



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)

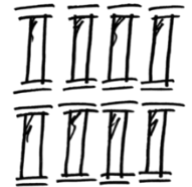
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## Building a Culture of Trust

By David Horsager, MA, CSP, CPAE

At its core, every issue is a trust issue. Without trust, costs, miscommunication, and poor behavior all increase in classrooms. Research shows that a lack of trust is the biggest expense an organization has. Think about the padlocks on kids' lockers. A lock is used because we can't trust people to leave personal items alone. What does that lack of trust cost? Time and money. First you must buy the locks and then between each class instead of simply opening their locker, students need to get their combination just right, costing time between classes.

Decades of research surrounding the traits of the most successful leaders and organizations came down to eight common traits they all shared which held up their greatest advantage: trust. The good news is that trust is something that can be built within individuals and organizations by using this **8-pillar framework**.



The first pillar of trust is **Clarity**. Why? Because people trust the clear and mistrust or distrust the ambiguous or overly complex. If an educator is not clear about assignment expectations or due dates, their students will experience frustration and lack of focus at school because that is what a lack of clarity breeds. To help increase clarity, individuals must be specific on the outcome and deadline. Once those are accounted for, allowing room for clarifying questions to be asked is vital. This ensures everyone is aligned and knows how they can continue to meet the goals or expectations.

The second pillar is **Compassion**. People put faith in those who care beyond themselves. It is easy to tell when an educator or administrator genuinely cares. This genuine compassion builds loyalty. Loyalty can drive performance, better experiences for everyone, and increased trust. This trust increases learning, classroom management, and safety.

The third pillar is **Character**. Character is made up of two main components: integrity and morality. People notice those who do what is right over what is easy. Since character is often built in private, not public, you must put in the work as a leader to show character even when no one else is watching. Character can be displayed through humility, principles, intention, self-discipline, and accountability.

The fourth pillar is **Competency**. Competency drives trust. Education can increase competency. To build and maintain trust, you must prove that you are keeping yourself and your skills current and capable. Staying up to date on information, ideas, and the current student experience will increase your ability to make relevant and competent decisions. It is helpful to have a mentor or circle of professionals with whom you can grow and help one another stay competent.

## Building a Culture of Trust . . . continued

The fifth pillar is **Commitment**. This pillar is about those who show up and stand through adversity. It is easy to stay committed when things are good, but when things get hard few withstand that test. Commitment means following through and showing up. People trust those they can count on.

The sixth pillar is **Connection**. People want to follow, work with, and be around those with whom they have an established relationship. If an educator does not take time to connect with their students outside of a structured lesson plan, they are going to have a tough time building trust with their students because there is no genuine connection being built. Make a point to get to know your students and other educators, they will trust you more and look forward to the time they have with you.

The seventh pillar is **Contribution**. People respond to and trust those who get things done. The contribution pillar is often seen not just in the individual, but in the group that they are leading and teaching. Educators are given a large responsibility and are often judged on the results delivered by their students. This responsibility means they must invest the time, attention, and resources that their students need to get things done! We trust outcomes such as educated, high integrity graduates that can lead our world toward good.

The eighth pillar is **Consistency**. Each of the pillars is crucial, but if they are not done consistently, they crumble. There will never be one moment to become trusted, instead, trust is either increasing or decreasing through every action or interaction. It is in the small moments that you must act and deliver consistently, and that is when you will build trust.

Organizations do not change, people do. Becoming a trusted educator requires attention and commitment to the 8-pillar framework to build trusted teams and classrooms. Building trust is a process; start today!



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## Problem-Solving Service Projects Build Character

*By Bill Mittlefehldt*

Thanks to NASA's Space Telescope, we have evidence of the universe's expansion, giving us time to reflect on the challenges before us as we assess the best tools for supporting our historical democracy. Democracy was an innovation built by the ancient Greeks in 507 ACE. But history suggests that this form of governance requires much collaboration. The Minnesota Character Council is a team of experienced public servants and business leaders who are rising to this challenge.

MCC offers communication, collaboration and expertise to improve the civic development of our youth. This often includes highlighting successful organizations and leaders who have improved cooperation between communities and schools. By sharing this synergy, MCC works to generate more civic success and rewards in our state. This article highlights a successful program that received both state and national recognition for engaging youth with problem solving skills and service that improved community systems.

Time magazine published an issue in November 2016 that focused on anxiety, depression and the modern adolescent. Since that time the challenges facing our youth have grown. The pandemic has affected most families, schools and communities. It disrupted our common rituals. In this interval, the number of guns, fentanyl and screen-time have increased, growing concerns about adolescent brain development and identity.



A core challenge of adolescent development is the focusing of brainpower and communication on topics and relationships of interest. Teen brain development benefits from mentoring and guidance provided by family as well as school and community partners. The challenges of change and the growing concerns with our civic, health, economic and ecological systems make this adolescent challenge to personal identity, critical to the quality of our democracy's community.

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## Problem-Solving Service Projects Build Character . . . continued

A door opened at Anoka High School when the police and city council had to devote more time with adolescent's who spent time on the streets of Anoka's historic downtown. The city manager contacted the high school and asked that the teens present some of their hopes and concerns to the city. The hope was that by students sharing, the city leaders could direct attention into a positive collaboration.

One result from this collaboration was the development of a service-learning program at Anoka High School where students could engage with community mentors to define a local problem in the civic, economic, health or ecological systems. If there was sufficient interest, student teams worked with local mentors to define a system problem and articulate a feasible solution. Students earned hours of service and assessed their progress in defining problems and phrasing solutions.

Another result of this emerging collaboration was the pleasure students and staff had with the positive response to the community improvement projects. Educators appreciated the increased questioning done by student teams. Mentors were pleased to observe the growing engagement from students. The city council developed an end of the year event where students presented to the mayor and council a summary of what they learned and acknowledged the role of their teachers and mentors. This grew into a Civic Fest where teams shared their service-learning projects to the community, parents, grandparents, neighbors and friends.

The students used these community improvement projects to apply for jobs, scholarships and college admission. Service-learning projects helped students find their "natural gifts" and helped focus careers and jobs of interest. Parents, grandparents and community partners experienced civic pride. Educators supported the service-learning and systems improvement approach as it focused brainpower while adding problem solving, leadership and commitment – key elements in a democracy.

## Seeking Nominations for the 2023 Minnesota Ethical Leadership Award



The Minnesota Ethical Leadership Award was created in 2011 by the Minnesota Character Council to recognize exemplary community programs building character strengths and ethical leadership skills in its participants. Since that time, 31 programs have been honored.

The award uses a nomination and application process; nominated programs must complete an application to become eligible for the awards. Just complete a short online nomination form and we will invite your nominee to apply.

Applications are reviewed by a volunteer evaluation panel of experienced practitioners and leaders. Honorees selected are celebrated at the Character Recognition Awards luncheon in May.

**Nominations are due Dec. 2.** To place a nomination or learn more about the award, selection criteria, and past honoree, visit [www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-ethical-leadership-award-1](http://www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-ethical-leadership-award-1).



### 2022 MELA Honorees:

Left – Minnesota Rural Education Association

Right – Resources for Recovery, National Youth Leadership Council

