

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.