

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

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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”.