EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS ETHICS

Essays on the Work of Clarence Walton

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WALTON AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

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Introduction

In approaching complex issues or unusual people, academics invariably seek inspiration from sages of the past. In this respect, they have learned to abide by Oscar Wilde's dictum that the only way to overcome temptation is to yield to it. In this instance, surrender leads to Aristotle, who remarked in his *Politics* that "if we take into account the good life, then . . . education and virtue have superior claims. . . . Above all, every state should be so administered and so regulated that its workers cannot possibly make money (from their office) . . . ."[1] Aristotle's observations are particularly applicable to the first of the three scenarios that will subsequently be described—scenarios that relate to Clarence Walton's involvement in policy matters related to local, state, and federal governments, respectively.

Before describing the first of these scenarios, delineation of the general background of American education is in order. In the demonology of detractors, American public schools, public school teachers, and public school boards rank in popularity alongside root canals and IRS audits. School bashing emphasizes low academic performance, classroom violence, sexual harassment, overcrowding, taxpayer revolts against waste, corruption, and teacher incompetence. The issue of teacher incompetence, and by extension, principal and superintendent incompetence, has been accompanied by a spate of disciplinary overkill of youngsters for such "grave offenses" as covert kissing and Midol smuggling. The whole home-schooling movement, now more than 500,000 students strong, has reflected the mass disenchantment towards perceived failures on the part of the schools to provide a safe and sound education.[2] The same public displeasure is evident in the growth of charter schools and voucher initiatives. Society's unfavorable reaction to public schools resembles some great revulsion against an educational virus eating away at the vital organs of the Academy. One of the great challenges is the lack of student motivation. What with television and Nintendo and 1,001 diversions and distractions, the family (already a growingly dysfunctional institution) is hard pressed to keep school youngsters interested in, let alone fully focused on, their studies. As a result, competent enthusiastic teachers are needed today more than ever.

Employers are also searching eagerly for the products of good schools; namely, employees who are capable, literate, well-motivated, self-starters. Yet, according to Richard Berman of the *Wall Street Journal* there are almost 12 million welfare-dependent adult Americans, more than one-third of whom languish at the lowest literacy standard, meaning they can't read a safety label or fill out a job application. Another third read below the level defined by the National Education Goals Panel as necessary

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