

## RESPONSIBILITY

### DESCRIPTION OF SESSION

In this session, participants will explore the concept of responsibility, based on an essay describing the characteristics of President George Washington.

### CATEGORY

- Character

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain the importance of responsibility as a personal characteristic.

### SUPPLIES

- **The Secret to Our Forgotten Man** activity sheet—make a copy for each participant
- **The Habit of Responsibility** activity sheet—make a copy for each participant
- **My Daily Progress Report** activity sheet—make a copy for each participant
- Pen or pencil for each participant

**ADVISOR NOTE:** Text in italics should be read aloud to participants. As you engage your post in activities each week, please include comments, discussions, and feedback to the group relating to **Character, Leadership, and Ethics**. These are important attributes that make a difference in the success of youth in the workplace and in life.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Activity 1

##### **Our Forgotten Man**

Pass out copies of **The Secret to Our Forgotten Man** activity sheet to participants and have them read the essay. After they are finished, use the reflection questions below to make the point that responsibility is an essential part of success in life and in acquiring good habits.

#### Activity 2

##### **Developing Responsibility**

Pass out copies of **The Habit of Responsibility** and **My Daily Progress Report** activity sheets. Give Explorers five to 10 minutes to think about the questions on **The Habit of Responsibility** activity sheet and determine how they can develop the habit of responsibility. This activity sheet is a personal activity and need not be shared with the larger group.

Have Explorers use the **My Daily Progress Report** activity sheet to record their progress working toward better developing an ethic of responsibility over the next two weeks.

### ADVISOR NOTE

Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own questions that relate to your post or specific focus area.

## REFLECTION

### Focusing Questions

- *Besides what you read in the story, what else do you know about George Washington?*
- *Why do some consider Washington “history’s forgotten man”?*

### Analysis Questions

- *Why do you think young George Washington thought responsibility was such an important habit to have if he were to become a military leader?*
- *How is responsibility an important characteristic for leaders?*
- *How might you use this in your potential career?*

### Generalization Questions

- *What are some ways leaders show responsibility to those they lead?*
- *What are some ways that followers show responsibility to their leaders?*
- *What are some ways that Explorers can practice responsibility?*
- *How might you use this in life or in college?*
- *Why is this important?*

## RESOURCES

### Activity 1

#### Our Forgotten Man

##### The Secret to Our Forgotten Man

He is the most famous American in history, but a man who is a mystery to most people living today. Most know that he was the commanding general of the Colonial troops that won the Revolutionary War. They know, too, that he was our first president. Many will quickly tell the story of young Washington's cutting down the cherry tree and, when confronted by his father, replying, "I cannot tell a lie. I cut it down." As it turns out, this story is an invention, created by an early biographer. But while most people know a few details of George Washington's life, the man on our one-dollar bill is a shadowy figure. Historians refer to him as "America's forgotten man."

Washington was born on a plantation—a farm—and he decided early that, while he loved the land, he wanted something more in life. As a teenager, he desired to become a military leader. As he read biographies of great generals and military heroes, he saw a common theme in their lives—responsibility. So as a young man, Washington set out to be seen as a person of responsibility.

Farm life gave him many opportunities, but Washington hungered to serve in the military. At an early age, he joined the local militia and very quickly became recognized for his dependability and bravery. There was no standing army in those days, so through most of his late teens until the Revolutionary War, he transitioned between plantation life and the militia.

During these years of on-again, off-again military experience, Washington worked on his leadership skills, the most important of which was his clear sense of responsibility for the men under his command. In the meantime, however, leaders of the 13 Colonies were becoming increasingly frustrated by the rule of King George of England. Finally, in Philadelphia in 1776, they decided to break away from England, and on July 4 formally broke with what was their motherland by signing the Declaration of Independence.

Not only was the Declaration of Independence the birth of our nation, but it meant our new nation had to go to war with England. It meant that a nation without an army or navy had to do battle with what was, at the time, the strongest military power in the world. Our Founding Fathers searched for a man of proven experience who would be able to unite volunteers and train them for this huge assignment.

George Washington, then 44 years old, was offered the job. Now a prepared military leader, Washington fully understood the enormous disadvantages he and his forces would face. But duty called and George Washington answered.

Outmanned, out-trained, and outgunned, Washington and his ragtag army took to the field

of battle and stayed there for eight long years. Continually confronted by superior forces, Washington fought a brilliant campaign. He and his army were like a lightweight boxer facing a dangerous heavyweight. They would retreat and retreat and retreat and then suddenly attack with a flurry of force that enraged and confused their opponent. But still the British forces pursued them from state to state.

The war took an enormous toll on Washington's volunteer army, made up largely of farmers and shopkeepers. Their continual retreating and lack of adequate weapons and supplies wore down their spirits. Shortages of food, medicine, and even blankets drained their bodies and souls. In Valley Forge, where Washington's forces wintered in 1777 and 1778, a third of the soldiers died of hunger, exposure to the elements, or both. What kept this army together and eventually led to victory was the soldiers' loyalty to their commander. It was a loyalty that Washington earned by his constant concern for the well-being of his troops. They felt his concern and sense of responsibility not just to winning the war, but to them personally. He took care for their safety in battle and continually fought to get them the weapons and supplies they needed.

When the British, finally exhausted by Washington and his Continental Army, surrendered, his officers tried to convince him to be the king of the new nation. Washington firmly refused and said he was going back to his family and his Virginia farm. He felt in his heart that his responsibilities were fulfilled, his duty served.

But it did not turn out as he had hoped. The young nation began to flounder dangerously, and the leadership organized a Continental Congress to form the rules for governing what had previously been a collection of states. They knew that only one man in the entire country had the prestige, authority, and skills to lead such an effort. So against his desires, Washington again left his farm and family and went to Philadelphia to lead the effort to form a governing constitution.

Once the document was completed, the Founding Fathers realized that the one man with the stature and widespread respect of his countrymen to be the first president was Washington. Again, out of a deep sense of responsibility, he put the needs of the nation ahead of his own desires and served not four but eight years in office.

To many Americans living today, Washington may be the "Forgotten Man of History." However, during his lifetime and for several generations thereafter, Washington was known as "First in war. First in peace. First in the hearts of his countrymen."

**Activity 2**  
**Developing Responsibility**

**The Habit of Responsibility**

This activity sheet will help you develop a plan to become more responsible.

1. Define “responsibility” in your own words.
2. State how you will be different if you succeed in developing a strong habit of responsibility.
3. List the everyday events or issues in which you typically have trouble with responsibility.
4. What are you going to do to learn more about responsible behavior?
5. What are you going to do on a regular basis that will give you the opportunity to practice responsibility? Be specific. For instance, “I’m going to complete all chores and homework before watching TV.” Or “Every day I am going to do something to help out at home.”
6. What will you do if you forget to practice responsibility or become discouraged?

**Activity 2**  
**Developing Responsibility**

**My Daily Progress Report**

Over the next two weeks, write a sentence each day describing your progress toward acquiring the habit of responsibility.

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