

UncommonSense®

FRAMEWORK

FOR LEADERSHIP CHARACTER ETHICS

“While I will never be perfect, I will strive towards...”

1. SEEKING WISDOM

I seek something greater than intelligence (knowing what is),
I seek wisdom, knowing what is right or true.

2. FIDELITY

I strive with courage to be who I say I am.

3. INTEGRITY

I strive to do what I say I will do.

4. COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

I strive to extend unmerited kindness to others as
an act of my will.

5. HONESTY

I strive to consistently speak the truth with compassion.

6. JUSTICE

I strive to uphold truth, expose error and correct wrongs.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY

I strive to self-scrutinize and seek the critique of others.

8. RESPECT

I strive to treat others as they would want to be treated.

9. PROMISE-KEEPING & TRUSTWORTHINESS

I strive to keep my word and my bond of relationship
with others.

10. EXCELLENCE

I strive to be my very best as I do my very best every day.

11. SERVING-LEADERSHIP

I strive to set the sacrificial example for others to follow.

12. UNITY

I strive to foster oneness among those to whom I am bound.

13. FORGIVENESS

I strive to extend and receive from others, unmerited acceptance.

14. HONORING AUTHORITY

I strive to yield to those given responsibility for others.

15. LIBERTY

I strive to preserve public rights by fulfilling my personal
responsibilities.

16. LEARNING & MENTORING

I strive to grow in wisdom and pass it on.

17. STEWARDSHIP

I strive to add value to all that has been entrusted to me.

18. SEEKING COUNSEL

I strive to overcome indecision and ignorance by securing
wisdom from others.

19. SUBMISSION TO TRUTH

I strive to courageously change my ways.

20. VALIDATING TRANSFORMATION

My renewed “inside” will reveal an increasingly renewed,
humble and hope-giving “outside.”

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





BBB

The Center for
**Character
Ethics**

UncommonSense[®] **FRAMEWORK**

FOR LEADERSHIP CHARACTER ETHICS

In the Business of Intentional Ethics

The Better Business Bureau has worked vigorously for nearly 100 years promoting high standards of business ethics. Yet, in the minds of many consumers, we were solely in the business of handling consumer complaints.

We knew that we needed to demonstrate and shine a brighter spotlight on our commitment to high ethical standards. So, we launched the International Torch Awards program to recognize businesses that were intentionally pursuing the highest standards of organizational ethics; putting integrity into action. Over the years, a commonality among our Torch Award recipients became clear—each valued character ethics as a vital trait in its organizational leaders.

Armed with this information, we set out to create a better roadmap to more intentionally transfer the essential disciplines of personal and public integrity. Then in 2001, we were introduced to the *UncommonSense*® Framework, a practical set of principles developed by the Sagamore Institute's American Center for Civic Character. This framework was not only the roadmap we'd been looking for, it was also the inspiration and foundation for The Center for Character Ethics, a 501 (c) 3 Educational Foundation of the Better Business Bureau.

Today, The Center is a powerful working collaboration of like-minded experts and organizations dedicated to providing practical character ethics education for leaders, educators and students, our current and future workforces. Our objective is to help every BBB service center have a clear strategy for advancing positive ethics (not just corrective intervention) and putting integrity into action in ways that strengthen the BBB brand and give individuals the confidence to intentionally commit to leadership ethics and ethical enterprising.

Why Character Ethics? Educators relate comfortably to the term *character*; businesses, government and higher education to the term *ethics*. They are two sides of the same coin. Because we serve both sectors, the term "Character Ethics" aspires to bridge the gap and reunites these words to express "universal ethics that uniquely build high character."



UncommonSense® F

The Critical Importance of Truth:

1. SEEKING WISDOM

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

Applying Truth First to Ourselves:

2. FIDELITY

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

Applying Truth in our Relationships:

3. INTEGRITY

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

4. COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

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

5. HONESTY

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

6. JUSTICE

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

7. ACCOUNTABILITY

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

R A M E W O R K

8. RESPECT

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

9. PROMISE-KEEPING & TRUSTWORTHINESS

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

10. EXCELLENCE

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

11. SERVING-LEADERSHIP

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

12. UNITY

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

13. FORGIVENESS

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

14. HONORING AUTHORITY

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

15. LIBERTY

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

16. LEARNING & MENTORING

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

17. STEWARDSHIP

High-character people live as if they will eventually reap what they sow. They actively identify with the role of trustee or steward rather than owner. They perceive their function as a resource or role “caretaker” for a limited time. As a result they regard “positions” and “possessions” as “conferred in temporary trust.” Therefore, they care for their respective positions and possessions diligently and seek to add value to every role and every resource to which they have been entrusted. Ethical people have a high regard for multiplying the value of their “accounts” for the purpose of serving others and benefiting those who follow. (Observable Virtues: humility, orderliness, carefulness)

18. SEEKING COUNSEL

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

Our Ability to Change

19. SUBMISSION TO TRUTH

Truth transforms people only when we submit to it. People who seek truth *cannot not transform*. Eventually everyone confronts the power of truth. When people of conscience are confronted by what is true, they feel convicted to replace or “put off” their lower character by pursuing and “putting on” high-character ethics. Taking action on this choice can occur overnight or over a long and often painful period.

20. VALIDATING TRANSFORMATION

Over time, high-character people exhibit consistent hope-giving and conscience-affirming character virtues that are the outer proof of inner-character ethics. Virtues and vices are simply the observable fruits that spring forth from either healthy or corrupted roots of character ethics. Therefore, character-builders must make the lost language of character ethics their first language. Moreover, since it is fueled by one’s daily responsibilities, not in the serenity of relaxation, character-builders must adopt an accurate view of the benefits of suffering.

Relevance to Our Daily Lives

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



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