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Minnesota Character Council

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On Character

By Roger Worner, Ph.D.

In the twilight of my life, I have been blessed with a time availability that my years as a school superintendent and consultant to school districts never provided me. For more than 50 years, work hours were largely devoted to attending meetings on every conceivable topic and a continuous flow of emails, texts, memoranda, studies, and articles to be read and studied. To be sure, while most of those communication artifacts were modestly to greatly valuable, I must admit, on reflection, that few of these thoughtful encounters were highly stimulating ... to the core of my being ... to my soul.

With time passing and the flexibility now accorded by old age and a slowed pace, I think more ... much more ... about those things that are or should have been stimulating to the core of my being. Could I have been better than that which I was, and should I have done more and better than that which I did?

Those thoughts arose in me most recently as I was reading one of many "classic" novels, "Little Women," that time has granted me.

That novel by Louisa May Alcott, read in an earlier era by most middle schoolers or early high schoolers and now by this old man, is centered on the March family, comprised of a mother, father, and their four daughters — the Little Women. This is a story of good people in every sense of the word. While the family members are not without flaws, they strive to be kind, moral and loving.

Throughout the course of the book, I was struck with the sense that members of the March family, collectively and individually, displayed a virtue of inestimable value, character!

Midway through the book, one of the four daughters, Jo, captured the essence of that virtue when she observed that "character is a better possession than money, rank, intellect, or beauty..."



On Character . . . continued

Jo's observation caused me to reflect. What is it that you or I value so very much that it exceeds for us the value of money, rank, intellect or beauty?

The answer to this question is the core of character. It defines our moral compass. It identifies and prioritizes our values. It is the gyroscope that centers us. It is the issue or issues where we would draw a line in the sand and make our stand. It is doing the right thing without self-serving motives. It is also about doing no harm ... and loving one another.

It is good practice in this hurried world to slow down and deliberately ask ourselves if we display the character attributes we desire in others, and if not, perhaps a recalibration of our moral compass is in order.

Roger Worner, Ph.D. is a retired educator who served in assistant, associate and superintendent capacities in North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and West Virginia. He is a consultant and taught at St. Cloud State University.

Resources and Recommended Reading

Greater Good Science Center (University of California, Berkeley)

Website: <https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/>

The center's vision is to "provide research-based tools and training to shift our culture toward a kinder and more compassionate society." The Greater Good in Education initiative provides resources to help educators build happier, kinder, and more equitable school communities, while the Greater Good in Action and Greater Good Magazine initiatives provide science-based practices and insights for a meaningful life.

"How Teaching Virtues Can Empower Young People" by Krista Mehari

Through a drive to create communities that provide safety and thriving, a group in Mobile, Alabama created Empowered, a positive youth development program for youth ages 11 to 14 that is virtue-based, centered in cultural grounding. The program focuses on empowering youth to pursue good lives by developing their own sense of purpose and providing motivation and tools to promote hope, wisdom, peace and forgiveness. It includes 18 modules that can be implemented in any order, designed to take between 30 and 45 minutes per session, and to be shared in groups or classrooms. The article concludes with lessons for empowering youth.

"How Educators Can Help Make a Kinder World" by Vicki Zakrzewski

By integrating character education, social-emotional learning, and mindfulness, schools can cultivate the inherent goodness in students. Purpose and moral identity provide the "why." Character education provides the "what," social-emotional learning provides the "how" and mindfulness makes it "stick."

Character Education Mini-Course

A self-paced online course for educators who are new to character education or would like to brush up on their content knowledge. They have generously offered it FREE through the month of October (normally \$49) by using the code: **characterdotorg** [Register Here](#).

Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don't, then you are wasting your time on Earth.

— Roberto Clemente

In Memoriam: Hector E. Garcia

By Todd Lefko and Stephen B. Young



Hector Garcia, our friend, colleague, and mentor, has passed.

He was incredibly bright. Hector thought big thoughts. In his vision and his ability to connect the dots, he was usually one level above the others in the room. He would have been the perfect professor at a small midwestern liberal arts college.

Hector thought about issues of justice and rights. To completely understand justice, you must know injustice and he did. He understood the meaning of injustice, both from personal experience and moral theory. He understood that injustice was a disease, which had to be fought on many levels, on a constant basis.

Hector was constantly frustrated that others did not comprehend his logic. He would patiently explain his logic, and by the time others understood his syllogism, Hector would usually be two thoughts further down the conceptual approach.

He worked hard, with commitment, and creatively in perfumes, in finance stocks, and in government. His heart was really in ideas, seeking to do what would be better.

Throughout changes in employment, he had one support—Brianna was always there, when others were not. She understood Hector and provided a shelter when the world was not compassionate.

Hector E. Garcia transcended this age. His intuitive mind reached back in time and across geography. In our post-Enlightenment, post-Modern, deconstructed, post-truth age, he had a foundation in ancient wisdom that the mind must be connected to the heart if we are to our best selves.

Hector understood that if each of us has our own truth and your truth is not my truth, that is not the end of the story but only a beginning. Hector used the word "complementary" - one truth complements another.

Seeking truth, or happiness, or successful assimilation in a community, is best achieved by looking for the complementarities between and among us.

Hector put this into action in business bridging Mexico and Minnesota; in public policy with the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs; in community with Moral Re-Armament and the Caux Round Table; and in his personal life with friends.

In all this Hector was remarkable and we will miss his ability to look over the wall, to go beyond, to see a better future, and never to give up hope.

We will miss our friend Hector.

Via Con Dios

We will carry on the fight.

Hector E. Garcia served on the Minnesota Character Council from 2021 to 2023. He considered character as a pivotal factor in addressing the volatile debate over "race," racism, prejudice, politics and violence in the U.S.