

## Moral Courage and Altruism in an Age of Self-absorption

At some point in our lives, all of us are placed in difficult situations. It is our job to figure out how to get through it. To me, moral courage means standing up for one's beliefs even when he knows it may result in negative consequences for him. Those consequences can be small or they can be devastating, in some cases including death. Many of those who practice moral courage are working toward reforming society in some way.

Herman Boone is a legendary high school football coach from North Carolina. He attended North Carolina College in Durham, later returning to the same school to earn his master's degree. Boone knew since he was in high school that he wanted to be a teacher and inspire teenagers and children. He caught a break in 1958 and accepted an offer to coach basketball, baseball, and football at a high school in Virginia. Three years later, he returned to his home state to become the head coach of a mostly African-American high school. Coach Boone had tremendous success there, winning 99 games and losing only eight.

In 1969, his high school was forced to integrate with another local school. The new school board did not offer the coaching job to Boone, thinking a black coach may cause uproar. Instead of giving up or retaliating, Herman Boone got a job as an assistant coach at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia. The city integrated all schools in 1971 and Boone was given the position of head football coach. Many Alexandrians had wanted a white coach who was a few years older, and thus hatred bred

for Coach Boone. People threatened him and demanded his immediate resignation. One angry man even threw a toilet through Boone's window as a warning.

Understandably, Herman was uneasy about his current situation. However, he continued living his dream of motivating teenagers towards success on and off the field. It is hard to fathom the amount of courage this man displayed in order to sacrifice his sense of security for the good of his players. In spite of the physical danger that he was constantly faced with, he continued to do his job. In fact, Coach Boone was thriving in his new atmosphere; his team captured a state championship and was voted the second best team in the nation. In his opinion, their success can be attributed to the close bond that the players had developed with each other. He taught them to forget about race and look at every team member as a human person.

To this day, Herman Boone continues to work towards eliminating discrimination. Although he is retired, he still has his love for teaching. He travels across the United States, speaking about his experiences and encouraging others to fight for his cause. He lives by the motto "Remember that the word 'success' comes in front of hard 'work' only in a dictionary." Herman's story was made into a Disney movie in 2004 called "Remember the Titans."

Three days a week, I volunteer at a grade school in South Omaha. I visit a first grade classroom and help kids read, write, and do mathematics. Many of these children speak Spanish as their first language, so we also work on English. Besides helping them with their schoolwork, I feel that I have developed great relationships with these kids. On Valentine's Day, two of the little girls came up to me and said, "We love you, (my

name)!” I have come to enjoy being around these kids so much that I really do not think of it as service anymore.

This experience has caused me to reconsider my career aspirations; before, I would never have thought about being a teacher, but these last few months it has slowly been growing on me. Now I realize how much of an impact teachers have on their students, especially on children so young. It is obvious that they look up to adults as role models. I would love to become a teacher so that I could have the responsibility of putting kids on the right track. I also aspire to become a lacrosse coach, whether it be at a high school or through the YMCA. Later in life, when I am married and have a family, I am going to make sure I raise my children to be contributing members to the community. I want to instill the same values into my children that Herman Boone instilled in his players.

## Bibliography

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1. To me, moral courage means standing up for one's beliefs even when he knows it may result in negative consequences for him. Those consequences can be small or they can be devastating, in some cases including death. Many of those who practice moral courage are working toward reforming society in some way.

2. I am most inspired by the willingness of these people to put themselves in danger in order to help another. For example, Michael Majercik easily could have been caught sheltering his Jewish neighbor and would have been killed instantly, but he did it because he knew it was right.

3. I can help my community by possibly becoming a local leader and setting an example for social change. These readings will have taught me that the perfect community is one in which each person puts everyone else in front.