

The
POWER
of
CHARACTER in
LEADERSHIP

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DR. MYLES
MUNROE



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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**THE POWER OF CHARACTER IN LEADERSHIP:
How Values, Morals, Ethics, and Principles Affect Leaders**

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Preface

The most valuable component of leadership is not power, position, influence, notoriety, fame, talent, gifting, dynamic oratory, persuasiveness, intellectual superiority, academic achievement, or management skills. It is *character*. Character is the cradle of credibility for the leader. Without the element of strong, noble, honorable character, leadership and all its potential achievements are in danger of cancellation. Every leader is only as safe and secure as his character.

I offer this book as a resource on this often-neglected aspect of leadership, which is personal but also extremely practical. Having a foundation of ethics is central to the success and longevity of one's leadership.

Many leadership training seminars and academic programs focus on vision, skills, management, organization, teamwork, and many other helpful subjects. Yet few of these courses address the topic of the leader's character. The subject is either downplayed or never covered at all. This oversight is tragic. Not only has it permitted the encroachment of an unhealthy atmosphere of negative attitudes and practices among leaders, but it has also led to destructive consequences for individuals, societies, and nations.

Character is the most powerful force a leader can cultivate because it protects leadership. It will enable you to be a success, personally and professionally, as you carry out your purpose, vision, and goals in life.

The Power of Character in Leadership is for...

- **Leaders who are currently pursuing a vocational calling and desire to be the very best they can be.** You will learn how to establish yourself solidly as a leader and reach your goals as you cultivate enduring influence.

- ✦ ***Those who are emerging leaders or who aspire to lead.*** You will discover how ethics and values free you to carry out your singular purpose in life.
- ✦ ***Leaders who have failed—perhaps in a major way—due to a character flaw of some kind.*** You are probably asking yourself, “How did I get to this place? What do I do now? Do I still have a future as a leader?” You will see how to rebuild the foundation of your life. Ethically, you may be on shaky ground right now, but you can begin the process of developing a renewed mind-set and a solid code of ethics that will lead to sound moral character. If you’ve fallen, this book explains how to “fall up” by making changes that will transform you from the inside out.
- ✦ ***Anyone who is concerned about the lack of moral force in leadership today.*** Having leaders of character on the local, national, and global levels is the key to solving a myriad of problems in our world. This book reveals a process for rebuilding our leaders so they can tackle the issues of our day.
- ✦ ***People who don’t yet understand that they are leaders.*** If you believe that leadership is for only a select few, you have accepted a false idea about leaders. Every person on earth is a leader in a particular area of gifting—and character development provides the foundation for discovering how you were born to lead.

In relation to the last point, the focus of my leadership training has always been the transformation of followers into leaders, and leaders into agents of change. There are millions of people who have tremendous potential for leadership, but no one has ever encouraged them to express it and develop it. In fact, many people are being told that they are “nothing.” Eventually, they believe it, so they do not fulfill their purpose in life.

If that has been your perspective, this book will help you to understand what it means to be a genuine leader and how to develop your leadership potential.

Regardless of your background, I invite you to discover the remarkable power of character in leadership—and how values, morals, ethics, and principles affect both the development and the outcome of your personal leadership success.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Leadership and the Crisis of Character

“Whatever failures I have known, whatever errors I have committed, whatever follies I have witnessed in public and private life have been the consequences of action without thought.”

—Bernard Baruch, businessman and advisor to U.S. presidents

In the dynamic drama of contemporary leadership playing on the world stage today, there are many “characters” who lack character. Moreover, the trail of history is littered with many would-be great men and women who harnessed the reins of power in various fields—political, social, economic, corporate, athletic, spiritual, and more. They wielded great influence and/or control over the lives of others; many felt the weight of material wealth and fame—only to have it all disintegrate and blow away like dust in the wind because of their tragic deficiencies of character.

A lack of strong leadership has made a mess of our world. Every country on earth is challenged by an absence of resolute leadership as it struggles under precarious times. Politically, economically, and socially, our nations are experiencing turmoil and moral decay—characterized by crime, religious conflicts, economic uncertainty, the unequal distribution of resources, political corruption, civil unrest, the disintegration of the family, cybercrime, poverty, disease, famine, sexual abuse, greed, racial clashes, ethnic “cleansing,” global terrorism, and war.

Our twenty-first century world seems to be an experiment in global self-destruction. We need strong leaders who have the courage to grapple with perplexing issues and seemingly overwhelming problems, as well as the ability

to discover and implement workable solutions. More than anything else, what we require today are competent, effective, visionary leaders in all walks of life.

The Missing Element: “Moral Force”

The leaders who have emerged today seem to believe that the primary qualities needed to address our troubled, demanding times are the following: great vision; academic and intellectual superiority; dynamic oratory and other communications skills that have the power to persuade; management expertise; and the ability to control others. However, time and again, history has shown that the most important quality a true leader should and must possess is the moral force of a noble and stable character.

There are about two hundred countries in the world today, and each one has leaders on the national, regional, and local level. Many nations also have aspiring leaders who run for public office each year. In addition, corporations and businesses, religious institutions, nonprofit organizations and community groups, and other enterprises in society all have leaders. Many people, in a variety of fields—economics, government, law, business, education, medicine, science, entertainment, sports, and so forth—are leaders or are training to be leaders.

We have all these skilled people in positions of power, with an ample supply of potential leaders. Yet the leaders who are trying to keep their nations, companies, organizations, and families from sinking are either lacking, or deficient in, that vital element of character.

Across the globe, we have seen leaders fall apart, ethically and morally. Many leaders start strong (or appear to), only to end up “crashing and burning.” A number of leaders have operated under a reputation of integrity that was only a façade. While they appeared competent and well-adjusted on the outside, they lacked real substance within. They were missing the element of moral force, and their ethical poverty eventually became evident. The public didn’t know who these leaders really were—until the leaders became enmeshed in scandal due to their reckless conduct, often finding themselves facing legal consequences for unlawful financial practices, theft, extortion, cheating, perjury...and the like.

The public didn't know who their leaders really were—until the leaders became enmeshed in scandal.

Meanwhile, other people in positions of power have been hindered by incompetence because they have never learned solid leadership principles and how to implement them. Others are capable, but they still aren't helping to address the needs of their society because they would rather destroy a corporate competitor or nullify a political opponent than work together with other leaders to address serious problems and find solutions.

Leadership Is Central in Our World

The contemporary crisis of character in leadership is alarming because, to a great extent, leaders determine the direction, security, and prosperity of cultures, societies, and nations. The following concepts demonstrate the central role of leadership in human society.

- **Nothing happens without leadership.** Leaders establish governments, start businesses, make scientific discoveries and advances, disseminate religious and philosophical ideas, and otherwise foster human culture.
- **Nothing succeeds without leadership.** Leaders develop ideas, carry out endeavors, and keep projects going.
- **Nothing is altered or transformed without leadership.** Unless an individual or a group of people begin to think differently or act differently, circumstances usually remain the same—or become worse.
- **Nothing develops without leadership.** Leaders take initiative to implement innovations, build on what has come before, and expand on prior successes.
- **Nothing advances without leadership.** Leaders are enterprising and forward-looking. They are often eager to enhance a society's quality of life through improved efficiency, greater convenience, and the introduction of new products and services.

- **Nothing improves without leadership.** Leaders see potential in situations and conditions where others see no hope and have no vision of the way things *could be*.
- **Nothing is corrected without leadership.** To fix errors and solve problems, someone has to take responsibility to see that adjustments are made. Leaders help societies to make a course correction when they have veered onto a destructive path.

Leadership is therefore key to human preservation, growth, and change. No matter what condition a society or nation finds itself in, it didn't arrive there by accident. Someone led them there.

Every person on earth is being guided, influenced, or manipulated by someone. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, we are continually being led by those who are our "official" leaders, as well as those who have become our de facto leaders by their influence over us. That is why our current problems won't be solved without a renewed emphasis on the foundational elements of positive and effective leadership. Countries, corporations, institutions, organizations, departments, and so forth will be effective and successful only insofar as their leaders are effective and successful. When leaders in all realms of life make a commitment to strengthen their leadership, they will enable their society to improve, survive, and progress.

*"We know that leadership is very much related to change.
As the pace of change accelerates, there is naturally a
greater need for effective leadership."*

—John Kotter, renowned businessman, professor, and author

Who Has Been Leading Us?

I have spoken at universities where I've met administrators, professors, and students. I have been a consultant to corporate gurus and government leaders. I have been interviewed on hundreds of television shows. In the process, I have met many well-known leaders. Yet, with a few exceptions, the famous and influential people I have encountered have not impressed

me with their leadership because it did not appear to include the essential ingredient of character.

Who has been leading our nations? Unfortunately, we have been influenced by many leaders and institutions that lack the quality of moral force—and their attitudes and actions are being absorbed by the culture at large.

Below is a sampling of leaders and organizations in various realms of life that, at the time of the writing of this manuscript, have been associated with ethical controversies, sexual and financial scandals, or criminal activity. In essence, they were victims of our society's crisis of defective character. Many leaders on the world and national stage who should be about the business of building up their nations are instead violating the public trust, breaking the law, and committing crimes against humanity. They are finding themselves in the headlines—and appearing before judges and other tribunals.

Some of the issues represented in this list are complex, while others are straightforward. At the time this book went to press, the outcomes of several of these situations were yet to be resolved—either by legislatures or courts. In some cases, not all the facts have been made public to allow for a full assessment. Yet these examples from the last several decades illustrate the range of ethical and moral crises in leadership with which the United States and nations around the world are being confronted.

Government and Politics

- The administration of U.S. President Barack Obama is dealing with several controversial ethical issues. Mr. Obama was admonished by the press, members of the U.S. Congress, and the public regarding the Justice Department's subpoenas of the phone records of reporters from the Associated Press while the department gathered intelligence related to a leak about a terrorist threat. A similar controversy flared in relation to phone records from Fox News in regard to Justice's investigation into a leak about North Korea.¹ Likewise, the president came under fire for the National Security Agency's ongoing practice of monitoring the phone records of ordinary Americans while looking for possible terrorist activity.² In

addition, the White House was criticized after revelations that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) gave certain conservative groups extra scrutiny when they applied for tax-exempt status. All of these issues are ongoing.

- ✦ Anthony Weiner of New York resigned his seat in the U.S. Congress after it was disclosed that the married congressman had sent sexually explicit text messages and photographs to women. He then ran for mayor of New York City, refusing to drop out of the primary race, even after a subsequent “sexting” scandal, despite political pressure to do so.
- ✦ President Bill Clinton was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives for perjury and obstruction of justice related to his testimony about the Monica Lewinsky scandal. He remained in office when the impeachment votes for both charges failed in the Senate.
- ✦ Ronald Reagan’s presidency was tainted by the Iran-Contra affair, in which the National Security Agency sold arms to Iran in exchange for American hostages, even though an embargo against Iran was in effect. Some of the money from the sale then went to Nicaraguan “Contras” to support their fight against the Sandinista government. This was in violation of the Boland Amendment, which was passed by Congress to prohibit military aid to the Contras. National Security Advisor Rear Admiral John Poindexter resigned, and charges were filed against fourteen people, though six were later pardoned by President George H. W. Bush.³
- ✦ Richard Nixon became the first U.S. president to resign his office in the wake of his participation in a cover-up of illegal activities authorized by members of his staff during his reelection campaign. The year prior to Nixon’s resignation, his vice president resigned his office due to political corruption involving bribery and extortion, as well as tax evasion.
- ✦ The former president of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is being investigated for his alleged role in a scheme to buy votes from members of the Brazilian Congress during the time he was in office.⁴

- ✦ The newly elected president of Kenya and his deputy president, William Ruto, face trial by the International Criminal Court for “crimes against humanity, including murder and rape.”⁵ The *Wall Street Journal* reported, “The court alleges Mr. Kenyatta and his deputy president, William Ruto, incited gang violence that left more than 1,000 people dead following his predecessor’s disputed election in 2007. Both men deny the charges.”⁶
- ✦ The Yugoslav war crimes tribunal of the United Nations “convicted six Bosnian Croat political and military leaders...of persecuting, expelling, and murdering Muslims during Bosnia’s war.” The convictions may be appealed.⁷
- ✦ Manuel Noriega, the former dictator of Panama, served a prison sentence of almost two decades in the United States for drug trafficking. He then served a brief time in jail in France for money laundering and was required to surrender nearly three million dollars held in his French bank accounts. France then permitted that he be extradited to Panama to serve prison time there for murder.⁸

Business and Economics

- ✦ JPMorgan Chase & Co. agreed to pay \$410 million in response to charges of price manipulation: “The bank’s energy unit, JP Morgan Venture Energy Corporation, was accused of raising electricity rates in [California and Midwest] markets between September 2010 and November 2012 through ‘manipulative bidding strategies,’ according to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.”⁹ Previously, the company lost \$7 billion after it “engaged in risky trades (derivatives).” This loss had led to various investigations into the company’s practices and procedures.¹⁰
- ✦ Employees at Halliburton, the contractor for British Petroleum (BP) in the Deepwater Horizon oil well project, destroyed evidence concerning the 2010 explosion and massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that killed eleven people. Under a plea bargain, the U.S. Department of Justice charged the company with a misdemeanor, fined it \$200,000, gave it three years’ probation, and required that the company cooperate with the department’s ongoing

investigation of the Deepwater incident.¹¹ Halliburton has been involved in other ethical controversies, including the charge by the Securities and Exchange Commission that the subsidiary of a company owned by Halliburton “bribed Nigerian government officials over a 10-year period, in violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA).”¹²

- In the Deepwater incident, “BP agreed to pay \$4.5 billion in penalties and pleaded guilty to 14 criminal charges related to the explosion.”¹³ The company apparently ignored advice from the Halliburton engineer to install a safer pipe and failed to test the cement sealing to see if it had been successful.¹⁴
- Former Wall Street mogul Bernie Madoff operated “the biggest Ponzi scheme in history...[he] bilked his clients of billions of dollars and fooled regulators for decades...”¹⁵ Madoff was convicted of securities fraud, investment advisor fraud, wire and mail fraud, money laundering, filing false documents with the Securities and Exchange Commission, making false statements, perjury, and theft from employee benefit funds. He was sentenced to 150 years in prison.¹⁶
- Over the course of decades, the Vatican Bank has been decried and investigated for functioning according to an internal culture of corruption, including alleged money laundering and ties with the Mafia. In 2013, there was a shakeup of leadership at the bank after a new money laundering scandal.¹⁷
- The former chairman of the mammoth Hong Kong-based Carrian Group received a three-year sentence for bribing bank officials to obtain loans the equivalent of \$238 million in U.S. dollars.¹⁸
- The German company Siemens agreed to a settlement of €330 million with the Greek government for alleged bribery in connection with contract bids for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.¹⁹
- Among other companies involved in child labor scandals, the clothing company GAP released a report in 2004 in which they acknowledged breaches of child labor laws and workplace safety.²⁰

- Through revelations by former tobacco executive and whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand, it was disclosed that cigarette companies like Brown & Williamson had been intentionally attempting to addict consumers to nicotine.²¹

Sports

- The spotless public image of golf champion Tiger Woods was tarnished when his multiple extramarital affairs became public. His wife divorced him, and he lost several lucrative endorsement deals worth \$100 million. Woods received therapy for sexual addiction and returned to the sport.²²
- In 2007, New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick was fined \$500,000 and the team was fined \$250,000 in the so-called Spygate scandal involving the videotaping of opposing teams' coaching signals. The Patriots also had to forgo a potential first-round draft pick.
- Champion cyclist Lance Armstrong and Olympic sprinter Marion Jones are among many athletes who have admitted to using illegal performance-enhancing drugs. Armstrong's seven Tour de France titles were taken away, and he was banned from professional cycling for life.²³ Jones was stripped of her three Olympic gold medals and sentenced to six months in prison, two years' probation, and community service for lying about her drug use to a federal agent, as well as for her participation in a check fraud operation.²⁴
- Jerry Sandusky, former assistant football coach at Penn State University, received a thirty- to sixty-year prison sentence after being convicted of 45 counts of child sexual abuse.²⁵
- Baseball star Pete Rose, a former Cincinnati Reds player and manager, was indicted for repeated gambling on baseball games and was banned from baseball for life. He also served five months of jail time and community service for income tax evasion.²⁶

Religion

- Numerous sexual abuse allegations have been lodged against Catholic priests in nations around the world. Charges have been filed in

various cases, and there has been fallout over cover-ups and inaction by Church officials.²⁷

- Atlanta megachurch pastor Bishop Eddie Long was accused of sexually abusing four teens. Bishop Long has stated that he is innocent, and he settled out of court with the plaintiffs.²⁸ Concerning a separate case, twelve former church members filed a lawsuit against Long and financial adviser Ephren W. Taylor for losses in an alleged Ponzi scheme.²⁹ The Securities and Exchange Commission has filed a lawsuit over the scheme in U.S. District Court against Taylor, his company, and his former chief operating officer.³⁰
- Once-prominent televangelist Jimmy Swaggart lost credibility and influence when he became enmeshed in a sex scandal involving a prostitute.³¹ Televangelist Jim Bakker was also caught up in a scandal due to his adulterous relationship with a former church secretary. In addition, he spent time in prison for mail and wire fraud and conspiracy in relation to his ministry's fund-raising.³²
- Ted Haggard resigned as pastor of his church in Colorado and as president of the National Association of Evangelicals after a homosexual affair with a male prostitute, as well as illegal drug use.³³

Arts, Entertainment, and Media

- Mel Gibson, formerly one of Hollywood's most popular and influential actors, was divorced by his wife after more than thirty years of marriage and seven children, for "irreconcilable differences," though infidelity may have played a role; his wife was awarded half his fortune.³⁴ Gibson was also convicted of hitting his girlfriend, resulting in a sentence of three years' probation, counseling, and community service.³⁵
- *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was fired for unethical reporting. The *Times*' public editor, Margaret Sullivan, stated that Blair "lied and faked and cheated his way through story after story—scores of them, for years. He fabricated sources, plagiarized material from other publications, and pretended to be places he never went." The reporter's conduct hurt the *Times*' reputation for accuracy and honesty.³⁶

- Author James Frey admitted to fabricating facts in his best-selling memoir *A Million Little Pieces*, setting off a controversy about what constitutes memoir and the line between fact and fiction.³⁷
- Singing superstar Whitney Houston died tragically of accidental drowning when she was in the midst of a professional comeback, with “the effects of heart disease and cocaine found in her system... contributing factors.”³⁸

Charity/Nonprofit

- Greg Mortenson, coauthor of the best-selling book *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace One School at a Time*, was cited for mismanagement of his charity Central Asia Institute, as well as the misuse of funds. The attorney general of Montana, where the charity is located, stated, “Mr. Mortenson may not have intentionally deceived the board or his employees, but his disregard for and attitude about basic record keeping and accounting for his activities essentially had the same effect.” Mortenson was not charged with any criminal activity, and he agreed to repay \$1 million to the charity.³⁹
- *Three Cups of Tea* describes Mortenson's humanitarian work in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The book was coauthored by David Oliver Relin. In a controversy unrelated to the charity mismanagement, there were allegations that Mortenson had included fabrications in his book, while Mortenson asserted only some literary license was taken. Coauthor Relin, whose integrity was effectively never in question in the matter, had acknowledged in his introduction to the book that there might be unavoidable inaccuracies in relating Mortenson's experiences. He wrote, “His fluid sense of time made pinning down the exact sequence of many events in this book almost impossible.”⁴⁰ The controversy placed stress on Relin vocationally, as well as financially, as he defended himself in a civil lawsuit over the book that was brought against Mortenson and himself. A judge dismissed the suit. Relin committed suicide in 2012; his family stated that he had “suffered from depression.”⁴¹

- ✦ The former head of the United Way, William Aramony, spent six years in prison for his part in embezzling between \$600,000 and \$1.2 million from the charitable agency. He used the money to support a “lavish lifestyle” and a young mistress.⁴² Aramony was convicted of “among other things, conspiracy to defraud, mail fraud, wire fraud, transportation of fraudulently acquired property, engaging in monetary transactions in unlawful activity, filing false tax returns, and aiding in the filing of false tax returns.”⁴³
- ✦ The charitable organization Feed the Children fired its founder and director, Larry Jones, for alleged misconduct. Jones filed a wrongful-termination lawsuit, and the organization filed a countersuit, “accus[ing] Jones of taking bribes, hoarding hardcore pornography...using a charity employee as a personal nanny...mispending charity funds, pocketing travel money, and keeping gifts from appearances.”⁴⁴ Jones maintains his innocence. He and Feed the Children reached an out-of-court settlement in which Jones apparently received some compensation but was not reinstated as head of the organization.⁴⁵

These are some examples of public figures, companies, and government agencies that have been associated with issues and scandals involving character, ethics, and the violation of the law. Many more examples could be cited. Revelations of such scandals have become commonplace—they are reported almost every day in newspapers, on broadcast and cable news, on the Internet, on Facebook, and via Twitter.

From a leadership standpoint, these situations illustrate several realities: (1) Character problems are widespread among leaders in many fields of endeavor. (2) A leader’s character flaws often end up hurting innocent people. (3) No matter how many accomplishments a leader achieves, no matter how much money he makes, and no matter how high he goes up the ladder of success, if he is deficient in character, his talent and skill are no guarantee he will stay on top, or that he won’t pay a great price.

Ask Bill Clinton. Ask Bernie Madoff. Ask Lance Armstrong. Ask Jim Bakker. Ask Mel Gibson. Ask Greg Mortenson. Their character flaws caught up with them. For some, it tainted their reputations. For others, it

virtually destroyed their lives, as well as the lives of others. For this reason, the critical issue of character must be addressed, as nations, regions, and local communities; businesses and corporations; civic organizations; religious groups; political parties; armed forces; educational institutions; and families continue to search for quality and qualified leaders to take the helm of responsibility and guide them to a better life and a promising future.

Though the above are high-profile cases that became national and global scandals, the disintegration of character today is found in every type of leadership and on every level of society—including the local level and “ordinary” people’s lives. It is found in our homes, with leaders (spouses and parents) who have extramarital affairs, use illegal drugs, abuse alcohol, rack up gambling debts, enter into risky financial investments in hopes of finding a fast track to wealth, abuse family members, and engage in other destructive actions. It is found in our local companies, with workers who embezzle money, steal equipment, or are lazy on the job. It is found in our schools, with teachers who engage in sexual relations with their students, or with students who cheat on exams and engage in bullying through social networks—and sometimes even bring guns to school and shoot their classmates and teachers. It is found in our universities, with professors who plagiarize scholarly works and undergraduates who pay other students to write their term papers.

*No one should think he is too smart or too safe to avoid
consequences of a lack of character.*

Perhaps you are thinking, *I’m not in danger of losing my job or being sentenced to prison.* However, if we as leaders ignore the necessity of character development—if we allow character defects to influence us—we risk failure in our personal lives, our leadership, and our future. No one should think he is too smart or too safe to avoid consequences of a lack of character.

A Psyche of Distrust

One disturbing result of the crisis of character in leadership is that it has created a psyche of distrust among the general public. There are, of

course, many earnest, hardworking people of integrity in all walks of life who strive to do the right thing and are helping to uphold the society in which they live. But while the nations of the world desperately need strong, authentic leaders, too many people in positions of authority are self-absorbed. They operate according to misplaced priorities or opportunistic motives. They fail to offer anything of lasting value to their families, associates, clients, customers, or fellow citizens. Instead, they abuse and misuse them. Ethically deficient leaders are leaving a legacy of fear, skepticism, and confusion among those who follow them or are otherwise affected by their leadership.

For example, will the time come when we can watch a race at a track-and-field meet or a cycling event and not secretly ask ourselves if the champion won because he used performance-enhancing drugs? We often harbor the notion that the winner must have cheated somehow. Or, even though we may make allowance for some unintended memory lapses, when will we be able to read a memoir and not have to wonder if some or most of it has been fabricated? Sadly, we have become wary of the validity of such accounts. Or again, when a large corporation is successful, when will we be rid of lingering suspicions about its business practices and how it turned a profit? We question whether big corporations can make money and still be ethical.

What Happened to Character in Leadership?

Why are today's leaders so deficient in character? A major reason is that, across the globe, much of leadership training—both formal and informal—fails to emphasize or even include the concept of character as an essential element of leadership. In addition, many governmental and corporate leaders, along with supervisors, bosses, and others in authority, are not mentoring their colleagues and employees in important principles of character development (though they still expect honesty and integrity from them). Instead, as we will see, other elements of leadership have been given priority—titles, position, power, intelligence, skills, gifts, talents, educational qualifications, knowledge, competence, and charisma or other personality traits.

In the process, we have produced...

- charismatic leaders without character
- gifted leaders without convictions
- powerful leaders without principles
- intellectual leaders without morality
- visionary leaders without values
- spiritual leaders without conscience

The nations of the world do not lack people in leadership positions. They lack genuine leadership *in* their leaders. The result is that we have no shortage of individuals running our countries and businesses and organizations who have titles and high-level positions. They are well-dressed and well-groomed. They are excellent communicators. They are highly skilled in their fields. Yet, as we have noted, these qualities haven't prevented an epidemic of "character fallout" among leaders of various categories—whether presidents and prime ministers, CEOs and directors, priests and pastors, or spouses and parents.

*The nations of the world do not lack people in leadership positions.
They lack genuine leadership in their leaders.*

Telltale Signs

What great leaders can you name who are alive today? (If you weren't able to answer that question without giving it a lot of thought, you're not alone.)

As I write this, Nelson Mandela has been in the hospital for two months due to a lung infection. Mandela was the first democratically elected leader of South Africa and was instrumental in dismantling apartheid. He is now in his mid-nineties. Over the past few years, I have noticed that every time he is admitted to the hospital, people around the world hold their breaths, because no one knows how much longer he will be with us.

What is it about our image of this man that makes us afraid to lose him, even though we understand he is at an advanced age? Could it be that we do not want Mr. Mandela to die because he may be one of the last remaining bastions of true leadership—a man who stands as the definition of character, which we all personally long for and want to see evidenced in the leaders we desire to follow? Is he among the last in a line of historical figures who possessed a vital leadership quality that has very little to do with standard ideas of “power” but nevertheless has the ability to change the world?

I believe that Nelson Mandela’s strong convictions about human dignity and equality among the races are the reason people all over the world want him to live forever. Perhaps South Africans are afraid their country might fall apart after he passes. To me, people’s anxious reactions to the health of Mr. Mandela, aside from being expressions of human compassion and respect, are telltale signs that character in leadership is so rare that people feel we can’t afford to let go of one great leader.

The Future of Leadership

What will be the future of leadership in our world? A familiar but significant truth applies to our present leadership crisis: You can lead people only as far as you have gone yourself. And many of our leaders have not stepped up to the starting line of character development, let alone crossed over it.

Many well-known people who have failed ethically have issued apologies through the media. Even though admitting you were wrong (or that you “made a mistake”) and saying you are sorry is a good start, if it is heartfelt, it doesn’t necessarily indicate a resolve to change your behavior and act responsibly in the future. You have to make a personal commitment to do that. You have to allow it to become an internal conviction—part of your personal code of ethics.

A future that includes strong, ethical leaders in our governments, businesses, educational institutions, civil organizations, and homes will be secured only by a return to character training and personal character

development as our *priority*. Leaders must embrace this challenge and actively seek to change their ways if our nations are to move from a mind-set of corruption and compromise to an outlook of conviction and character. Instead of seeking political power or economic power or entertainment power or sports power, leaders should pursue political character or economic character or entertainment character or sports character.

A future that includes strong, ethical leaders will be secured only by a return to character training and personal character development as our priority.

A new type of leader must begin to emerge within our governing institutions, our communities, our businesses, our places of employment, our families—and ourselves. Leadership that is weak in ethics and values has allowed our nations to fall apart. It has also initiated many of the problems we grapple with in the world. A return to character in leadership will enable us to begin to address these problems from a position of strength, resolve, and honor.

I have given talks on the power of character in leadership in various halls of government across the globe. Some leaders have literally wept as they've explained that no one has ever taught them about the part character plays in leadership. They were instructed on how to manage resources, but they were never taught how to manage their own lives—and how their application of such knowledge was crucial for effective and successful leadership.

Each of us must not only understand and implement the principles of leadership but also make a commitment to become established in character, adhering to a strong code of ethics. Then we must continually grow in the development of our character, so that we can have a positive and lasting impact on our generation and generations to come.

“A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on.”⁴⁶

—C. S. Lewis

PART I:

The Priority of Character

I

Character Matters

“A man’s character is his fate.”
—Heraclitus, Greek philosopher

On the day that former business magnate Bernard Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison for his massive Ponzi scheme—which cost his clients billions of dollars—the judge made some striking comments about Madoff’s life and leadership:

In terms of mitigating factors in a white-collar fraud case such as this, I would expect to see letters from family and friends and colleagues. But not a single letter has been submitted attesting to Mr. Madoff’s good deeds or good character or civic or charitable activities. The absence of such support is telling.¹

Remarkably—and significantly—not one friend, family member, neighbor, colleague, or acquaintance came forward to offer a positive statement about Madoff’s character or deeds. Such a statement might have helped to commute his sentence, allowing him the possibility of being released on bail some time before the end of his life.

“Better than Gold”

An ancient proverb declares, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”² Many fallen leaders could affirm the truth of this proverb. While some have fallen from higher and more public places than others, they have all suffered losses. These

losses were avoidable, but they came about because the leaders lacked “a good name,” or integrity.

Starting Strong Then Self-destructing

I have been training leaders for more than thirty years, in more than seventy nations. It has been a true joy to see men and women throughout the world discover who they were born to be, and subsequently make an impact on their homes, communities, businesses, and nations through their personal leadership.

There’s nothing I want more than for leaders to be successful—fulfilling their purpose and vision in life. Specifically, I want *you*, as a leader, to succeed.

Yet I have observed a troubling development in our world. Too many leaders start strong but then fail or self-destruct because of defects in their moral compass. As a result, they lose much—or all—they have worked for. They nullify their potential, so that they are unable to make future contributions to their generation. And *every* leader’s contribution is needed today as we face a myriad of complicated issues and crises across the globe that need the influence of strong leadership. This is a critical time in our world when the future of leadership is at stake.

The Greatest Obstacle to Leadership Success

As a leadership consultant, I have witnessed the frustrations of national leaders and their cabinet ministers as they have tried to deal with the complex political, economic, and social challenges confronting their nations. I have worked with corporate executives who were determined to discover a more principled and effective leadership approach for themselves and their staff members. I have observed the string of fallen leaders in a variety of fields whose ethical failings have been shouted to the world almost daily via news headlines and talk show programs.

Everywhere, people are struggling with the idea of what it means to be a leader and on what foundation they can build true leadership.

*This is a critical time in our world when
the future of leadership is at stake.*

Certainly, there are times when a leader fails because his knowledge and skills aren't right for the particular business, organization, or government for which he works. Or, the timing may not be right for him—perhaps he was promoted too soon and isn't able to handle the responsibility. It could be that his lack of training in the essential principles of leadership keeps him from pursuing his purpose and potential, or from recognizing the right time to move to the next level of leadership. In such cases, the person's position is not one that can—or should—be preserved. He needs to step back and reevaluate his true place as a leader.

Yet I have concluded that the greatest obstacle to a leader's success is a deficit of character. If I could teach a leader one thing that I believe would preserve his leadership, and even his very life, it would be the priority of character—internal values and principles that one is committed to and that manifest in one's life as ethical conduct.

What Kind of Character?

Throughout this book, we will be examining various definitions of character so that we may have a full picture of its meanings and applications. We'll begin with one of the most universal. Character is:

the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation.

In the sense of this definition, everyone has “character.” We are each identified by the sum of our mental and ethical traits.

But the question we are asking is this: As we exercise leadership, of what kind, or quality, are our mental and ethical traits? Are they positive or negative? Do they build up or tear down? As we talk about character, therefore, we will focus on what it means to develop and manifest honorable principles and ethics that will distinguish our lives.

In the world of leadership training, there is an abundance of seminars and workshops that offer instruction on the leader's purpose, vision, and passion. There are also many academic courses available on leadership principles, business management, team building, and so forth. While important, they focus mainly on the mechanics of leadership.

How many courses or training sessions do you see offered on the topic of character formation and the establishment of strong values? On how to live according to one's conscience, not compromising one's standards? Not many. This vital aspect of leadership is being overlooked—to our own detriment.

Moral deficits frequently lead people to negative or ruinous consequences—such as missing out on promotions and advancements, being fired from their jobs, losing their life savings, betraying their families, surrendering their lifelong dreams, and going to prison. A leader must know how to establish a solid foundation for living that will sustain him and keep him on the right path in times of uncertainty, temptation, and crisis.

“Convicted” for Good Character

The judge's comments about Bernie Madoff's character lead us to ask ourselves some probing questions about our own lives:

- If my family, friends, and colleagues were asked to give a statement under oath in court about the strength of my character, what would they say? Would they be able to talk about my good values and the positive contributions I have made to society?
- Changing the analogy around, would their testimony be strong enough to “convict” me for my good character? If so, would their assessment be true in light of what I know about myself?
- How much importance have I placed on having a good name—and the character to back it up?
- What difference would it make to my family, my business, or my organization for me to be acknowledged as a person of genuine integrity?

- Am I living ethically in all areas of my life—such as the ways I work with others, meet my responsibilities, and treat others in the world?

Your Personal Security System

Good character is like a personal security system for your life. Many people install security devices in their homes and places of business to protect them from outside forces—such as thieves who would steal from them and intruders who would do harm to their family members or employees.

Suppose a would-be thief tried to open a window of a home that was electronically “armed” by the security system. An alarm would sound, exposing the intruder, with the goal of scaring him off, while alerting the security company. Or, what if a trespasser managed to sneak into an office building during working hours and lie low until everyone had left for the day? If the security system has been installed properly, the moment he came out of hiding to steal or ransack, the system would detect his movement and set off a signal, alerting security and/or law enforcement officials to his presence.

*Good character, or moral force,
is like a personal security system for your life.*

We can “install” character in our lives so that it will work like those security systems. We do this by developing values and establishing a code of ethics that will alert us to, and protect us from, the negative effects of various outside influences—such as life’s pressures, difficulties, and temptations. These negative influences can threaten our leadership by invading our lives and stealing our willpower, common sense, and better judgment. Values and ethics also safeguard us from internal “intruders”—our own human frailties that cause us to rationalize immoral behavior and take ethical shortcuts.

True leadership has always been built on strong character. That is why we need a new respect for this essential leadership quality. Not only that, but we must immediately begin to promote its restoration. Many leaders

today are attempting, unsuccessfully, to separate the ethics of their personal lives from the responsibilities of their public lives. That approach might seem legitimate on face value. Yet below the surface is this crucial reality: Leadership is not just a role one plays; it is a life one leads.

A Foundation of Character

Some people have a cavalier attitude toward ethics and morals—aware of them but essentially disregarding them. However, other people have never really been trained in the principles of character, so they make unwise decisions that lead to their downfall. We can all think of people who were admirable in many ways but fell because they lacked the discretion or discipline that comes from cultivating good character. For example, they may have started associating with “friends” who weren’t looking out for their welfare and drew them into illegal activity. Or, they may have begun experimenting with drugs or alcohol because it seemed “fun” or provided a release from life’s pressures, only to fall into the snare of addiction.

A failure in character can happen to anyone, in any vocation or stratum of life. For example, there was the case of two elementary school cafeteria workers from Pennsylvania who were described as “sweet, hard working lunch ladies” but who stole more than ninety thousand dollars of lunch money over a period of eight years to feed their gambling addictions.³ Similar stories have unfolded in communities across the globe.

I recognize that addictions to gambling or to alcohol, drugs, or other substances can be the result of physical predispositions or deep emotional issues. These often require the assistance of a professional counselor. Yet character training is an essential part of the healing process in these cases. As we will see, the development of character in an individual begins with the realization of his value as a human being and an understanding of what he was born to accomplish. With that awareness, he can gain a new sense of self-worth, internal strength, and hope for the future.

No matter what type of leader you are or how widespread your influence, you face personal temptations, challenges, and stresses. And only a foundation of character will sustain you and your leadership.

Leadership is not just a role one plays; it is a life one leads.

“Easier Kept than Recovered”

Thomas Paine wrote, “Character is much easier kept than recovered.” Character is like preventive medicine—it keeps you morally healthy so that you won’t develop maladies as a result of ethical flaws. One of the most serious of these disorders is untrustworthiness. Once you lose the trust of your family, your friends, or your colleagues, it is very difficult to win it back.

Imagine you owned a business and had been using a particular supplier for many years. Then, the supplier was exposed as having been repeatedly dishonest in his billing practices. Assuming he wasn’t put in jail, would you continue to do business with him?

Or, suppose you had supported a particular politician but found out that he had been taking bribes for years, living a lavish lifestyle. Would you continue to support him?

Chances are, no.

We can easily understand why leaders who have ethical defects lose the trust of their followers, because we have all experienced some type of betrayal, as well as the pain and anger it generates. Perhaps you have been overcharged for repair services, had your house broken into and robbed, been blindsided by the unfaithfulness of a spouse, or had a colleague gossip about confidential information you shared. You understand what it means to be a victim of someone who is operating with a character deficit. As leaders, we must ask ourselves, “Am I, in any way, violating the trust of those who have placed their faith in me? What impact am I having on those who are influenced or affected by my behavior?”

Once you lose the trust of others, it is very difficult to win it back.

The Courage to Identify and Root Out Weaknesses

It is not just the Bernie Madoffs of this world who have character flaws. And it is not only “big” ethical issues like fraud and infidelity that erode our integrity, injure our credibility, and wrong others, damaging the quality of our leadership. Character has many practical, everyday implications.

For example, how would you rate your consistency? If you are always delinquent in paying your bills due to carelessness, it can, among other things, affect your credit standing and that of your family or business. One result is that you could miss out on opportunities to acquire loans to expand your company, thereby limiting the growth of your business. In a similar way, if you are regularly late for appointments and meetings, you can erode others’ confidence in you and prompt them to decline future collaborations that would have been advantageous for you.

Or, could a lack of self-discipline be undermining your strengths? For instance, do negative emotions such as anger control you? If you hold on to grudges, you may lose out on beneficial relationships, as well as sacrifice your own peace of mind as you waste unnecessary energy dwelling on bitter thoughts. Or, if you allow yourself to abuse alcohol or drugs, you will not only do harm to your health but also put yourself at serious risk of losing the respect of people you value and who can support your leadership (not to mention the ramifications of any legal violations).

All of our negative attitudes and careless behaviors weaken our leadership. The effects of our unaddressed character flaws inevitably cause us damage. Whenever we fail to pay attention to issues of character, we will experience some kind of loss.

The fallen leaders whom we know personally or read about in the headlines are warnings to us. We must recognize that every decision we make adds a sentence to our life story. Will the complete story of your life and leadership add up to something positive and honorable? There is only one way to ensure this outcome—through the intentional development of character.

A leader who desires to be strong and effective will summon the courage to identify and root out his weaknesses.

Most people have certain positive character traits and certain negative character traits. Picture a continuum where some people have moved toward the positive side of character, while some have moved toward the negative side. Where are you on that measure? Are you on the positive side, with conviction and integrity—or on the negative side, with duplicity and moral compromise? Your answer will require some introspection, including an examination of your personal motives. It is easy for us to overlook areas of ethical weakness in our lives, and to remain unaware of how these weaknesses affect the quality of our leadership.

A leader who desires to be strong and effective will summon the courage to identify and root out his weaknesses, preventing them from growing into larger, more damaging issues.

The Priority of Character

There are many components to leadership, but I consider the following three areas to be indispensable: (1) purpose and vision; (2) potential and ability; and (3) values, ethics, and principles. Of these three areas, the most important is the third, because values, ethics, and principles protect a leader's purpose from being sidelined or destroyed.

Purpose and *vision* show a leader what direction he is meant to go in life. All leaders live by a sense of meaning. They believe they are here on earth to do something important for humanity. The knowledge of their purpose is a catalyst, giving them internal motivation.

Potential is a leader's innate gifts and qualities, while *ability* includes all the skills, expertise, education, knowledge, wisdom, and insights a leader has developed and acquired, as well as all the other resources at his disposal that will enable him to accomplish his purpose. Leaders must believe in their own capacity to fulfill the vision that resides in their mind and heart.

Values, *ethics*, and *principles* relate to a leader's character. They are the standards that a leader establishes for himself—and lives according to—in the process of exercising his potential and ability for the accomplishment of his vision. Consequently, the leader has a sense of responsibility toward himself and others.

“The price of greatness is responsibility.”

—Winston Churchill

Let’s shorten the titles of these three components of leadership and simply refer to them as *purpose*, *potential*, and *principles*. Many leaders do not see principles as being more important than—or even equally as important as—the other two areas. Yet purpose, potential, and principles must all be in balance for leadership to work—they are a trinity of leadership success.

To sum up, leaders need (1) a guiding purpose that generates a passion to accomplish a vision; (2) a recognition of their innate gifts and a commitment to develop them, as well as to gather available resources; and (3) the formulation of values, ethics, and principles that order their conduct and guide the process by which they exercise their leadership. Purpose and potential are never more important than principles, because a lack of principles can nullify them.

The Most Powerful Force

Character is the most powerful force a leader can possess because it protects his life, his leadership, and his legacy—it manifests who he is and shapes who he will become. Without character, every other aspect of leadership is at risk. Let’s look at some of the ways that character protects and preserves one’s leadership.

Character Protects a Leader’s Inner Life

Character establishes a leader’s integrity and enables his growth as a person of ethics and values. Leadership training and development must start with the inner life of the leader before it can move on to the principles and process of leadership.

Having character will not prevent you from experiencing various struggles and setbacks in life—all leaders have those. But for long-term personal and professional success—and for the ultimate summation of your life—maintaining character is indispensable.

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

—Theodore Roosevelt

Character Extends the Longevity of Leadership

As we have seen, leaders across the globe—in all levels and arenas of society—are being removed from their leadership roles and positions due to ethical violations and moral concerns. Their downfalls have cut short their leadership, causing them to lose their ability to exercise their innate gifts, through which they were meant to fulfill their purpose and vision in life.

A point that we will return to as we explore the nature of character is that leadership is a privilege given by the followers. When a leader violates moral standards, he forfeits the privilege to use his gift in the service of the followers who gave it. Leaders don't have a “right” to be followed. The privilege of leadership is one that leaders must protect through their character and the trust it evokes. Only the power of genuine character can restore the faith in leadership and authority that many people lack today.

I have watched many highly gifted leaders who have manifested a character failure act as if they had done nothing wrong. Believing they could cruise along on their gifts alone, they didn't understand that they had forfeited the opportunity to continue serving their talents and abilities to the world—at least until they had effectively addressed their character defects. Leaders who have fallen need to stop and correct their ethical issues first. Then, they can begin to earn others' trust again, and, hopefully, move forward in genuine leadership.

Businessman Elmer G. Leterman wrote, “Personality can open doors, but only character can keep them open.” Your character—not your gift—is the fuel of your leadership. Your gift is validated by your character. So, when your character isn't maintained and starts to “leak,” your gift loses the ethical power that propels it.

A leader's gift is only as safe as the character that contains it.

So, while leaders have many opportunities to use their gifts and skills, it is character that ultimately determines the length and effectiveness of their leadership. Years ago, one of my mentors told me, “Whatever you compromise to gain, you will lose.” Many people have sacrificed a great future on the altar of compromise. They have taken their potential to impact the world and thrown it away for momentary pleasure or monetary gain.

Jesse Jackson Jr., a former U.S. Congressman and the son of the civil rights leader, was sentenced to 30 months in prison for using campaign funds to make more than 3,000 personal purchases over a period of seven years, totaling approximately \$750,000.⁴ The prosecutor for the case commented, “Jackson’s political potential was unlimited.... He squandered his great capacity for public service through outright theft.”⁵

The consequences of lost leadership affect not only individuals but also corporate entities. Energy company Enron went bankrupt and had to sell off all its assets after some of its executives used fraudulent accounting practices to hide its debt. The actions of those executives helped to crack the foundation of the whole company, and their own contributions as leaders were cut short.

Accordingly, leaders must become aware of an often-overlooked, but very real, threat to their leadership longevity: *success*. Don’t expect your success to carry you in life. Rather, let your success be carried by your character. Many people cannot handle achievement well because the accompanying responsibility, rewards, and stakes weigh too heavily on them. People can fall into all kinds of moral and ethical problems when they are successful because they suddenly feel all-powerful and unrestrained. They don’t realize that they are setting themselves up for a disastrous fall.

People become leaders when they make the decision not to sacrifice their principles on the altar of convenience or compromise.

The great leader Jesus of Nazareth said, “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁶ In effect, a person can “gain the world” through the power and riches associated with his leadership but, at the

same time, forfeit his soul—the very core of his being—by ignoring or betraying his own character. In doing so, he can lose his leadership impact and longevity—not to mention the reason for his very existence. That is a tragic waste of his leadership and his life.

The only way to protect what you hope to accomplish as a leader, and what you have already accomplished, is to develop and maintain strong personal character.

Character Preserves a Leader's Cause and Legacy

As we have noted, a leader's failure can damage the reputation of the government, company, organization, or associates with which he is connected. This truth illustrates another foundational principle that we will explore more fully later on: A leader's values are personal—but they are never private.

Some years ago, when United Way chairman William Aramony was sentenced to prison for embezzling the organization's funds, the news of his actions damaged the charity's reputation. When a scandal occurs within an organization, that organization has to rebuild its reputation and earn the public's trust all over again. The United Way board took immediate action to restore the faith of its donors by hiring as their interim chairman a businessman who was known for his integrity.

A leader's values are personal—but they are never private.

Some leaders fall dramatically and publicly, destroying their legacies in an instant. Other leaders unravel their legacies over a long, slow moral descent that eventually ruins their lives. When the longevity of an individual's leadership is cut short by a character issue, he is often unable to leave the legacy that he was meant to give to his generation. He has to forfeit his vision—or, if not his vision itself, then his own participation in that vision.

Shortly after Lance Armstrong stepped down as chairman of his charity due to doping charges, the charity—which helps those who are dealing with cancer—changed its name from the Lance Armstrong Foundation to the LIVESTRONG Foundation. Former Executive Vice President

of Operations Andy Miller said, “We set about charting an independent course forward.”⁷ Ironically, the name of the charity’s founder and former leader had to be removed to help safeguard its future.

No matter how much good a person may have done, his contributions can be overshadowed by even one questionable act. For two hundred years, Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and vice president of the United States, has been more widely remembered for the term that was coined based on his single act of political maneuvering than for any other part of his time in public service: *gerrymandering*.

Hitendra Wadhwa, a professor at Columbia Business School, wrote about one of the characteristics that made Martin Luther King Jr. a great leader and helped to preserve his purpose, message, and legacy. It was his commitment to control his anger at the injustices and insults that were continually hurled against him, and to channel that anger toward constructive purposes. “King had reason enough to be provoked, time and again. He was physically threatened and attacked by bigoted people, repeatedly jailed by state authorities (sometimes on trivial traffic violations), harassed by the FBI and even vilified by fellow black leaders who preferred more aggressive forms of resistance.”

Wadhwa then quoted from King’s autobiography, in which the civil rights leader recorded how he admonished himself, “You must not harbor anger....You must be willing to suffer the anger of the opponent, and yet not return anger. You must not become bitter.” The professor concluded: “Only by taming his own anger did King earn the right to become a messenger of peaceful struggle to the people of the nation.”⁸

When we intentionally develop our character, we strengthen our frailties, tame our vices, and prepare ourselves to fulfill our personal leadership role.

Character Prevents a Leader from Hurting Those Around Him

A leader’s fall can deeply hurt those close to him and others who have put their trust in him. It can destroy not only his life but also the lives of his victims, the families of his victims, his own family members, his associates,

and his associates' families. Returning to the example of Bernie Madoff, the businessman's investors were afflicted with shock, anger, and economic devastation due to his Ponzi scam, as many of them lost much or all of their life savings.

Moreover, not one member of Madoff's family was present in the courtroom to support him when he was sentenced to the longest prison term for fraud ever given.⁹ Either he had alienated them by his deception, or they were afraid to be seen with him.

In addition, tragedy has stricken the former tycoon's family. His older son, Mark, committed suicide on the two-year anniversary of his father's arrest.¹⁰ His younger son, Andrew, is currently fighting stage IV cancer of the blood. He had been in remission from the disease, but he feels that "the stress and shame that he dealt with after hearing about his father's... Ponzi scheme caused his cancer to surface again." He declared, "Even on my deathbed I will never forgive him for what he did."¹¹ Once more, our personal behavior often has consequences for others. We can jeopardize their futures, as well as our own.

The only way to stay focused on your vision and keep moving forward in the midst of the inevitable stress, criticism, attacks, temptations, and setbacks that come with leadership is to develop personal character. The only way to contribute meaningfully to your generation is to maintain character.

What do you want to achieve? What do you want to contribute to the world? Character will pave the way to its fulfillment and also protect it.

No Substitute

We are living in difficult social and economic times when we must re-focus on the priority of character—because character is the foundation for all aspects of effective leadership.

Authority, gifts, skill, knowledge, experience, expertise, and so forth are integral elements of leadership, but they can never substitute for character. Unless we want to see the conditions of our world grow increasingly worse, and unless we disregard the lives and legacies of our leaders—and

that includes us—we can't move into the future with the same methods and values of leadership that we're employing today. The public has been learning bad habits from its leaders. We must have a course correction—and it must start with each one of us.

Character is the foundation for all aspects of effective leadership.

We face a great “war” today: the struggle between character and compromise. I believe character will ultimately win, as more and more leaders commit to becoming ethically conscious and principled, because true character rests on a strong foundation that has the power to defeat compromise.

All leaders should be encouraged to value integrity so that they will not turn away from their ethical standards and thereby sacrifice the great potential they possess. Those in high office and in other visible positions must take this truth especially to heart. Engineers know that the taller the building, the deeper the foundation must be. Similarly, the more exposure a leader has to the public—the more fame he acquires, the more influence he exerts—the more vigilant he must be to maintain deep, well-established character.

Your Leadership Rests on Your Character

Despite current trends, it is possible for leaders to have character in the twenty-first century. We have many examples of people from former times who faced similar challenges with conviction and who can inspire and encourage us. Think of Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks became a leader simply by insisting on being treated equally when she rode the city bus. She refused to sacrifice her principles on the altar of convenience or compromise.

No matter in what domain you are a leader—financial, political, educational, religious, medical, corporate, scientific, artistic, and so forth—your leadership rests on your character. In *The Power of Character in Leadership*, we will explore...

- ✦ What character, or moral force, is, and how to develop it.

- How your beliefs shape your values, morals, ethics, and principles.
- How to build your leadership so that it is both effective *and* enduring.
- How to develop specific qualities of principled leaders.
- How to be restored after a failure in character.

You will be challenged to assess the strength of your current beliefs and values, and to make a new or renewed personal commitment to ethical leadership. This will necessitate making changes in your life. Yet change is the best thing that can happen to us when we take what is weak and make it strong, and when we take something good and make it even better.

Character matters to you because...

1. It establishes and strengthens your inner life, so that you are a person of integrity and honor.
2. It enables you to effectively fulfill your purpose and potential.
3. It protects your leadership and your vision—preventing you from canceling them prematurely, and enabling you to leave a legacy for your own generation and future generations.

Character matters to the world because...

1. It is the key to inspirational leadership. People need the encouragement and influence of genuine leaders if they are to fulfill their own purposes and live peaceful, productive lives.
2. It safeguards the well-being of those who are under the authority of leaders or are otherwise affected by leaders' actions and influence.
3. It enables leaders to build and maintain healthy communities while addressing critical problems with ethics and integrity.

Your family, community, and nation need you to be a leader of principle. Guard your character, prizing it as “better than silver or gold.” Learn the theories and practical skills of leadership, but first establish values and ethics that will free you from moral hindrances and empower you to carry out your singular purpose in life.