



Minnesota Character Council

# CHARACTER Connect

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*The MCC is administered by Synergy & Leadership Exchange. To learn more visit [www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council](http://www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council)*

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## Character, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity

Though the media narratives we are subjected to every day ignore character, it is at the center of our national trauma of race, equity, inclusion and diversity.

Simplistically, we might say that people with “good” character are more caring and tolerant of others while people with “bad” character are often less constructive in their behaviors.

Character, for example, was frame for decision-making in the trial of former Minneapolis Police officer Derek Chauvin for the death of George Floyd. The prosecution accused officer Chauvin of a character flaw – gross indifference to the risk of death in his restraint of Floyd. On the other hand, Chauvin’s lawyer raised questions about the character and prior behaviors of George Floyd.

People with good character are most likely not racists; have equitable instincts and value fairness; tend to take others at face value without pre-judgment or reduce them to stereotypes; and are open minded and friendly.

On the other hand, people with bad character – no matter their race, religion, ethnicity, gender – are more likely to discriminate against others using stereotypes; make selfish and invidious distinctions, pit people against each other, seek win/lose outcomes, are judgmental and suspicious, exploitative and mistrustful of others, and hold grudges.

In our politics also, the issue of character is constantly being brought to our attention. Media and political narratives thrive on praising some for being “good” and raising suspicions about others for being “not good.” Political efforts are directed at controlling and keeping out of power those whose character – their values, their ways of being – cannot be trusted.

If we were to do better in raising citizens of good character, we would do better in achieving our national ideals of inclusion and equity. Character education should be front and center in the education of our youth – from pre-K to 12.

We should follow the advice of Martin Luther King when he said “I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Mother Teresa elevated the need for good character when she said, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

As a boy, my parents, grandparents, and teachers - especially Mrs. Parsons in 5<sup>th</sup> grade - pointed me toward thinking about character by looking to the past – to George Washington who proposed supporting excellence in character by “raising a standard to which the wise and the honest may repair.”

## Character, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity . . . continued

I wanted to become wise and honest. Abraham Lincoln asked that we have the character to have malice towards none and charity for all. I sought to be more charitable. I was standing before the Capital in January 1961 when John Kennedy said, "With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

—By Stephen B. Young, Global Executive Director, Caux Round Table

### Be a Person of Character

*"Be more concerned with your **character** than your reputation, because your **character** is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."* — John Wooden, American basketball player and coach

Let's consider what makes up character:

**Caring**—be kind and thoughtful toward others

**Humility**—do not be arrogant or think yourself more important than anybody else

**Attitude**—have a settled, positive way of thinking, be optimistic

**Responsibility**—accept the burden and challenge of obligation

**Accountability**—take ownership, especially after situations occur

**Citizenship**—behave in a socially conscious manner

**Trustworthiness**—be worthy of reliance

**Empathy**—emotionally understand other people's points of view

**Respect**—regard others with dignity as you would want to be treated

With these nine elements, you can be a person of character. Being a person of character does not require a special skill, hidden talent, money or God-given ability. Character comes from within and we are all capable of being people of character by the choices we make each and every day. Remember, with character and integrity you do not get a letter grade A or B or C or D—it is PASS or FAIL!

If I were to write a book on leadership, chapter one would be on character and integrity—both are foundational to being a successful leader! Everything starts with character. My definition of success consists of two sets of two words: **Go-Getter**—Work hard, show up, fall down 6 times and get up 7, failure is NOT fatal; and **Go-Giver**—make a difference, invest in a life, encourage and give hope by GIVING BACK!

So with that, I want to challenge everyone to be a person of character. Be the person who people ask for support, opinions, guidance, advice or perspective. Be the person others talk to when they are having a bad day, need help or are lonely. Be the person others contact first to share exciting news, accomplishments or triumphs. Be the type of person who people tell their most secretive secrets. Be the person who is a net-giver by sharing your time, talent and treasures whenever possible. Be a person of character—here we go!



—By Dan Stoltz, President and CEO of SPIRE Credit Union and proud Roseville Area Optimist Club member

### Character: the way to personal and public well-being

Over two centuries ago, when large sailing vessels met in the open ocean, they would greet each other with three questions: 1) Who are you? 2) Who is your captain? 3) What is your destination? These questions provide a framework for understanding character as the fundamental element of identity, as a reservoir of essential values, and as an arbiter for ethical outcomes.

Who are you? This first question, about identity, is a prerequisite to responsibility. If you don't know who you are, you can't be responsible. Character starts with self-awareness of the roles and attending responsibilities of those roles. The identity of student, for example, carries the attributes of hard and patient work, a

## Character: the way to personal and public well-being . . . Continued

commitment to truth, ability to address conflicting ideas, and civility in communicating and judging the validity of knowledge. These qualities of identity manifest themselves in character. Without character there is little or no responsibility. Be it student, teacher, parent, or any other role, responsibility will only follow from character.

Who is your captain? The second question speaks directly to character. What values, ethical behavior, and past and present conduct can we use to predict future performances? Character is reputation and predicts destiny.

What is your destination? The third question asks about two qualities of character. One describes the quality of present modes of conduct, and the second paints a vision of goals and end-states of personal, family, and social performances and accomplishments.

Taken together, this framework helps us see the attributes of character within the person and institution by asking about or observing examples of identity, controlling values, and beneficial results of intentional instruction in character development. There are many examples of the benefits of character in all areas of life. One is offered here; the economic benefits.

From Adam Smith, the father of capitalism, we received the first principles of the free market. 1) A market must be encased in ethics, or it will become sluggish, expensive, corrupt, and no longer free. 2) Wealth (property and character) can only be created by people. Creators of this wealth are a special kind of people; people who are educated, healthy, and who know the meaning of self-interest, properly understood. Self-interest, properly understood, means that one's concern for the common wealth and infrastructure, as well as the ethical practices of commerce, are equal to one's concern for private wealth. These conditions of freedom and wealth creation are dependent upon civic virtue and the character of citizens. In the end, only citizens, not subjects, can create wealth. Without the high functioning citizen, there is no wealth, and without character, there is no citizen. These qualities and abilities are not innate. They must be intentionally taught and practiced within a rigorous and democratic context.

—By Michael Hartonian, Ph.D., Professor (retired), University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and MCC member

## Character Recognition Awards – Virtual Celebration on May 18



Join host Synergy & Leadership Exchange on May 18 at 11 a.m. for a virtual celebration of the 2020 and 2021 Character Recognition Award honorees! Register at <https://bit.ly/3v54zfw> to receive a link to access the event! More details at [www.synergyexchange.org/character-recognition-awards](http://www.synergyexchange.org/character-recognition-awards)

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## Resources

[Illuminating Character: Virtual Character Education Conference, June 24](#)

Explore the important role that character education and social emotional learning play in improving school culture and academic achievement, and interact online with like-minded colleagues to share and learn strategies on how to engage students and help them develop into ethical citizens. Keynote presentations by Clifton Taulbert and Scarlett Lewis, breakout sessions, and pre-conference workshops (June 23). Early bird pricing ends May 28. Learn more and register at <https://www.alverno.edu/Character-Conference>.