

Good morning faculty, staff, parents and students. My name is **John Mitchell Brock**.

I would like to congratulate each of this year's National Honor Society inductees in their academic accomplishments and for demonstrating a leadership of integrity, diligence and character.

Character can be defined as "the stable and distinctive qualities built into an individual's life which determine his or her response ... regardless of the circumstances." Our character is what really determines our success in any area of life as it guides our responses through any circumstance or situation that we may encounter. It is WHY we do the things we do and WHY we do those things the way we do them. Being inducted into the National Honor Society today demonstrates your good character up to this point and is a stepping-stone opportunity for you to raise your standards and set higher goals on your path to success.

Our character is much, much more than just our reputation. Our reputation is what others perceive about us, while our CHARACTER is who we really are ... even when no one is watching us. Abraham Lincoln recognized the important difference between character and reputation and said it best when he said: "Character is like a tree and reputation is like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." Lincoln used imagery in his explanation to demonstrate how the shape of a shadow is determined by the angle of light and the observer's own perspective, it's not a perfect image of the real tree. By the same token, reputation is not always a true reflection of moral character.

People of good character are guided by ethical principles even when it's dangerous or detrimental to their social standing, careers or financial stability. They do the right thing even when it costs more than they want to pay. Good character isn't something you are born with or something achieved by doing one good deed. Decent moral character is established by conscientious abidance to moral values ... not just good intentions, but absolute follow-through. Character counts ... everywhere, all the time!

Anne Frank, the 13-year-old victim of Nazi persecution, wrote in her diary, "The formation of a person's character lies in their own hands." While the efforts of parents, teachers and role models can have great influence upon the values that a young person adopts, we must respect and accept the accountability and responsibility of choice and its role in the formation of individual character. True character is formed and revealed by: how we deal with everyday situations, how we respond to circumstances and how we handle the extraordinary pressures and temptations. Our character is built and determined "experience-by-experience" and "decision-by-decision."

When nobody is looking. Character is not based on who someone tells you to be or what your friends think about you. It's about knowing what is right and following it. It's about the way that you treat the people that you have nothing to gain from. It's the way that you treat those "unimportant" people that speaks volumes about what you stand for and who you are deep down inside. One of the greatest influences on our character is those with whom we surround ourselves. Choose wisely. Character is about setting goals, stretching yourself in order to achieve them and then by doing so, discovering your own self-worth.

I would like to close with a quote by Horace Greeley, the famous New York newspaper editor, "Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wing, and only character endures. Character is our legacy. What will yours be?"