is just research from a single source, corruption is just getting a bonus check that is not from one's employer, and checking the textbook during a test is just *really* last-minute studying.

While I do not agree with any of these positions, others may. Comedian Jon Stewart said it best in one of his more insightful moments that "success is defined in myriad ways, and [that definition] will come from one's basic sense of decency" - the truth is, some people simply do not find morals to be an important factor in their decision-making process and they are consequently comfortable with cheating and lying regularly when most people are not - and achieve greater success as a result. Thus, in my opinion, our so-called "ethical principles" are

nothing but the jealous reaction of the remainder of the population who cannot bring themselves to the same level of moral degradation yet are nevertheless bitter about their gruesome path towards success and long greedily for the rich rewards the immoral few have acquired so easily. And so, a set of regulatory "ethical" principles are set to shun and discourage these dishonest behaviors, creating a theoretically fairer playing field for the game of life. Simply put, ethics is not a rigid code of moral rights and wrongs, just a set of convenient principles that only comes into play when someone gets ahead unfairly.

In this reward-oriented angle, it becomes clear why small ethical violations such as cheating on a minimally-weighted pop quiz are routinely ignored: If cheating had occurred on an AP exam, the outcome would be entirely different - the incident would be quickly uncovered, branded a "scandal" and extensively covered on local media. However, the benefits one would gain from acing a pop quiz, on the other hand, are so miniscule for me - or anybody else, for that matter -- to care, because to do so would be a pointless waste of energy. With that in mind, I will continue to stand by my earlier decision to not report what I saw; and realistically, I am confident that the majority of the populace would have done the exact same.

As morally sordid as this notion seems, it is only another reflection of basic human nature. Although we like to pretend otherwise, human civilization is but a flicker in the greater picture of the cosmos; while we may have come far from the cave-dwelling days of yore, we are still millennia away from evolving into immaculate saints driven by ethics rather than greed. Ultimately, it is without a doubt that ethics is a positive force in our world, but it is always important to remember that our "civilized ways" are not the product of monkish righteousness, but by our personal desire to win against, and not be beat by, the competition.

"Generation Y: The Debt Paying Generation"

As a high school student, I fear that because of the country's current economic state and the national debt, that I might not be able to get a job after I graduate from college. The United States' national debt is well over 15 billion dollars, and it threatens my very way of life in all aspects. In today's economy unemployment is the high especially for college graduates. It is unethical for the national debt to be so high and for politicians to be doing nothing about it; it is not right for politicians to leave this debt to future generations. To live a financially ethical life within my family involves living within our means even if that means going without some things we want. Quite simply, my grandparents and parents have taught me that to spend more than we make is unethical. The U.S. Senate, on the other hand, has not provided a national budget in over three years, and no progress is being made in Washington.

Ethics is more than just the difference between right and wrong; it's one's personal responsibility to do what he or she believes is right, and to abolish anything he or she believes is wrong. This responsibility is present in politics for elected leaders to spend the citizens' tax money with frugality. To spend more than the government takes in and to constantly go into debt is not only unethical, it is also ineffective. Citizens, especially my generation, are afraid for the future and overwhelmed by the prospect of paying back all that debt.

Politicians have convinced us that everyone has a right to comfort and happiness and that the government has a moral duty to provide it. They believe that wealth and liberation come in the form of paper or electronic money and that distributing limitless amounts of this commodity is a cure for all social and economic ills. This way of thinking is

what led to the housing crisis, because families took out loans that they had no hope of paying back.

Recently the fiscal cliff has been a prominent issue in politics, and this issue will affect the future of America. Congress's last-second legislation certainly conveyed the impression that everyone stepped away from that fateful edge. The truth is that the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 serves as yet another dismal solution in a long string of unserious attempts to resolve our nation's uncertain fiscal future.

All of the political posturing to avoid blame for a potentially self-induced recession resulted in \$600 billion in tax hikes over 10 years and little to no spending cuts. The \$60 billion a year in targeted taxes on "the rich" is inconsequential against annual trillion-dollar deficits. The big loser in the "fiscal deal" is the generation that will spend their lives paying down tragically enormous levels of public debt. This debt payment burden will be so large in a few years that the future economy will be slower, the Debt-Paying Generation's lifetime earnings will be smaller, and the quality of this generation's life will be lower than any prior generation.

The name "Generation Y" has been given to the generation of young working adults under 35 who have been hit the hardest by the crippled job market. This generation of workers faces a bleak future because of economic policies fabricated for their rhetorical qualities rather than their merits in producing economic opportunity and upward mobility. Since 2007, the average income for those aged 25-34 has fallen 8.2 percent—a decline twice as large as the 3.9 percent decline for the rest of the adult population. Even now, unemployment for those aged 20-24 and 25-34 remains at 13.7 percent and 7.7 percent, respectively—a stark contrast to the 6.1 percent unemployment rate for the rest of adults.

Where to place the blame? The most ominous opponent of the young working generation and economic stability is the size and trajectory of the national debt. Our nation's debt currently weighs in at \$16.4 trillion. By 2022, the debt is expected to balloon to \$23.9 trillion. Even the postponed draconian sequestration cuts (mostly defense cuts) and the largest tax hike in history would not recoup the additional debt proposed by President Obama's budgets--a clear sign that we are not headed in the right direction.

A 2010 study by the International Monetary Fund cited by the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research demonstrates that if current policies stay in place, our gross domestic product (GDP) will be 30.4 percent lower than the baseline in 2050. The wealth of our nation would be about \$10 trillion less than if normal economic growth had occurred. To put this in perspective, the continued abdication of responsible budgeting would erase nearly 20 years of economic growth--two lost decades.

Sadly, our government overpromises so much that it must borrow 42 cents of every dollar that it spends. Rather than budgeting responsibly to build a sustainable future, our elected officials "conscript the wealth of future generations" to finance overspending today. The Debt-Paying Generation will be forced to work beyond their means, not to provide their children a better future, but to reimburse today's corrupt politicians for their overindulgence. Is the American Dream still possible? In Jefferson's words, all citizens should have the chance of, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." As a part of the rising generation I have this dream, the dream to do more than my parents and to give my children the same opportunities I have been given. The National Debt threatens this dream because I don't know what the future holds with such a high debt.

Thao

When I was little, my mother always told me to never be afraid of doing what is right, I did not know exactly what she meant by that until 2005 when that old saying was put to the test.

My family moved to the United States seven years ago. We stuffed our bags filled with hopes and dreams of escaping the injustices of my country and carried it on our shoulder. The images of America, painted by my relatives in the U.S. made my palms sweat with anticipation. When I was in Vietnam, I received pictures of things I've never seen. I saw skyscrapers and green lawn instead of dented roofs, and crooked brick walls; brand new cars instead of creaky mopeds. We were thrilled to come to America. However after we arrived, we quickly realized that skyscrapers and BMWs were not applicable to everyone, The road to success was far, far away. But my mother realized that the road begins with a good education, and she invested everything she had on that beginning.

I didn't speak much English aside from the typical words like "Hello" and "Hungry". So before school started, my mother enrolled me in a summer program that would strengthen my speaking ability in order to catch up with the other kids, I have to admit, I really liked that school, I quickly made a friend named Thao; she was Vietnamese as well. In this strange land, we found comfort in each other that reminded us of home, but we also found courage within each other to embark on unimaginable journeys. Overtime, Thao became like a sister to me. Thao and I promised each other that we would always be best of friends and protect each other. At that moment, there wasn't any possible way for me to break that promise but soon after, I did.

One day during recess, Thao and I were playing hide and seek. As I hid away underneath a small desk, I heard a sound coming from the teacher's table. Slowly, I peeked at that mysterious noise to find Patrick, the principle's son, digging through the drawer. My jaw dropped to the ground as my eyes widened to catch a glimpse of the crumpled bills and cell phone that ended up in his hand. However, before he could leave, the recess bell stopped him dead in his track. Panic began to set in and he ran towards my direction and stuffed the filthy loot inside a backpack, Thao's backpack. As he proceeded to try to erase his crime, he, inevitably, found me underneath the desk. All of the blood rushed out of his face as he dragged me into the hallway.

I could still remember his words clear as day, "If you say a word about any of this, I will tell my mother that you stole it and you will get kicked out of this school and you won't be able to get your money back." And I did exactly what he told me to do. When the teacher noticed the missing items, she conducted a class-wide backpack search. And the closer she got to Thao's backpack, the heavier my breathing became. When she pulled out the missing items, I thought I was going to faint. Thao desperately pleaded for the teacher to believe her. Then she turned her teary eyes toward me, and asked that I testified to our hide and seek game.

I said, "I don't know".

Thao was forced to leave after delivering a public apology in front of the school. I wanted to say sorry to her but every phone call I made ended with a cold rejection or a loud sob of anger of being misunderstood and the pain of being betrayed. What was I supposed to do? My mother gave everything so I could achieve the American dream; she worked two jobs to support my family. and she empty her bank account, and depleted her youth so that I could have a better life. I couldn't afford to give up everything my mother had done for me. I used those reasons every single day to try to make myself feel a little better; it didn't work. After spending weeks in ambivalence, my mother's old saying popped into my head and I knew exactly what I had to do. It's much easier said than done. I never thought it would be so hard to do the right thing, it was no longer about clearing Thao's name or punishing Patrick or being filial to my mother. It was about just simply doing the right thing. As a member of society, I had a responsibility to report the wrong that I see. If I turned a blind eye, how different would I be from the corrupted officials in Vietnam? If I chose to remain silent when no one was oppressing my voice, then how is living in the U.S. different than from living in Vietnam?

Of course, I wished that I had come to this conclusion sooner so that I wouldn't have to lose someone so important to me; however, better late than never. It was a shaky first step to fully utilize my freedom but it helped solidify the lesson my mother taught me; never be afraid to do what is right, to stand up for others, and to speak out for those who are unable to, those are the ethics, which are the key elements to preserving our civilized community.