



Leadership Character Ethics

TENETS

Every social ill, business dysfunction, government scandal and broken relationship can be directly linked back to some breach, lapse or chronic absence of character in adults, conversely every noble outcome is underwritten by character.

Character is the cornerstone of American Citizenship. Without “Top-Of-Mind and Tip-of-the-Tongue” character ethics re-emerging and reinhabiting American Leadership ... we are lost.

American leaders must re-embrace the character-building example and enterprises as their most critical role (whether these leaders are presidents, politicians principals or parents).

Adults must be invited and not intimidated into the character-building journey. Ultimately, high character people and their message must be irresistible.

Positive and proactive approaches to re-educating several generations of adults will be critical to renewing the character consensus that is the unique “spirit” of our American society.

Adult leaders will require clear character ethics and character-building maps like UncommonSense™ to guide them.

Voluntary leadership movements underwritten by wise and bold public policy adjustments that move adult character acquisition objectives into an urgent citizen priority will have a powerful positive effect on current and future generations who in turn will have a redeeming impact around the world.

TO: AMERICA'S 21ST CENTURY LEADERS

The critical role of leaders in American business, academic, government, faith and media institutions to co-model and systematically transfer leadership character ethics, the foundation of our uniting American spirit, has been a neglected priority for more than 100 years.

While good character is essential for American self-government and good corporate citizenship, it's intentional transference today to other adults through leadership methods and modeling is nearly non-existent.

As a result, the ability of future American leaders to adopt and practice the essential "American Character-Building Ethic" and pass it on is entirely at risk in the broader culture.

We believe this leadership character ethics crisis has fueled the divisive culture crisis which (regardless of your liberal or conservative view) is both the greatest indictment of America's 20th century leaders and the greatest opportunity for the leaders of the 21st century.

In response to this crisis, hundreds of diverse leaders labored together to design the UncommonSense™ character code and its implementation companion "The Guide to Building High Character Leaders and Organizations". These simple, uniting and proven adult mentoring tools clarify conscience-convicting character ethics and create a map for leaders to build character ...together.

Since 2000, the state of Ohio and various Ohio trade and professional associations have been a leading force in proving the efficacy of the long-term and collaborative UncommonSense™ approach. This unique project needs to be deepened and strengthened and expanded to additional states.

We established the American Center for Civic Character as a non-profit educational project to make these tools available to leading American professional and trade associations serving constituents in government, business, media, family, faith, secondary and higher education.

We rely on grants from corporations and foundations who are members or supporters of these associations to improve and grow this thrifty and important movement to create a common "tipping point" for American leadership renewal.

Towards this End in Serving Others;

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chip Weiant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chip Weiant
President

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**“Character cannot be
developed in ease and quiet.
Only through experience of
trial and suffering can the
soul be strengthened, vision
cleared, ambition inspired,
and success achieved.”**

*-Helen Keller
20th-century American social activist,
public speaker and author*

The Center gratefully acknowledges Beck/Durell Creative of Worthington, Ohio whose sacrificial generosity and great talent made this communication possible.

MESSAGE MOTTO MISSION STRATEGY



OUR UNCOMMON MESSAGE:

The American Center for Civic Character created UncommonSense™ which is a conscience-affirming character ethics framework designed by and for adult leaders to contemplate, apply to their life's work, adopt within their work teams, and easily commend to those around them.

OUR MOTTO:

“Helping to make the lost language of leadership character ethics, America’s first language.”

OUR MISSION:

To make available and normative leadership character building maps, modeled and taught by a movement of marketplace (government, business, faith, media and education) leaders in our culture using learning resources based on UncommonSense.

OUR STRATEGY:

We have established a character-building professional development curriculum that is designed to be distributed by, for and among existing networks of America’s influential trade and professional association leaders. We are implementing this strategy first at a state level and intend to incrementally elevate this effort into a national movement during this decade.

DECLARATION OF *UncommonSense*™

THE AMERICAN
CENTER FOR
CIVIC CHARACTER

We believe character ethics are self-evident, non-coerced conscious-affirming beliefs that, when acted upon consistently, produce virtuous behaviors such as: compassionate acts, honest answers and just decisions. These virtuous behaviors create order and build trust. Order and trust are the twin indexes that historically predict leadership effectiveness among American presidents, pastors, parents, and principles. This unique preoccupation with building character has been the source of our "American Spirit".

We believe, however, that character-building ethics are only relevant when they are accurately defined and lived out in a compelling and consistent language and lifestyle. We believe it is intellectually dishonest to affirm the relevance of character ethics, codify them... and then bid them hang lifeless on a lobby wall.

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

We believe, therefore, that daily "character-building" is a leader's most important role because character (rather than competencies such as planning or communicating) is the cornerstone of functional relationships and teams. Indeed high character is what ignites competencies to deliver force to an institution's mission.

We believe that today's generation of leaders lacks three things: a shared vocabulary of character-building ethics, tools that help us implement the character-building enterprise, and a lack of meaningful multi-institutional support for our role as on-the-job-character-builders.

*We believe that the leadership character-building ethics of *UncommonSense*™ is a model tool for our times: "Uncommon" sadly because defined character ethics are no longer common and "sense" because it nonetheless irresistibly prevails upon a sensitive conscience.*

We freely confess that we are far from perfect and we will always be growing in our personal application of character ethics. However, we shall at all times devote ourselves to be character builders. Therefore, we commit to incorporate character building into our private and public lives for the essential renewal of our relationships, organizations, communities, nation and world ... in these significant times.



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The Critical Importance of Truth:

1) SEEKING WISDOM: Ethical or high character people courageously seek something greater than intelligence or knowledge (knowing what is); they seek wisdom (knowing what is right or true). Wisdom must logically culminate in the identification of conscience-convicting truth to be intellectually honest. Hence, the relentless pursuit of truth, its source and its compelling advocacy is the moral objective of ethical, character-building people. (Observable Virtues: principled, prudent, contemplative)

Applying Truth First, to Ourselves:

2) FIDELITY: High character people courageously strive to be what they say they are. Their behavior matches their beliefs. As a result they resist the temptation to sacrifice “what is right or wise” for “what might work or be popular” and overcome private and peer temptations that would render them hypocrites. Only those who strive after what is true and then first apply this consistently to themselves, are capable of authentically creating order and building trust (the pre-requisites to relationship) within their organizations, marriages, families, fellowships, friendships, teams, etc. (Observable virtues: courageous, sober, reflective, self-aware, single-minded)

Applying Truth in our Relationships:

3) INTEGRITY: High character people do what they say they will do. Because of their habit of wisdom and fidelity they demonstrate the courage of their convictions by doing what they say they will do even when there is great pressure to do otherwise. As a result they do not manipulate anything or anyone at any time. (Observable virtues: consistent, predictable, orderly, faithful, guileless)

4) COMPASSION FOR OTHERS: High character people are compelled by wisdom, fidelity and integrity to extend unmerited kindness to others; as an act of the will. They are compelled by an operative conscience (rather than their emotions alone) to be genuinely benevolent and sacrificially giving. They abhor meanness, cruelty and neglect of others. Act-of-the-will compassion makes loving the “hard-to-love”, possible. (Observable virtues: kind, gentle, patient, benevolent, generous)

5) HONESTY: High character people speak the truth with compassion. Ethical people speak up, present their facts with thoughtful accuracy, and do so with compassion. They are not avoiders; they are care-fronters...they confront because they care. They clearly qualify their yes and no and thereby minimize misunderstandings. They do not deliberately mislead or deceive others by misrepresentations, overstatements, partial truths, selective omissions or other intentional means. They take responsibility and don't shift blame. To avoid confusing others high character people break habits of sarcasm and cynicism. To avoid inflaming others they avoid sanctimonious and condescending tones. (Observable virtues: discrete, discerning)

6) JUSTICE: High character people uphold truth, expose error and correct wrongs. Just people are diligent in weighing evidence. They contend for truth and perform vigorous and unbiased examinations of individuals and information. Just people do not oppress powerless persons, or condemn innocent persons; they protect them. In the process of affirming good and reproving evil they strive not to be harsh, exasperating or manipulative. Just people strain to objectively determine what outcome, however difficult or painful, is right. (Observable virtues: upright, bold, diligent, decisive)

7) ACCOUNTABILITY: High character people scrutinize themselves and welcome the scrutiny of others. They acknowledge that human nature compels us towards independence. Our preference for independence results in isolation from one another. Isolation breeds temptation to unethical conduct. High character people resist this chain reaction by adopting transparent life and work-styles that invite inspection. They place themselves in relationships that motivate self-examination and encourage constructive critique from others, particularly those they serve. (Observable virtues: an open, up-front, disclosing spirit)

“Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.”

~Theodore Roosevelt
20th-century American President

“Character is what you are in the dark.”

~Dwight Lyman Moody

(1837-1899)

8) RESPECT: High character people treat others, as they would want to be treated. They have an accurate view of the human condition: namely that every person is capable of both dignified and depraved conduct. As a result, they weigh the intrinsic worth of others as exactly equal to their own worth. This is why people of character are convicted by the Golden Rule. This conviction makes valuing diverse roles, giftedness, skills, style, personality, race, religion, and genders logical if not irresistible. Respect leads diverse people to value the dignity of others while having the liberty to passionately disagree with their opinions (opinions which can be influenced by our depravity). (Observable virtues: an inclusive, engaging and honoring spirit)

9) PROMISE-KEEPING & TRUSTWORTHINESS: High character people do not break their word with others. Because they prize interpersonal trust, they do not make promises lightly, they are candid in supplying relevant information and they are diligent in fulfilling their commitments. They make every reasonable effort to fulfill the letter and the spirit of their promises. They tirelessly maintain a promised confidence. They do not interpret agreements in any unreasonably technical or legalistic manner in order to rationalize non-compliance or to justify escaping their promises. (Observable virtues: faithfulness)

10) EXCELLENCE: High character people strive to be their best knowing that this enables them to do their best every day. Ethical people experience good "being" that fuels great "doing". Excellence is the result of high character merging with high competence. Excellence is a high task achieved virtuously. When high character people collaborate they produce a "culture of excellence". True and enduring organizational excellence therefore is only sustainable by people of high character. (Observable virtues: self-control, discipline, enthusiasm, pureness of heart, persevering spirit)

11) SERVING-LEADERSHIP: High character people sacrifice themselves for those they lead. Serving-Leaders model and mentor high character conduct and produce an inspiring environment in which their sacrificial example of serving others produces relational harmony, principled reasoning, effective communication, clear mission, constant learning and character-rich decision-making. Leaders of high character produce cultures of character where followers increasingly manifest virtues rather than vices. (Observable virtues: courage, humility, selflessness)

12) UNITY: High Character people strive to build relationships that foster oneness among others who are bound with them to a common promise, mission or purpose. Ethical organizations seek uniformity in their people's shared character ethics and unity among their otherwise richly diverse people. Without a persevering commitment to shared character ethics, there is no hope for sustainable unity. (Observable virtues: reconciler)

13) FORGIVENESS: Because they know they are far from perfect people of high character are humble and they extend to and receive from others, unmerited acceptance. Character breeches separate people. Separation injures conscience. High character people forgive and genuinely seek forgiveness to reconcile or restore their relationship with any person to whom they have committed a character lapse. Seeking forgiveness requires a confession of error by the offender. Rendering forgiveness is a radical act of undeserved understanding (or grace) by the offended. High character people are thankful when forgiven and are motivated to forgive inevitable offenses against them. They forgive others and seek the forgiveness of others intentionally. (Observable virtues: humility, patience, gratefulness, long-suffering)

“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

~Abraham Lincoln

(1809-1865)



14) HONORING AUTHORITY: All people are imperfect, requiring boundaries for behavior. High character people willingly yield to the authority of those who are charged with upholding those boundaries. They help shape and then abide by the legitimate laws, rules and boundaries established by legitimate authorities and strive to live within those boundaries for the betterment of all people. When those given authority violate conscience-convicting character ethics; high character people take wise action to justly hold them accountable. (Observable virtues: yieldedness, submission/ "under the mission")

15) LIBERTY: High character people preserve their public rights by fulfilling their personal responsibilities. In order to preserve public freedoms, every single person must exercise private restraints. Therefore, free people embrace self-control so that the need for public controls are minimized. As a result, high character people communicate and live out character ethics and intentionally exhort others to do likewise as an active act of preserving liberty for everyone. (Observable virtues: temperance, self-control)

16) LEARNING & MENTORING: High character people are lifelong wisdom-seekers and wisdom-advancers. They have both a teachable and a teaching spirit. They impart truth to the uninformed. They reduce ignorance by illuminating the disenfranchised. They multiply character-based people and leaders. They nurture teaching relationships in order to maximize the character and competency of others: they are mentors. Mentors endeavor to invest their lives in others in order to help them help others to attain their greatest potential. (Observable virtues: curiosity, creativity, teachability, inspiration)

17) STEWARDSHIP: High character people live as if they will eventually reap what they sow. They actively identify with the role of trustee or steward rather than owner. They perceive their function as a resource or role "caretaker" for a limited time. As a result they regard "positions" and "possessions" as "conferred in temporary trust". Therefore, they care for their respective positions & possessions diligently and seek to add value to every role and

every resource to which they have been entrusted. Ethical people have a high regard for multiplying the value of their "accounts" for the purpose of serving others and benefiting those who follow. (Observable virtues: humility, orderliness, carefulness)

18) SEEKING COUNSEL: High character people seek wise counsel particularly when confronted with issues that cause tension and/or confusion between two or more character ethics. Because they are guided by their tireless pursuit of truth they regularly seek the wisdom of others of high character. After they weigh this counsel they act. The goal of this process is wise actions (what is right) rather than popular action (what would make one appear good) or pragmatic action (what might appear to work). The result of a decision made with wise counsel is a clear conscience and the fruit of a clear conscience is contentment. (Observable virtues: thoughtfulness, patience, discernment, confidence)

Our Ability to Change

19) SUBMISSION TO TRUTH: Truth transforms people only when we submit to it. People who seek truth cannot not transform. Eventually everyone confronts the power of truth. When people of conscience are confronted by what is true they feel convicted to replace or "put off" their lower character by pursuing and "putting on" high character ethics. Taking action on this choice can occur over night or over a long (and often painful) period.

20) VALIDATING TRANSFORMATION: Over time high character people exhibit consistent hope-giving and conscience-affirming character virtues, which are the outer proof of inner character ethics. Virtues and vices are simply the observable fruits that spring forth from either healthy or corrupted roots of character ethics. Therefore, character builders must make the lost language of character ethics their first language. Moreover, since good character is built in the valleys of life, not on the mountaintops and since it is fueled by the daily grind not on vacation, character builders must adopt an accurate view of the benefits of suffering.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) Why are character ethics relevant to Americans? According to Michael Novak, (former US ambassador who currently holds the George Fredrick Jewett Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute) America rests upon a unique three-part foundation: 1) Constitutional Democracy, 2) Free Capital Markets and ...3) Moral Consensus. Corrupt any one of these three parts and you corrupt America. Today the foundation of “American Moral Consensus” is at risk.

2) What is the status of the American character-building ethic? A clearly-stated, substantially defined and transferable set of shared ethics no-longer inhabits the American leadership/citizenship mindset or experience. Most leaders can no longer articulate let alone defend their guiding ethics except in vague and un-compelling terms. As a result today’s leaders are mutually failing to live out and pass on one of the most necessary citizenship skills of self-government.

3) Why are not more leaders championing defined ethics like UncommonSense? Very few leaders are willing to champion defined character ethics because they are fearful of becoming the target of both rightful and wrongful accusations of hypocrisy. Others have simply become “intellectually lazy”. The result is leadership silence. Imperfect leaders who are striving to practice high character need to take an example-setting risk. Communities of leaders agreeing and acting together can begin to break the cycle of just talking about ethics (the preoccupation of most leaders) and getting on with the tough job of calling upon one another to define them and live them out.

4) What is the origin of UncommonSense: In 1989 an Ohio hospitality firm composed of a diverse group of 450 employees set out to find a “conscience-convicting character ethic” which would help unite them as they underwent the stressful task of re-engineering the company. After searching for 6 months among universities, think tanks, Fortune 500 companies and “ethics experts” the leaders discovered many character “buzz words” and mind-numbing ethical platitudes...but no single “common sense” tool that was clearly-stated, substantially defined and transferable to others. Disappointed but undaunted; they began fashioning UncommonSense: “sense” because it affirms the conscience, “uncommon” sadly...because it is no longer common. Today, the American Center for Civic Character (a non-partisan, non-profit education corporation) provides UncommonSense free of charge as a public leadership service.

5) How was UncommonSense developed? UncommonSense has endured 10 years of field application and literally hundreds of revisions based upon the critiques of hundreds of leaders. While UncommonSense remains an imperfect character ethic that invites scrutiny and constant improvement, it serves to engage business, government, education, faith, media and parental leaders in a new level of conscience-convicting character ethic definition, discussion...and determined action. This, in turn, helps groups of leaders build coalitions that last.

6) Why do you use the term “conscience-convicting” character ethic? There was a day when the word “honesty” (for instance) meant a very similar thing to a very diverse group of Americans. Today this is just not the case. Today we debate what honesty means; we have lost our “moral consensus” and along with it an accurate sense of authentic honesty. As such we must appeal this case from America’s court of public opinion to the higher court of human conscience. A consensus of conscience must be the objective of today’s shared character ethic defining efforts.

7) Why does a character ethic need to be pursued especially by leaders? Unlike any other body of

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



knowledge, UncommonSense is transferred by example not rhetoric. To acquire management skills we undergo training. To develop UncommonSense requires training, mentoring and accountability. Leaders create the most consistent compelling force and inspiration for UncommonSense adoption by others simply by setting the example.

8) How do you cultivate an UncommonSense culture? UncommonSense relies on being “educational, relational and invitational”. Ethical habits (and the resultant superior character habits or favorable virtues that it produces) first involves education and is followed by daily conscience-convicting relational “mini-decisions”, that are observable by all. With leaders setting the example and the office creating a “public stage”, the conditions are right to help people make choices that reflect UncommonSense.

9) How do you motivate people to aspire to UncommonSense? Our character ethic choices (while often being difficult) are, nonetheless 100% within our personal control...and are not governed by our social status. UncommonSense is therefore one of the few equalizing and empowering (and therefore appealing and classically American) resources for all citizens.

10) What do religious leaders think of UncommonSense?

Two focus groups composed (among others) of Orthodox and Reformed Jewish rabbis, Roman Catholic priests, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Mainline and Conservative Evangelical pastors, Mormon, Muslim, and Hindi lay leaders unanimously affirmed the conscience-convicting thesis of the code and further testified that it supported their faith’s values rather than contradicting them. They are enthusiastic about UncommonSense.

11) What are the cultural consequences of no moral consensus? The necessary conscience-convicting vanguard of character pursuit is disengaged. If character is marginalized then our moral consensus is abated and a powerful and vacuum-filling consequence of cynicism is sown into the culture. The indifference caused by cynicism is the number one enemy of moral consensus. Whatever fuels cynicism in a culture therefore is fueling civic collapse regardless of the apparent health of its Free Capital Markets or Constitutional Democracy.

12) What outcomes can we reasonably expect if we focus on leadership character ethics? Ethical leadership over time will produce an ethical following; non-ethical leadership will produce a non-ethical following. The next generation will be impacted for good or bad...It’s as simple as that. Since cultural forces are eroding ethical constructs upon which character rests countermeasures of intentional ethical education and reference resources such as UncommonSense will help leaders reestablish an intellectually honest inertia towards conscience-convicting moral consensus in America. Good people must act. Indeed, as 18th century French philosopher, Alex De Tocqueville, put it: “America will cease to be great when America ceases to be good”.

“We provide unique educational resources to help diverse leaders who represent multiple institutions adopt and co-advocate adult character-building best practices...together.”

We provide unique educational resources...

Our character-building resources convict the conscience, provide a new language for compelling leadership and identify example setting-based pathways to build a uniting and common culture of character among America’s diverse adults.

These tools are delivered in both workshop and coaching forms. We believe that effective character-building must be ethic-rich and value-neutral; detonate break-throughs in adult learners; and serve as an integrating, on-going, personal implementation map for leaders and their teams.

“UncommonSense™” and its implementation companion “The Guide to Building High Character Leaders and Organizations” meet these specifications. They are compact adult learning resources designed as templates for busy government, business, faith and education leaders.

...to help diverse leaders who represent multiple institutions...

America is world renowned for its vast array of civic, religious, educational, professional and trade associations. To move important knowledge efficiently and credibly into America’s multiple institutions one must connect with the broad association community. Since character-building is everyone’s job...we invest here.

Moreover, association leaders constantly seek to provide value for their members by identifying and providing member-enriching services, of which one of the most popular is leadership development. It is into these associations, where the gathering and enrichment of leaders occur, that the ideals of character-building have the most hope for uniting all Americans in a common, uniting initiative.

...to adopt and co-advocate adult character-building best practices...together.

Specifically, therefore, our character-building resources are targeted to association CEO’s and to the CEO’s of our sponsoring corporate co-advocates. We help these leaders make the message and practice of character-building their own and then help them advocate this through their membership services or HR/ Leadership development departments.

After we identify motivated and earnest association presidents, university deans, mayors or governors, faith denominational leaders or large business CEO’s we then create a custom coaching plan to help them implement the character-building resources internally first and then help them to “externalize” the message to their constituents and communities over time.

OUR CORE DELIVERABLES



The UncommonSense™ Declaration and Character Ethics Code:

This four page document is our workhorse and establishes the transferable target for leadership character development. It is available free of charge through our network of co-advocates or on our web site.

The “Guide to Building High Character Leaders and Organizations”:

This first workbook in an eventual series of three successive workshop support resources includes UncommonSense™, a leadership character-builder self assessment and guidance on how to build a team of character. The Guide is available only through workshops sponsored by our Co-Advocate Network.

The UncommonSense™ Co-Advocate Coaching and Workshop Network:

Our primary goal is to be a “wholesaler” not a “retailer” of the UncommonSense™ leadership character self assessments and workshops. Therefore we invest our primary energies into identifying and equipping long term, multi-institutional co-advocates who then multiply our efforts exponentially by reaching out to their constituents (at no cost to the center).

Our web site: www.CharacterUSA.org

Our web site is constantly being improved to provide a primary interface between the center and our co-advocates. Because we encourage the adoption and promotion of our resources via our co-advocates (normally with large constituencies) our site is geared to serve these leaders as they serve others. The center re-directs all media inquiries to our co-advocates.

Research and Conference Support:

The Center is constantly researching, writing and producing *practical* leadership character building resources that are then shared with others via local and national conference venues again normally via our corporate and co-advocate network.

