

Character, or Characters?

Carl Mays, who resides in Gatlinburg, Tenn., is a speaker and author who has appeared at a number of Life Care functions, including the annual management meeting and the directors of nursing gathering. His recent column dealing with character contains a message for all of us. It follows:



Quarterback Tim Tebow will get a shot with the Broncos.

Former University of Florida quarterback Tim Tebow became a hot discussion topic when Denver Broncos coach Josh McDaniels selected him in the NFL draft. Many of the comments have been of a very sarcastic, critical nature, such as one sportswriter demanding, "Fire Josh McDaniels for drafting a team chaplain in the first round." Only time will reveal the outcome of the selection, but the entire situation led me to think about hearing the late Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry say, "We're looking for character, not characters."

Regardless of any other talents and qualities one may possess, character often means the difference between life and death – of an organization or a person. I recall a "character segment" from the classic *Lawrence of Arabia* film. T.E. Lawrence, a British Army lieutenant during World War I, is leading a group of men across the Nefud Desert, considered impassable even by the Bedouins. Traveling day and night during the final stretch to reach water, they find an oasis. As the men celebrate and splash in the water, Lawrence discovers a riderless camel. The man apparently had fallen off during the night.

Lawrence says, "We must go back and find him." But no one agrees to join Lawrence. They plead with him not to go, saying it is God's will he did not make it, that his fate was written by God. "We must not interfere," they declare.

Lawrence climbs on a camel and heads back into the desert alone. The men shake their heads and say, "Now we have lost him, too." Two days later, a shimmering image emerges from the heat wave stretched across the sand dunes. The men stare, wipe their eyes, and stare again. Finally, someone yells, "It's Lawrence! He has found him!" They run toward Lawrence. He hands the unconscious survivor to them, looks into their faces and hoarsely whispers, "Remember this: Nothing 'is written' unless you write it."

Has today's whole economic, social and political turmoil slapped you down? Is it now trying to "write you off?"

(more)

J.C. Penney is a name well-known to most of us. He launched his chain of "The Golden Rule" department stores in 1907. His first wife died in 1910. He incorporated as the J.C. Penney Company in 1913. His second wife died giving birth to a son in 1923. The stock market crashed in 1929, and he lost \$40 million.

By 1932, J.C. Penney had to sell out to satisfy creditors, leaving him virtually broke. His spirit was crushed from his losses and his health began to fail. He ended up in a sanitarium. One morning while there, he heard the distant singing of employees who gathered to start the day with a chapel service. The words were, "*Be not dismayed, whatever betide, God will take care of you. Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you.....*"

J.C. Penney followed the music to its source and slipped into a back row. He left a short time later a changed man, his health and spirit renewed, ready to start the long climb back at age 56. By 1951, there was a J.C. Penney store in every state, and for the first time sales surpassed \$1 billion a year.



J.C. Penney's character could not be swayed.

Mays' illustrations show the value of character – not only for the quality of a person's life, but its impact upon groups and even in the marketplace. Character, of course, must be one of the building blocks of Life Care, in each location and with every position.

– Beecher Hunter