

# Faith



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

## Having a strong character is more important than winning

Several years ago, I heard about a fifth-grade boy who showed character during a summer all-stars baseball game that was intense and high-stakes.

Both teams were determined to win.

The boy, named Michael, made an amazing stop at shortstop. Everybody in the stands thought he'd caught the ball for an out, but it was questionable whether the ball touched the ground before landing in his mitt.

The umpire asked Michael if he'd caught the ball. The crowd grew silent as everyone leaned in and listened closely. Michael knew if he said yes, he'd be the game hero. His team and their fans would be thrilled. But Michael chose to be honest instead. He admitted the ball hit the ground before landing in his mitt. Immediately, you could hear the crazy parents in the stands grumbling about the call and the missed catch.

Michael's mother, on the other hand, was so proud of her son for choosing to tell the truth. She grew more proud when a father from the opposing team emailed her after the game to congratulate Michael on his honesty.

Now, all of us like to win, and it's probably fair to say that most of us would love to be heroes. And while the desire to win can be good and motivating in pushing us to work hard, be brave and achieve our goals and dreams, it stops being good when it overshadows something more important. Like character.

What is character? Character is the way you conduct your life, and who you are when nobody is looking. Character is making a habit of good choices, and practicing virtues like honesty,

kindness, patience and respect. Character is how you treat people who can do nothing to help you. And character is doing the right thing on a small level every day, because these small choices prepare you for those big choices that put your true character to the test.

At some point, we all face moments like Michael. In a matter of seconds, we're forced to choose between doing what's safe, easy, yet wrong and doing what's hard, risky, yet right.

And if you put yourself in Michael's shoes, it's easy to imagine the temptation to lie. It took great courage for him to be honest even though he knew he might disappoint some people and even make them angry.

Michael took a risk, but it was a risk worth taking because he kept his integrity. He proved he's the kind of person who others can trust and respect. More importantly, his choice allowed him to feel proud of himself. It enabled him to feel that deep inner peace we all want and crave.

Living in a place like Mountain Brook, I'm surrounded by winners every day. I see highly successful adults raising exceptionally talented kids in this community of champions where the bar is set high.

In many ways, it inspires me. I love watching people use their gifts to help others, serve God and reach their full potential. With each generation, the standard of excellence gets passed on, which makes the kids of Mountain Brook well equipped to become world changers by the time they leave home for college.

What I've realized over time, however, is how easily the drive to succeed can create blind spots

in communities like this. Being overly focused on outward success — and overly impressed by tangible signs — can make character an undervalued commodity.

Frankly, I want more for my kids. I want them to care more about their substance than their show. How my kids feel about themselves matters far more than whether they look like a big deal to others. And while I want them to strive for excellence, I believe real excellence starts with character.

Because it's not trophies, bragging rights or bank accounts that will make my kids winners at life. It's not victories that will turn them into a class act. It's not fancy homes that will lead to meaningful relationships. And it's not a perfect résumé that will fill the emptiness inside them as they wrestle with who they are and what purpose they were made to serve.

Winning is awesome, and I hope every child experiences the thrill of winning many times as they grow up.

At the same time, I hope my kids and others learn to value character over winning, understanding that character is really about moral fiber, and when you seek moral excellence first, excellence in the rest of your life will naturally follow.

I applaud parents like Michael's mom and the dad who emailed her, because they get it. They understand how Michael's character win was a greater victory than being a fifth-grade hero.

And what the rest of us can learn from this is to make sure we celebrate the right things at home. Our kids should have no doubt that what thrills us more than them being named Most

Likely to Succeed is for them to earn a reputation of being Most Likely to...

- ▶ Comfort a classmate who is upset;
- ▶ Stand up for someone being bullied;
- ▶ Admit their mistakes and face the consequences;
- ▶ Agree to be PE partners with the least athletic person;
- ▶ Give money back to a person who just dropped a \$20 bill;
- ▶ Congratulate a friend for making a team that they didn't make; and
- ▶ Work hard and keep a positive attitude, even when everyone else is complaining.

Kids with great character attract friends with great character. The perks of this are obvious. So if we want to launch our children into positive relationships and help them become people who others want to be around and imitate, we must value and cultivate quiet strength.

Any child can catch a baseball, but only a handful would have the guts to choose honesty over a moment of glory. If you ask me, that's the sign of a superstar who's going places in life. That's the kind of child I hope to raise, and the kind of person I want to be in my own character journey.

*Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her first book, "10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know," is available on Amazon and everywhere books are sold. Join her Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at [karikampakis.com](http://karikampakis.com) or contact her at [kari@karikampakis.com](mailto:kari@karikampakis.com).*

# SUMMER

## PHOTO CONTEST

WHERE WILL YOU TAKE US?

DEADLINE IS AUGUST 5

Winners will be announced in our September issue.

**Category 1:** Any summer fun photo

**Category 2:** A summer fun photo displaying a copy of Village Living wherever you are

**To enter:** Email high resolution photos in .JPG format, captions including location and photo credits to [kwilliams@starnespublishing.com](mailto:kwilliams@starnespublishing.com). Four photos allowed per person.



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