Building Character

Strengthening the Heart of Good Leadership

Gene Klann
Building Character

Strengthening the Heart of Good Leadership

Gene Klann
A Joint Publication of
The Jossey-Bass
Business & Management Series
and
The Center for Creative Leadership
## Contents

Preface vii  
Acknowledgments ix  
About the Author xi  
1. Character and Leadership 1  
2. Five Influential Attributes 21  
3. Example 49  
4. Experience 65  
5. Education 89  
6. Environment 111  
7. Evaluation 127  
8. Next Steps 151  
Appendix A: Personal Values 163  
Appendix B: Assessing Leadership Character 167  
Appendix C: A Checklist of Good Leader Behaviors 169  
Appendix D: Leadership Character Scenarios 183  
Appendix E: Integrated Plan for Developing Leadership Character 189
CONTENTS

References and Suggested Readings 193
Index 202
About the Center for Creative Leadership 209
Recent news brings us a steady flow of reports on character failures of leaders and influential personalities in corporations, sports, the entertainment industry, politics, religion, and nonprofit organizations. Of course, all humans are flawed by varying degrees of weakness and shortcomings, and character lapse is nothing new in leaders. What is disturbing, however, is the current frequency of failures, the range and depth of their impact, and their span across virtually every type of business and occupation.

This book is for leaders who are concerned about this problem and who understand that the character of their own cadre of leaders affects the productivity, culture, and reputation of their organization. The book is for practicing leaders and managers in corporations, nonprofit organizations, the government, and the military. More specifically, it is for those who may want to address the problem by developing positive leadership character in their subordinate leaders, employees who are being groomed for supervisory positions, employees who show high leadership potential, and other key individual contributors. Inasmuch as all employees have some degree of leadership potential, this book is really about processes that can be used to develop the leadership character of all your employees. The book is also for anyone taking part in such a process.

Leaders have an inherent responsibility to further develop their cadre, including in the area of leadership character. Before doing so, however, it’s implicit that the leader must become an outstanding role model for leadership character. The leader must set the example.
This book will give practicing leaders and managers practical tools, information, and processes for further developing their own and others’ leadership character. It gives practical ways to establish and ensure sound leadership behaviors.

As I wrote this book, I was keenly aware that there was, as yet, no readily available basic reference or substantial set of guidelines regarding this challenge. Many well-written books address character as a general concept, and some touch on the topic of character for leaders, but none outlines a practical model on how to actually develop leadership character in others. Having led others in the military and elsewhere for more than thirty years, I know how much those of us who recognize the need to develop, rather than just look for, strong character in others need a sound resource. I intend this book to fill that need. A starting point for the book is defining what positive, effective leadership character is—what it looks like, its dynamics, and its potential benefits.

The book is not a discourse on the moral meltdown of the West or the moral collapse of the United States. It will not attempt to evaluate whether the nature of humankind is basically either good or bad. It won’t present a monolithic moral code, nor attempt to mandate, prescribe, or direct anyone’s behavior. Nor will it address every possible situation. It doesn’t pretend to be the definitive work on character, character development, or leadership development.

But it will draw on my experience as a leader and teacher of leaders, and on my work at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), which is itself an excellent example of how the culture of an organization can promote positive leadership behaviors that influence institutions and situations much larger than itself. The book will provide you with a framework for instituting leadership character development within your organization. It will describe a process based on good fundamentals, best-practice insights, and common sense. This is a practical book. I’ve tried to make it simple, direct, realistic, practical, and firmly grounded by examples.

Greensboro, North Carolina
September 2006

Gene Klann
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Kathy, who possesses the most sterling leadership character of anyone I have ever known. She was also my able research assistant, sounding board, critic, encourager, and spur! I would also like to thank my children, Kim, James, and Eric, for their support, encouragement, insights, and personal examples of character.

Thanks to my dad, mom, and sisters, Joann and Audrey, who were the key leaders in the development of my own leadership character. Hoping against hope, they always displayed incredible patience and resilience!

I must also recognize several outstanding leaders of character who have been an inspiration to me: Bob and Mary Gunn, Coach Ron Akin, Charles Lange, Colonel Mike Barry, Major John Ernser, Principal Bob Meisner, Professor Michael Boll, Coach Bill Ebert II, Ron Sweetman, Ellen Ramsey, Jerry Hersh, Paula Brown Stafford, Joseph Nelson, and Vincent Manzi.

My sincere appreciation also goes out to those colleagues with whom I discussed this work and who offered comments, suggestions, changes, and criticisms, especially Pete Scisco and Ellen Van Velsor. Thanks also to Felecia Corbett for her invaluable assistance with my research. A special thanks to Alan Venable, whose accomplished editing skills and wide range of insights and talents helped make this book a reality.
About the Author

Gene Klann is a senior member of the training faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. Prior to joining the Center in 1999, he was founder and president of Leadership International, an organization specializing in human relations, training, coaching, and management consulting. During that same period, he conducted training at the Michigan Leadership Development Institute at Saginaw Valley State University, where he designed and delivered a leadership series for key business and community leaders.

Gene retired from the U.S. Army in 1994 after twenty-five years of distinguished service. His career included service in Vietnam, Germany, Panama, the first Gulf War, and Italy, and culminated with service at the U.S. military delegation to NATO headquarters in Brussels. He successfully completed five tours as a unit commander. Gene was awarded seventeen personal military decorations, including three for valor and fourteen for specific acts of achievement or meritorious service.

Gene earned his B.A. in history from Ripon College, his M.A. in international relations from the University of Arkansas, European Campus, and his Ph.D. in philosophy from the Free University of Brussels. He also received a diploma as a U.S. Army War College fellow from the NATO Defense College in Rome.

His first book, Crisis Leadership, was released in 2003. His second, Building Your Team’s Morale, Pride, and Spirit, was released in 2004.
As the personal highlight of his career, Gene takes special pride in having commanded a battalion of six hundred paratroopers in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and seeing that all six hundred returned to the United States alive.
Chapter One

Character and Leadership

Who was the best leader you ever worked for?
Why?
Who was the worst?
Again, why?
Take a moment to answer.

As you thought about the first two questions, you probably thought of some good leader you have known and mentally assigned words and concepts like competent, trustworthy, positive, dependable, cared about people, or kept us informed. The memory of a bad leader probably summoned a list of opposites: incompetent (or only marginally capable), pessimistic, didn’t care about anyone else, wouldn’t share information.

For both leaders, you probably remember specific behaviors that you thought were good or bad, and the behaviors probably followed a pattern. Over time, for better or worse, most leaders exhibit consistent patterns of leadership behavior. The pattern shapes their reputation (how they are known and perceived by others), is considered a reflection of their character, and largely determines their standing and status with others.

Leader behaviors that are considered positive and constructive can be attractive and highly influential. The result is greater respect and trust, and stronger emotional connection between such leaders and their employees. These are behaviors that leaders should strive to develop in themselves, in the cadre of leaders below them, and in all their employees.