



The Case for Character Ethics

Character ethics are self-evident, conscience-affirming truths that when acted on consistently, produce virtuous behaviors, such as: compassionate acts, honest answers and just decisions. These virtuous behaviors create order and build trust. These are the twin indexes that best predict leadership success among presidents, pastors, parents and principals.

Why is character-building essential to every leader's role?

"Character-building" is a leader's most important role because character, rather than competencies such as communication skills, is the cornerstone of functional relationships and teams. High character is what unites high competencies to deliver mission force.

No matter how "competent" leaders may appear...if they choose to devalue, ignore or fail to demand character (first in themselves and then in others), then they will experience low character or dysfunctional relationships.

Dysfunction forces a leader to expend more and more limited leadership capital to deal with the results of low character: conflict interventions, ruptured teams, lawsuits, broken relationships and heartache. When the leader's progress toward delivering the mission is chronically distracted by this dysfunction, the leader has failed.

Two reasons why every leader needs to be an intentional character-builder.

It's our responsibility...To some degree or another, "followers" (workers, constituents, and students) entrust themselves to leaders. This offering of trust triggers a moral imperative and often a legal imperative that compels leaders to create and sustain a nurturing, order-creating, trust-building, character-rich environment.

It's our right...Leaders serve others best when they demand excellence. Excellence is fueled first by the example of the leader and then by empowering others (giving problem-solving authority to those closest to the challenge). Leaders who distribute authority to people must correspondingly demand high character of them. Leaders have the right to cultivate, and expect others to cultivate, high-character environments. American leaders who neglect intentional character-building (particularly in this age) are taking a great risk, as well as missing their calling.