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## Minnesota Character Council

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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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## What Does Character Mean to Me?

Language is a vital part of human connections as it allows us to communicate our ideas, thoughts and feelings with others. The building blocks of language are concepts that help us think about and understand the world and ourselves. Concepts can have layers of meaning and invoke powerful responses. "Character" is one such concept. For many, character imbues a set of cultural virtues that defines one's relationship with others as well as with the environment. The Minnesota Character Council believes character transcends religious and political ideology. Read on for several perspectives on the meaning of character.

### From students involved with The Inner Hero:

"Having good character can mean the way someone acts thinks and feels or maybe even portrays themselves." — M.J.R., Armstrong High School.

"Character means the qualities that make a person or group different from other individuals." — J. F., Armstrong High School.

"I believe to have character is to hold yourself to high standards and simple values such as respect for others and honesty." — E.M., Totino–Grace High School



*The Inner Hero is a nonprofit that works to create spaces and programs for youth that reduce violence, build trust and encourage education that empowers youth to be productive citizens.*

## What Does Character Mean to Me? . . . continued

**From Don Salverda**, leadership and management consultant and former Ramsey County Commissioner:

Character is the North Star for our integrity, moral impact, personal effectiveness and very destiny. Character is the foundation of virtues, building blocks and pillars that include trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

The main thing in life is to be a person of character, to model positive attitude and behavior keeping character the main thing on a daily basis.



**From Matt Bostrom**, president, Values-Based Initiatives, LLC and former Ramsey County Sheriff

Shared values lead to mutual trust.

Recently, I asked community members and police officers the same question: To increase trust between the community and the police, what type of people should be hired? Four shared values emerged from their responses. Police officers are trustworthy when they are characterized by high character (integrity), emotional intelligence (compassion), servant leadership (humility) and cultural competence (respect).

These shared values lead to mutual trust between the police and the communities they serve. The starting point for police departments then is to hire for character and train for competence®.

The shared values of integrity, compassion, humility, and respect transcend cultures and organizations. Therefore, when we each take responsibility for reinforcing them in our personal and professional lives, and for holding our government accountable to these values, we will see a rising tide of mutual trust, optimism, and safe communities.

**From Michael Hartoonian**, retired professor from the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota, an essay, "A Thought on Character":

Character...it has been said that "I can't hear a word you're saying, because your character is speaking too loudly."

Our character always walks out ahead of us, telling the world who we are. This is true in all cultures, and it applies to civilizations, communities, and citizens as well. With social media, our character really gets out ahead of us. But what is this thing called Character?

Let's look for an answer.

First, most people desire the comfortable and easy road of life. But the easy road almost always leads to an unfulfilled life. Second, believing that you alone are responsible for your good fortune or believing that you have no responsibility for your wellbeing are both examples of a weak mind. Character must always come through the work we do building rightful relationships. What we are given, we are given. What we morally make out of whatever we are given is earned value.

## What Does Character Mean to Me? . . . continued

It doesn't matter who gives you stuff — your uncle or your government, because being given things or favor carries no respect from people of character. And, more importantly, you will not respect yourself, simply because you know that you didn't deserve it. No one and nothing will harm us as much as we harm ourselves by believing that we are victims of circumstance incapable of having high character and respect.

Thus, the person with character always keeps an eye on the road ahead. Through personal merit, and through family and community achievements, blessings come when you understand that your image of the future and the delayed gratification that enhance that image are more important to your present behavior than all the things that have happened to you and your ancestors. We could all spend our life's time thinking that someone owes me, big time, I know that I could. But character always means choosing to take a different road, one that is future oriented and one that will help build a life of harmony.

Do I choose comfort, materialism, indifference to others, and simply keep amusing myself? Do I believe that the future is irrelevant? Or do I embrace the empiricism that tells me that choices made today will alter and define my future. Indeed, my future as well as yours is in plain sight. All we need to do is evaluate our present choices.

Often, we are reluctant to evaluate our choices, believing that the present is all we have. The arguments for focusing on self and the present moment are false narratives sold by the ignorant to the ignorant. Such beliefs and attending behaviors are basically a manifestation of an absence of character.

There is something that is very clear to any observer of history. And that is the realization that there exists a direct relationship between violence and incompetence. Whether watching a company go bankrupt, a husband hitting his wife, a child shooting another child, or a nation's army invading another country, we are witnessing incompetence, particularly moral incompetence. However, we can also observe throughout history that when people within institutions and nations behave with the grace of character and its attending attributes, we achieve harmony, peace, and wealth. Can we imagine what we lose in the absence of character?

If we listen, this is what all cultural wisdom has taught us: There exists in all human endeavors a direct relationship between the ability to create excellence and wealth, and the obvious character people exhibit in their conduct toward one another.

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“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 coach