

PERSONAL

REFLECTIONS

ON

THE

12 PRINCIPLES

OF

ALTRUSA

Written by,
Altrusans of District Three
April, 2004

Forward:

The following pages include thoughts, poems or reflections written by members of our district about each of the principles written by Mamie L. Bass in 1921. These principles were adopted at the first Altrusa Convention held that same year.

Imagine what it must have been like living as a woman in those times. For centuries women had very little rights. They could not own property unless they were widowed, they were not allowed to vote and couldn't do many of the things we take for granted today. Mamie and our pioneer sisters paved the way for us to share in the freedoms and successes we have today!

Women were involved in the suffrage movement for more than 70 years by the time Mamie wrote the guidelines for which our organization began with, our principles. Women longed to be involved in a movement that its #1 goal stated it was a "builder of women." Clubs grew rapidly and borders were crossed in 1935.

Even though it has been over 83 years since Altrusa began, it is important for us to hold on to our heritage. A thought that kept coming to me shortly after I became involved on the district board is that "What is old - is new." Times and people change, but the principles which brought us together then still hold true today.

Please reflect on one of the principles and reflections written each month at your meetings. Share the writings with your club, and ask your members what the monthly principle means to them personally. Through the process we will all be reminded of the common ground, which has brought us together.

Enjoy!

Cindy Schad

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PRINCIPLE #1

Altrusa is a builder of women.

In an atmosphere of diverse leadership styles, varied professional talents, and continuous opportunities to affirm and encourage one another in service to our communities around the world, Altrusans are passionate about building women. We build women through scholarship programs and service projects that focus on the needs of abused, neglected, or otherwise needy women in our community. We also build women among our membership giving them leadership roles in the club and encouraging their growth and development through teamwork. Through ASTRA we build Altrusans of tomorrow instilling a spirit of service, professional development, and goal setting that affords a firm foundation for young women. American First Lady, Humanitarian, United Nations Delegate and Altrusan Eleanor Roosevelt reminds us how to build women through the following six truths:

1. Character – “Character building begins in our infancy and continues until death”
2. Courage – “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.”
3. Enthusiasm – “If you approach each new person you meet in a spirit of adventure, you will find yourself endlessly fascinated by the new channels of thought and experience and personality you encounter.”
4. Life – “Life is meant to be lived. Curiosity must be kept alive.”
5. Philosophy – “Do whatever comes your way to do as well as you can. Think as little as possible about yourself. Think as much as possible about other people. Dwell on things that are interesting. Since you get more joy out of giving to others you should put a good deal of thought into happiness that you are able to give.”
6. Self-Image – “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Yes, Altrusans are builders of women and are indebted to Altrusans like Mamie L. Bass and Eleanor Roosevelt who have illustrated our first principal to us so effectively by the lives they lived.

Written by,

Sandy Furches,
Past Governor 2001 – 2003
Altrusa Int’l. Inc. Lake City, FL

Principle #2

Altrusa is an expression of the search for the best in character, in business and in citizenship.

The American Heritage Dictionary describes “character” as:

- The combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another.
- A distinguishing feature or attribute.
- Moral or ethical strength.
- Public estimation of someone.

Our English language has many words that can be used to mean the same thing. Just think of the different words that we often use when talking about a person’s character. Abilities-Attributes-Traits-Trend-Make-up-Manner-Mode-Mold-Nature-Features-Fashion-Fabric-Style-Type-Personality-Reputation-Ethos-Philosophy-Way.

People even have different perceptions of what “character” means to them; yet here are examples of two people from not only different lifestyles, but from different centuries that both relate to beauty.

- Screen actor, Jacqueline Bisset, (*Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1974) says, “Character contributes to beauty. It fortifies a woman as her youth fades. A mode of conduct, a standard of courage, discipline, fortitude and integrity can do a great deal to make a woman beautiful.”
- Poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, (*Essays, “Self-Reliance”*, 1841) says, “Character gives splendor to youth and awe to wrinkled skin and grey hairs.”

Other famous people, when describing “character”, have also been quoted to say:

- “If you think about what you ought to do for other people, your character will take care of itself.” (Woodrow Wilson, U. S. President)
- “The best index to a person’s character is (a) how he treats people who can’t do him any good, and (b) how he treats people who can’t fight back. (Abigale Van Buren, columnist)
- “Character is the basis of happiness and happiness the sanction of character.” (George Santayana, poet, philosopher)
- “To keep your character intact you cannot stoop to filthy acts. It makes it easier to stoop the next time. (Katharine Hepburn, screen actor)
- “It is fortunate to be of high birth, but it is no less so to be of such character that people do not care to know whether you are or are not.” (Jean de La Bruyere, 17th century writer, moralist)
- “You can tell a lot about a fellow’s character by his way of eating jelly beans.” (Ronald Reagan, U. S. President)

Character is what makes us unique, and perceptions of someone's character may determine that person's place in life. After all – Would a bank president aspire to hire an employee with a dishonest nature? And on the other end of the spectrum – Would a gang member want to be surrounded with people of cordial manner? Of course not! It is very important that bankers are honest, yet conflict is the general make-up of a gang. Furthermore, we read daily news of scandals ranging from priests to politicians, which confirms that just because a person holds a prestigious profession, integrity is not guaranteed.

It is imperative that *we search for the best character* in all positions where one person might be perceived to have power over another, or where trust is naturally assumed. Unfortunately though, this is not always the case in some situations. For example: A little boy trusting his parish priest, or a little girl trusting her favorite schoolteacher could be scarred for a lifetime if the priest and the schoolteacher have flawed with deviant behavior.

If Nathan B. Forrest, founder of the Ku Klux Klan, had been a man of high moral character, a lot of people would not have been beaten and hanged, and countless lives might not have been destroyed. In addition, maybe today there would be less blaming of others for one's predicament; more consideration might exist among races in the south; and just maybe there would be more tolerance of all ethnical groups across our great nation.

If Adolph Hitler had been a man of virtuous character, maybe there would have been more Jewish grandparents around to tell their grandchildren pleasing stories of life in Europe, and how they had to walk 10 miles in the snow to go to school, and maybe our nation would never have needed to learn the meaning of the word "Holocaust."

And in conclusion...If 3rd World leaders like Osama Bin Laudin had been men of integrity and virtuous moral fiber, the World Trade Center in New York would still be standing, over 3000 firemen, policemen, business workers, professionals, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters would not have lost their lives, and September 11, 2001, would not be a date to be imprinted on our minds forever.

Wouldn't the world be a much better place if not only Altrusans, but all people strove for the best character in themselves in business and in citizenship?

Written by,

**Bethe Cribbe,
Altrusa Int'l Inc. Anderson, SC**

Principle #3

Election to Altrusa is an evidence of confidence, which imposes upon the recipient the obligation to strive to be true to the highest standards of life in her personal and business relations.

"The Altrusan who searches for the highest standards in all personal or business relations is someone who finds the best in everyone and accepts everyone's differences."

Written by,

**Eva Ulrich,
Past Governor 1988 – 1990
Altrusa Int'l. Inc. Columbus, GA**

Principle #4

Altrusa in the very derivation of its name is committed to the philosophy of unselfishness, of the joy of giving rather than getting, and to the search for that happiness which is based upon spiritual worthiness.

**“TO LIVE IS TO GIVE,
AND NEVER COUNT THE COST.
IN THE GIVING,
SELFISHNESS IS LOST.”**

Written by,

**Melanie Futch,
Altrusa Int’l Inc.
Statesboro, GA**

(This poem was written by Melanie when she was in elementary school!)

Principle #5

Altrusa is practical idealism. Its service consists not in saying great things, but in daily earnest practice of its principles.

Our daily lives are ordered by the individual choices each makes. As Altrusans and humanitarians, we live with sensitivity and care for others by daily reaching out and making a difference in the lives of the donor as well as the recipient. The beauty of Altrusa is that it causes us to be more sensitive to and involved with community needs through our varied service programs.

Written by,

**Betsy Burch,
Altrusa Int'l. Inc. Live Oak, FL**

Principle #6

Altrusa commends to its members an active interest in public affairs, realizing that the State is but the individual writ large.

*As members of Altrusa we are commanded
To take an active interest in public affairs.
This can be in politics or community service—
It can be serving as a board member or acting as chairs.*

*It can mean being in charge of a drive
Or taking part when the city or county commissioners meet.
The school board meeting is another way to go—
Or we might even serve as a committee member for the President's
seat.*

*We can make public affairs our career
Or we can take part in public affairs as a volunteer.
Whatever we do, let us do the very best that we can
To help and give service to our fellow man.*

Written by,

**Margaret A. Rosenberger,
Altrusa Int'l Inc. Gainesville, FL**

Principle #7

Altrusa develops true leadership, concerned with accomplishment and not with recognition.

**REAL LEADERS ARE ORDINARY PEOPLE WITH
EXTRAORDINARY DETERMINATION!**

Part of being an effective leader comes from an inner ability to find satisfaction in simple accomplishments. The satisfaction is even greater when it comes as a result of ordinary individuals working together to accomplish good works.

As “Leaders in Service” Altrusans demonstrate leadership through their many community projects. We derive our satisfaction by seeing the tangible results of our shared efforts. We are determined to make a difference in the world we live in.

Written by,

***Donna Johnson,
Past Governor 1999-2001
Altrusa Int’l. Inc. Gainesville, FL***

Principle #8

Membership carries with it no obligation to transact business with other members. It makes no promise of returns in any commercial specie. Its rewards are in proportion to the loyalty, the unselfishness and character of the member herself.

With membership in Altrusa, you become an Altrusan. You are part of this organization due to your keen interest in community service, literacy and the environment. You are the advocate for the community through your club. You have no obligation to transact business with other members but by virtue of getting to know your members, you may want to avail yourself of the services or business interest of some of the members and refer persons to businesses or services other members have available. And, as other members get to know you, you may have business interests or services other members will be happy to avail themselves of in the community. Networking is a side benefit to being an Altrusan. We are happy and proud of the accomplishments of our members, and you may find you are able to use these services and acquaint the membership with your business or services. It's a win-win situation.

In becoming an Altrusan, we have found in you a person of high character, one who is willing to unselfishly serve the community through programs of Altrusa and other organizations. Because you have the ability to work side by side with other members, you become a sister (or brother) with common interests to share. The diversity of membership of the organization entitles you to fun, and a feeling of a job well done when working on a community service project or fund raising effort. Your values are such that since you are an Altrusan, you desire working with other Altrusans for the common good. You are rewarded with the feeling of accomplishment and making a difference in the life of another. The more you become a part of Altrusa, the greater your rewards. What is loyalty and unselfishness? Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines loyal in part as faithful to a cause, ideal or custom and loyalty in part is the tie binding a person to something to which he is loyal. We as Altrusans are all about causes, ideals and customs, and get excited about planning and carrying out activities we care about in Altrusa. You get your personal battery charged by how much you participate in the activities of Altrusa. Another word for unselfish is generous. We are generous with our caring, our participation and love for what we do in Altrusa and persons with these characteristics naturally gravitate to Altrusa when they discover who we are. It is most important to continue to seek out potential business and professional persons who will become Altrusans –but only those with the special qualities of caring, unselfishness and community spirit. Altrusa membership is your way of life!

Written by,

**Linda Robison,
Altrusa Int'l Inc. Spartanburg, SC**

Principle #9

Altrusa expresses goodwill for all mankind. It emphasizes the good and lets the evil sink into the oblivion it merits.

Working at a fundraiser with my club last year, I felt very connected to this principle. While watching my Altrusa Sisters working together for the purpose of raising money for our service projects, I realized that together we all work for the greater good of mankind.

I believe that when we join Altrusa, we are like caterpillars with our “feelers” in many things. As we grow in service a chrysalis forms around us, and we emerge as beautiful blue and white butterflies! We fly from project to project, and we touch so many lives. Service really is a gift of beauty. We are so busy flying and looking for good places to land that we do not allow evil to be a place where we rest our wings.

Shine and soar high, Altrusans!

Written by,

***Cindy Schad,
Altrusa Int’l Inc. Ocala, FL***

Principle #10

Altrusa is democratic; it knows no class, no favorites, but is founded upon merit alone.

Dem*o*crat*ic *adj.* 1. Of, characterized by, or advocating democracy. 2. Of or for the people in general; popular. 3. Believing in or practicing social equality

I don't know about you but sometimes I much prefer a definition that does not lead me to have to look up the meaning or another word. Makes my life simpler, as it were. In this case, the next word I have to look up is democracy.

De*moc*ra*cy *n* 1. Government by the people exercised either directly or through elected representatives. 2. A political or social unit that has such a government. 3. The common people, considered as the primary source of political power. 4. Majority rule. 5. The principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community.

I believe that Mamie L. Bass was thinking of the last meaning in each of these definitions when she wrote the 10th principle. That Altrusans are individuals of equal stature working toward good in their community.

Do we, as Altrusans, always practice that belief? Each time we go to a club meeting, a committee meeting, service project or fund-raising project, we take all the cares and woes of the day, the worries, the joys, the prejudice, the stereotypes that we as human beings have. In her 10th principle, Mamie L Bass is telling us to lay all that aside for the time we are together. As Altrusans, we have come together as business and professional women, as leaders in our community, as individuals wanting to achieve success collectively. To do that, to be successful in our Altrusan endeavors and in our lives, we work and play together democratically – believing each person brings her/his own uniqueness, contributions and merit to the work we do in the name of Altrusa.

Feeding His Clothes (a story from the Middle East)

The sultan held a sumptuous feast at the palace. Mulla Nasrudin watched finely dressed guests arrive at the palace gate; He fingered his tattered rags and compared them with the elegant silk and satins on the people who entered the festivities. His stomach growled with hunger. He thought about the fine food served at the banquet.

Led by his stomach, he walked up to the gate and presented himself to the guards. Since, by custom, hospitality demanded that he not be turned away, the guards allowed him into the feast. The guards, however, ushered him discreetly to a seat at the very end of the banquet table.

Delicious food arrived on great trays carried by well-groomed servants. By the time the trays arrived at the end of the table where Mulla sat, they were empty.

Mulla sadly left his unused plate and wandered out the palace gate. He went to the home of a rich friend and explained what had just happened. Mulla asked, “May I borrow a fine suit of clothes?” The friend gave Mulla rich clothes and an expensive turban to top his elegant attire.

Mulla returned to the palace and presented himself at the gate. When the guards saw him so well dressed, they did not recognize him. Thinking he was a visiting prince, the guards bowed low before him. Respectfully, the guards escorted him inside and seated him at the head of the table.

More trays of food arrived, and servants piled delicacies on Mulla’s plate. Before long, everyone was staring at Mulla. He had rubbed curry into his sleeve. He had poured wine on his turban. He had smashed roasted eggplant all over his cloak. Finally, the guest seated next to him was moved to awkwardly inquire, “Pray tell, but why have you rubbed messy food into your fine attire?”

“A thousand pardons,” said Mulla, “if my clothes look the worst. But it was these clothes that brought me all this food. It is only fair that they be fed first.”

(From Wisdom Tales From Around the World by Heather Forest, published by August House Publishers, Little Rock, Arkansas (1996).

It’s easy to look at the outside of a person and forget about the more important person inside. First impressions are just that—first impressions, quickly formed and often invalid when we get to know the inner person. Mamie L. Bass is telling us to look to the inside person, to interact with that person and to not be led astray by the trappings surrounding the outer person we first see.

Written by,

**Carroll Myers
Altrusa Int’l Inc. Atlanta, GA**

Principle #11

Altrusa believes that the way to progress lies not in emphasizing the faults of men and their failure to give proper recognition, at times, to women in business, but rather in arousing women to their responsibilities and their possibilities so that their accomplishments will blaze the trail for greater things.

In 1921 when The Principles of Altrusa were adopted, very few women were in business or involved in public life. Today, eighty-two years later, many advances have been made. Altrusans like Mamie L. Bass, Eleanor Roosevelt and less well-known women like Cassie L. Dollar and Myrtice Price, accepted their responsibilities, looked at possibilities and their accomplishments and blazed a trail for Altrusans to follow. It is true, some doors are still closed to women; however, such a trail has been made that a woman with determination and the desire can make an addition to the trail. Now among women, and Altrusans, we have physicians, dentists, CEO's, ministers and senators. Women have been recognized for their accomplishments both in the private and the public sectors. As we continue to explore our possibilities, even greater accomplishments will be achieved. In a few years we may be referring to "Madam President of the United States of America". Women must take the responsibilities that go with taking jobs that have always been thought of as "men's work". Nothing is impossible for a person with enough courage and determination.

Written by,

*Barbara Duren,
Altrusa Int'l. Inc. Atlanta, GA*

Principle #12

Altrusa believes that it is not enough to be good; Altrusans must be good for something. Each member must be doing the piece of work that is hers in a way that puts her in the front ranks of accomplishment.

Mamie L Bass penned these words more than 80 years ago, and they are as relevant to Altrusans today as they were then.

We are privileged to live in a beautiful world in which we can use our energies and talents to accomplish much. We all have many talents that we can use to maintain and enhance this wonderful world in which we are privileged to live. We must develop these talents, share them with our fellowman and continuously find new opportunities to put our talents to work.

Altrusans have much to offer. To begin with, we have our time, our skills, our ideas, our knowledge, our experiences, our interests and ability to get things done. We can use all of the above every day to improve life for ourselves, our loved ones, our fellow workers and our communities. Each day is full of incredible opportunity. I challenge you to reach out and make a difference.

Life will reward you in direct proportion to what you are able and willing to give.

Written by,

***Margaret H. Cannon,
Governor 2003-2005
Altrusa Int'l. Inc.
Caldwell County, NC***