

The UncommonSense®

DECLARATION

From the Desk of J. Kenneth Blackwell, Ohio Secretary of State:

Throughout my years in public service, I've seen first-hand many of the positive and varied ingredients that combine to give our country its strength and viability.

One of those ingredients—character—stands out above the rest. Character is the cornerstone of American citizenship. And good citizenship is the foundation of community. It is also the foundation of both good business and good government.

Yet today's generation of leaders often lack two fundamental resources. We lack a shared vocabulary of character-building ethics, and we suffer from the absence of support for our role as on-the-job character builders.

No one is perfect, although we've all known a few people who dare to claim infallibility. For the rest of us, there is "UncommonSense." "Uncommon," because sadly, defined ethics are not common anymore and "Sense," because it prevails upon the conscience.

UncommonSense is a tool for learning the language of character. It challenges us to be life-long learners as we pursue character—as we live it, lead it, and pass it on. That's why I recommend UncommonSense as a character ethics model for Ohio's business, government, education, faith, media, health and service leaders.

I have found UncommonSense to be a rare resource—it gives a clear map of character ethics and at the same time is designed to be easily passed along to others. The sound ethics of UncommonSense create a framework to guide diverse people toward a uniting common character culture. But this cannot happen without leaders who are committed to character.

I believe UncommonSense will hold up under intellectually honest investigation. That's why I invite serious study of this document, and I ask every reader to thoughtfully articulate and share with me any critical fault they find with it.

Noble visions, worthy missions and guiding values all require and are validated by character ethics. Thus, a strong character foundation is and always will be the key predictor of true personal health, interpersonal vitality, and organizational success.

With this in mind, please consider making your own commitment to character building. By learning and living character ethics—the virtues advocated in UncommonSense—Ohio's leaders can launch a revolution of character-building in our great state. Join me.

Sincerely,


J. Kenneth Blackwell



UncommonSense®

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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 prerequisites to relationships) 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 habits 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 do not 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 toward 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 Virtue: an open, up-front, disclosing spirit)

“Everyone thinks about changing the world; but no one thinks about changing himself.”

– Leo Tolstoy

- 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 that can be influenced by our depravity). (Observable Virtue: 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 Virtue: 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 Virtue: 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 breaches 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)
- 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 / “aligned with the mission”)
- 15) LIBERTY: High-character people preserve their public rights by fulfilling their personal responsibilities.** In order to preserve public freedoms, every person must exercise private restraints. Therefore, free people embrace self-control so the need for public controls is 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)
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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 and 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 action (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 that 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 it is fueled by one’s daily responsibilities, not in the serenity of relaxation, character builders must adopt an accurate view of the benefits of suffering.

Relevance to Our Daily Lives

Persevering as a character-builder is the only thing that is truly 100% within our personal control. This means there is hope for personal change today that is not dependent on change in others or in our circumstances. Our conscience drives our convictions. These convictions generate courage and this courage drives our conduct, regardless of our past, our current circumstances, or even cultures or settings that are hostile to high character.

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

– Helen Keller