



HILTON COLLEGE

A letter from

The Head

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Dear Parents,

What are the values we hold dear?

In the game of cricket, does one walk or does one wait for the signal from the umpire? I am not talking about the faintest edge that requires technology to ascertain whether there was the slightest sliver of an edge or not; I am referring to the fairly obvious 'nick' that the fielders around the bat - and the batsman, in particular - heard. In talking to our cricketing 'boffs', it seems that fewer and fewer professional batsmen walk before the umpire has signalled 'out'.

Is this a problem? In a high stakes world, the pressure not to fail is immense.

Many of us may have experienced a less pressured scenario, like erroneously being given an extra 50 cents change, or more, after making a purchase. This scenario has become more and more foreign to our children but when we were young, such a moral dilemma was not uncommon. Did we say something to the shopkeeper or bolt for the door?

Today's cyber world also offers several similar challenges: adolescents can behave suspiciously by liking, posting, shaming, bullying, often with the hope, or veil, of anonymity and often with the idea that 'as long as I don't get caught', or like the batsman - until I am given out by the umpire.

Our moral compass seems to point in a kaleidoscope of directions, at the same time around the same issue.

Our newspapers are awash with story after story that suggest that more and more people from all walks of life are seemingly more economical with the truth than society may have been in the past. Perhaps it is the growing number of people on our planet, or the ubiquitous nature of news and media, but it does seem that this trend is growing.

These days fewer batsmen, in life, walk when they have 'nicked' the ball.

In daily living the notion of 'walking' must be explained to our sons. Most importantly, however, we need to model this behaviour. If we allow someone else's mistake for example, in crediting our account with too much; or in not charging us for an item at a checkout point; or something similar, to go unnoticed or uncorrected, we model behaviour that demonstrates the notion that someone else directs and controls our moral compass. If we do this, we outsource one of the most important lessons available in growing a child, and later a citizen, to make the ethical choice when challenged.



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I am an avid reader of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who is a lucid thinker about values in our modern world. Shortly after the stock market crash in 2008, he wrote a piece that included the following excerpt:

“Markets don’t guarantee equity, responsibility or integrity. They can maximise short-term gain at the cost of long-term sustainability. They don’t distribute rewards fairly. They don’t guarantee honesty. When it comes to flagrant self-interest, they combine the maximum temptation with the maximum opportunity. Markets need morals, and morals are not made by markets.

They are made by schools, the media, custom, tradition, religious leaders, moral role models and the influence of people. But when religion loses its voice and the media worship success, when right and wrong become relativised and morality is condemned as “judgmental”, when people lose all sense of honour and shame and there is nothing they won’t do if they can get away with it, no regulation will save us. People will outwit the regulators, as they did by the securitisation of risk, so no one knew who owed what to whom.

The big question is: how do we learn to be moral again? Markets were made to serve us; we were not made to serve markets. Economics needs ethics. Markets do not survive by market forces alone. They depend on respect for the people affected by our decisions. Lose that and we lose not just money and jobs but something more significant still: freedom, trust and decency, the things that have a value, not a price.”

If we, as a school, are deliberate in our approach to instil an understanding and an application of ethics in the choices our boys make, it is my hope that we will send young men into our world who will be equipped and ready to make the moral choice at every opportunity. As a parent, your responsibility is to reinforce this intention, the seeds of which we trust were planted when your sons were young.

Adolescents, however, are street-smart. If we say one thing but do another, they are quick to notice and choose the easier route as their default action.

In 2016, Guy Waterhouse - Hilton’s Head of School, endeavoured to launch an “Honour Code” among boys. This is a borrowed concept from Woodberry Forest in Charlottesville USA, and is a longstanding ethos at their school which, among other things, insists that boys write tests without an invigilator in the venue. Boys are required and expected to be absolutely honest in their conduct, the caveat is that should a boy cheat and boys report him - he is summarily asked to leave the school. Most boys make a conscious decision not to cheat. This ethos extends to theft of any kind at the school.

Rabbi Sacks asks, “How do we learn to be moral again?”; in cricketing language, “How do we learn to walk?”

As adults we must all be on the same page. Our boys must hear one message. Morality may not become “relativised”; there is right and wrong. It is with this intention that we proceed in our quest to instil an ethical code in all we do: our boys, our country, our world is crying out for this as a gold standard. We will not relent; we cannot afford to.

Regards,
George