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Minnesota Character Council

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Outsourcing Character

By Todd Lefko

The business of outsourcing services and manufacturing reflects an American cultural pattern, and this begs the question: "Have we also outsourced the development of societal and personal character?"

Economics, labor and resource availability has shaped many decisions in business. Morality often was not a factor. The loss of lifetime employment for an individual or community was not important, in the name of profit or competition. In some cases, economic shift, availability of resources or emerging international markets provided justifications for decisions.

Character also requires access to resources, both human and institutional. The emerging market is the expanding challenges faced by every individual. The economic shift is the reality that our needs, goals and competition increase as we live. What does not differ is the quality of judgment required by decisions. This remains true for every person, organization and business.

When character development is outsourced to others, we lose some control over the potential results. Character is developed from what one selects as the correct informal patterns from family, friends, media, and the culture. There are also formal systems such as schools, courts, laws, and enforcement. These formal and informal patterns both reflect and reinforce our standards of behavior. We have focused upon what others and systems do for us. Some systems have proven useful, others have been found lacking.

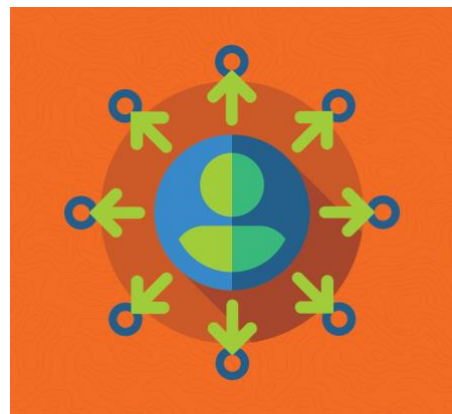
America has a myth which stresses the role of the individual and personal character. We have combined conflicting myths, of personal responsibility as the reason for success, and the development of systems which expect others to create a successful individual. These conflict when individuals or systems exhibit destructive patterns. We often demand results without providing the required resources, and then blame the system, rather than our actions.

We cherish our rights. We demand their constant enforcement and expansion. What we rarely discuss is our responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities are a two-sided coin. Character is a responsibility. The basic question of responsibility for character in America requires a

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public discussion. We have created many systems which allow avoidance of serious issues.

Outsourcing reflects the needs of an increasingly complex world. Few of us have the capacity to teach our children every new subject, the medical or psychological capacity to care for every senior, put out fires or arrest criminal. Because of this complexity, it has become more essential for strong individual role models within the family, the business and educational communities and government as well. These actions of individuals and of systems are shaped and directed by individuals. In a complex world, the actions and character of individuals remain basic.



We are creating a new social structure where the personal and the systems are interacting, and not always producing positive outcomes. It is time that religious, legal, educational, and business organizations create local and national dialogues on responsibility for character development. Right now, must answer this call with courage and get to this most important work.

Students Stand Up for Leadership

By Doug Erickson

Karaoke, dancing and swimming — were all activities that took place at a popular Brainerd area resort on Nov. 6–7, 2022. How do these equate to a student leadership conference? The answer: the Minnesota Association of Student Councils and Honor Societies annual Leadership Forum. Nearly 500 students and 60+ advisors attended the Forum. Although the recreational activities were popular, students had the opportunity to dive deep into the issues facing them at their schools from across the state.

In the post-covid era, students are transitioning back into the day-to-day, in-person high school experiences. Although the students almost universally embrace the transition, it comes with challenges. It is those experiences that the students discussed in the “Big Idea” session. Divided into groups of 15, students covered 13 Big Idea topics: acceptable protest, school safety, mental health, gender identity, school traditions, social media, racial issues, sexual harassment, cyber bullying, academic integrity, civil political discussion, chemical/alcohol issues, and gender equity in school opportunities. The discussions were intense but respectful. Each group came to a consensus statement that was recorded.



Students also heard a keynote address entitled, “Be the One” from Angie Charboneau-Folch, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principal’s National Legislative Coordinator. Angie emphasized through her life story of the courage it takes to step up against the destructive forces that students face. Terry D’Imperio, the 2021 National Student Council Advisor of the Year and Doug Erickson, the MASSP coordinator of student activities, led separate workshops on the importance of

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the group process. Advisors heard Bob Driver, the MASSP executive director, give the high school principals' perspective of student leadership.



It seemed incredible that students and advisors were able to listen, learn, discuss, network and dance in a 24-hour conference. The final act took place in the closing session led by the students. The student councils in Minnesota are divided into 10 divisions. For the last session each division selected a song with a strong leadership message. They presented that message and as a division, sang karaoke to their song on stage to more than 500 students and advisors. From Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" to Michael Jackson's "The Man in the Mirror," the student leaders illustrated what it means to have the courage to stand up for leadership.

Seeking Minnesota Promising Practices

Seeking unique and effective practices that are cultivating a culture of character at your school or youth-serving organization. Apply for a Minnesota Promising Practices Award!

There is no cost to apply. Just complete a short online application. Applications are evaluated by an outside panel of practitioners. Award honorees are celebrated at the Character Recognition Awards luncheon in May. Applications are due Feb. 10, 2023.

Character.org recognizes national-level promising practices. This is a separate application and due date.

Learn more and view award winning practices at www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-promising-practices-awards



Resources for Parents

Check out these resources on supporting character formation:

- PBSKids For Parents Learn and Grow: Character — www.pbs.org/parents/learn-grow/all-ages/character
- PBSKids For Parents: Responsibility, How to Teach Your Five-Year-Old Responsibility — <https://www.pbs.org/parents/learn-grow/age-5/character/responsibility>
- Parenthood365 — www.parenthood365.com
- "Awe Might Be Our Most Undervalued Emotion. Here's How to Help Children Find It." by Deborah Farmer Kris — <https://wapo.st/3W23P8g>
- *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life* by Dacher Keltner

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