

Chapter One

Character and Leadership

Who was the best leader you ever worked for?

Why?

Who was the worst?

Again, why?

Take a moment to answer.

As you thought about the first two questions, you probably thought of some good leader you have known and mentally assigned words and concepts like *competent*, *trustworthy*, *positive*, *dependable*, *cared about people*, or *kept us informed*. The memory of a bad leader probably summoned a list of opposites: *incompetent* (or *only marginally capable*), *pessimistic*, *didn't care about anyone else*, *wouldn't share information*.

For both leaders, you probably remember specific behaviors that you thought were good or bad, and the behaviors probably followed a pattern. Over time, for better or worse, most leaders exhibit consistent patterns of leadership behavior. The pattern shapes their reputation (how they are known and perceived by others), is considered a reflection of their character, and largely determines their standing and status with others.

Leader behaviors that are considered positive and constructive can be attractive and highly influential. The result is greater respect and trust, and stronger emotional connection between such leaders and their employees. These are behaviors that leaders should strive to develop in themselves, in the cadre of leaders below them, and in all their employees.

The word *develop* raises several questions: Can good leadership be developed, especially insofar as character is concerned? Can an adult's character be deliberately improved? If so, what attributes of character are most important to focus on in developing better leadership? Finally, are there specific approaches and methods that an organization can pursue?

The answer to all these questions is yes. The aim of this book is to help you, a practicing leader, to further build and develop leadership character in your organization's leadership cadre as well as in yourself. The book will look at leadership character first and foremost in terms of behavioral patterns that have a positive, consistent, and useful influence on others. Later chapters will lay out a systematic framework for organizing your efforts. They will also provide a number of tools and suggest specific effective methods.

For now, let's consider a bit more why these efforts are needed, what it really means to lead, and how a focus on behavior makes character development possible.

What's Currently Missing from Leadership Development

While we all agree that leadership is important, we also seem to agree that there is a problem with the performance of our leaders. The results of a joint survey by Harvard and *US News and World Report* regarding leaders in the United States confirms this. Of the 1,374 people polled, 73 percent responded that most leaders in the United States are out of touch with the average person, 58 percent felt their leaders cannot be trusted, only 39 percent felt they have high ethical standards, and only 28 percent said they are the best Americans can do ("Poll: A Leadership Deficit," 2005). Nearly 60 percent of those polled believe the country would be better off with more women in leadership positions. Military and medical leaders got the highest leadership marks, and leaders of the press got the lowest. From this survey one can reasonably conclude that there is a leadership deficit in the United States. Considering the daily in-

ternational news, it is not unfair to say that there are varying degrees of leadership shortfalls around the world and in many fields of endeavor.

In the course of my own interviews with many leaders in business and other organizations, I have found that while they and their organizations pay a good deal of lip service to the subject of leadership character, they do very little of substance about it. What is done? For example, new employees, including leaders, are briefed by human resources on corporate values and standards of behavior (but after that they hear nothing). A list of company values is commonly posted somewhere in a frame (but never emphasized or discussed). Posters from publishers like Successories focus on character, integrity, and related principles (but hang unnoticed in common areas). There may also be some innocuous rating item regarding integrity on the performance appraisal form—or a course about ethical dilemmas offered by the corporate online training university (but very rarely anything with real teeth or substance).

Beyond that, character development work has traditionally been limited to defining appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in areas such as sexual harassment, diversity and affirmative action, sensitivity training, and employee standards of conduct. Even in organizations that are more advanced, character development has not gone much beyond group discussion on how to handle situations posing ethical dilemmas. The task of defining and instilling moral and ethical attitudes or behaviors seldom gets more than a passing look.

How can these behaviors be defined? What needs to be instilled?

First, let's draw an important distinction between managing and leading. Although many people know there's a difference, in practice the two are often confused. But management deals with such tasks as planning, designing, directing, controlling, coordinating, and tracking execution. By contrast, leadership is about motivating, inspiring, encouraging, and influencing people. We lead people and manage things. Real leaders are effective at leveraging and shaping reality with intangibles such as vision, hope, spirit, morale, emotion, enthusiasm, passion, and soul. Good leaders have positive influencing

attributes like courage, caring, self-control, optimism, and communication skills. Good management matters, but it is much easier to find or train good managers and administrators than it is to find or train good leaders. Of course, some nominal leaders have only slight impact and influence because, in fact, what they primarily do is manage. But what they miss—and what is hard to find—is a genuine people orientation and the special relational skills that a really effective leader must have.

Leadership has the potential to become your organization's most valuable resource. Everything new that happens or does not happen in your organization—including any response to change—depends on the quality of your leaders. The success or failure of a company's vision, products, programs, systems, and processes all depend on leaders' setting the atmosphere, tone, and example for the entire organization. Exceptional leadership can have a strong, positive multiplying effect. This is particularly true of the organization's senior leaders, but it is not limited to them. For better or worse and more or less, leaders on every level will affect their sphere of influence.

Really good leadership is a rare and precious commodity—increasingly so as organizations face new complexities and challenges at the global level. The good news is that you don't need to mine the depths of the earth for great leaders. You can develop the leaders you have.

To Lead Is to Influence

Basketball Hall of Fame coach John Wooden said that a life not lived for others is not a life, and that there is no greater joy than doing something for others (Wooden, 1997). Rick Warren begins his best-selling book *The Purpose Driven Life* with the words, "It's not about you" (Warren, 2002).

These ideas go directly to the heart of what it means to lead. Being a leader of character means that life is not so much about what you yourself can accomplish as it is about caring for and behaving so as to meet the needs of others in ways that bring out their

best. To lead is to influence. An effective leader possesses the skills and abilities to influence others for the best—prompting, stimulating, motivating, persuading, dissuading, convincing, and encouraging. An effective leader is always thinking, “What impact does my behavior have on others?” “What might others think, feel, or do as a result of what I do?” “Is my behavior effective, ineffective, or neither?” “How can I behave differently to be more influential?”

Of course, a leader’s influence can be positive or negative. Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein possessed the ability to influence, but their ultimate influence was basically self-serving and obviously negative. Others, such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Florence Nightingale, also possessed the capacity to influence but used it more positively, focusing on the needs of others and not on themselves.

Effective and positive influence does not usually flow out of simply applying official authority, title, position, or regulations. Often an authoritarian approach is ineffective in motivating others to do what is needed. Effective leaders must develop skills in a range of other more positive ways to influence. In *Leadership in Organizations* (1989), Gary Yukl lists numerous tactics commonly used to persuade or convince others, among them ingratiating, exchanging (quid pro quo), building coalitions, making inspirational or personal appeals, consulting, legitimizing, and pressuring. Yukl suggests that managers can categorize these tactics as being either positive or negative. For example, pressuring and micromanaging to achieve results (such as frequently checking on a direct report’s progress on a specific assignment) will generally have negative consequences. On the other hand, personal appeals based on a legitimate relationship between leaders and their leadership cadre (founded not just on title or position but also on common interests and values) can achieve significant results.

In the past, leaders were expected to influence their direct reports. Today, however, leaders are also expected to influence their superiors, board members, peers, customers, clients, suppliers, the news media, community officials, political leaders, government regulators,

negotiators, environmental authorities, special interest groups, Wall Street analysts, and any number of other stakeholders. To meet these demands of leadership, rank is clearly not enough, and each group requires different tactics to be influenced and led both effectively and positively. Leaders need flexibility and many different skills to communicate credibly and interact with all these parties for maximum results. The principles found in this book address the kinds of influence that extend in all directions.

The idea of leadership as influence also points to a difference between a focus on effectiveness and a focus on *success*. The difference is not just semantic. Of course, leaders should be successful, but a better gauge is whether they are truly effective in terms of influence. Leaders can be considered successful when they achieve the goals and objectives for which they are responsible—that is, when they “make their numbers.” But suppose that in the course of making those numbers, half the workforce leaves the organization and morale of those remaining is low. Or suppose much greater success was possible if everyone in the organization had really taken part? True effectiveness means using leadership influence to unite the organization’s efforts toward and past any single bottom-line moment. It means achieving goals and objectives in such a way that the team is still intact, morale is high, and people are lined up to get on the team.

By these criteria, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the victorious coalition forces in the first Gulf War, is an excellent example of an effective leader. His victory was one of historic proportion and he did it with less than three hundred U.S. deaths—very literally keeping the team intact. Even one soldier’s death is one too many, but in contrast it was estimated there would be approximately ten thousand U.S. deaths in that conflict.

Focusing on Behaviors

Traditionally character has been defined as “the combination of emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities that distinguishes a person.” It derives from the Greek *kharassein*—to engrave, inscribe, or

sketch. In other words, character means qualities that are internally engraved in people, becoming an integral part of them. These qualities are then reflected in a person's pattern of behavior. Thus, leaders' behavior reflects what they stand for and what their core nature is.

Different people see leadership character attributes as more or less fundamental to character behaviors. Frances Hesselbein, founding president of the Drucker Foundation, defines leadership as a matter of how "to be" as a leader and not how to do or say something (Adrian, 2001). On the other hand, when it comes to leading, certainly what we *do* in the literal sense outweighs whatever we merely say or profess to be true. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *Letters and Social Aims*, we don't have to say very much because what we do "thunders" so loudly that no one hears a word we are saying.

Leadership character is all about behaviors. A leader's behaviors are a combination of attributes: traits, qualities, and skills. Leadership character is defined as behaviors that have a positive influence on others. It is how leaders behave (based on what inner qualities they may possess or thoughts they may cherish) that determines their reputation and good name.

Leadership behaviors refer mainly to conduct in the presence of others: actions, comments, nonverbal signals, and personal mannerisms, as well as general demeanor, deportment, and comportment. Like anyone else, leaders can behave badly or they can conduct themselves properly and suitably. Leaders can display positive and constructive behaviors or those that are negative and destructive. Whichever they display, their behaviors will be understood as a reflection of who they are.

I mentioned early that leaders are viewed according to their overall patterns of behavior. For the greatest leadership influence and impact, consistency matters. Consistency extends beyond the idea of "rising to the occasion." Leadership character is not just seen in leaders' behaviors related to crisis, in the presence of stress, or in situations involving an ethical dilemma; it shows up in all behaviors and in everything they do or fail to do. This is crucial point, because we tend to talk in terms of how a leader handled a certain

crisis or made a difficult or potentially controversial decision, but what is equally important (or more so) is how the leader consistently and positively communicates, solves problems, makes decisions, resolves conflicts, disciplines others, builds teams, or casts a vision from day to day. Daily and common behaviors tell much more about the character of a leader than the periodic tough decisions do or the way the leader handles the single great crisis of a career.

For leaders, consistency means always reflecting the same basic principles in practice. It means that one's behaviors conform and agree with one's past words and actions regardless of pressure, criticism, and advice to do otherwise. It means maintaining the habitual positive behaviors that are key to winning trust and respect and achieving effectiveness overall. It means being seen and known as a pillar of dependability and reliability, not changing or wavering based on opinion polls, internal disapprovals, or external condemnations.

Consistency also implies that a leader's behaviors and character are not compartmentalized between work and personal life. You are who you are, and that doesn't change when you arrive at the office or at your own front door. Your character is such that you find consistent standards for behavior in any context. Responsibilities, stresses, and personalities may vary, but your character does not. All the politically correct arguments to the contrary do not change that reality. Behaviors reflect a leader's character regardless of the context. In every context, your character will be noticed and judged.

Leadership Character Can Be Developed

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "A man's character is his fate." There is truth in this fatalistic view. Every person's character is founded on early experiences and influences in childhood and adolescence. These come from home life, schooling, interactions with peers, part-time or summer jobs, and spiritual institutions. They're provided by role models such as parents, grandparents, older siblings, teachers, coaches, spiritual leaders, and by society in general.

Such contacts and exposures largely determine people's patterns of behavior, their value systems, personal moral codes and creeds, convictions, principles, and beliefs. In these forms, a person's character accumulates over time.

But Heraclitus' view does not rule out character *development*—the idea that character can change through an ongoing, continual process of growth, maturation, and improvement. Leadership character involves for the most part learned behaviors, which can be observed and assessed by others. If you learn how to conduct yourself in a certain manner, your behavior will reflect a certain quality such as courage, caring, self-control, optimism, and ready communication. None of these attributes is innate and all five of them lie at the heart of effective leadership.

You can develop the behaviors that define leadership character both in yourself and in others. A person may have a natural inclination or a genetic predisposition to behave in a certain way. Psychologist Carl Jung's "type theory" advanced the idea that we are all hardwired toward certain behavioral preferences. But Jung also believed that we can and do learn to behave contrary to our preferences (Jung, 1976).

All the behaviors involved in leadership character are ones that can be learned by adults regardless of age. As humans, we never lose the ability to learn. This is not to say that changing behaviors is always easy. A behavior that a person has practiced for several decades will not change overnight. However, a rational, emotionally healthy, and psychologically stable person of any age can see an advantage to changing certain behaviors and act upon that perception.

A basic thesis of many religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, is that people can change their behavior to become more moral and virtuous. These religions contain moral codes and numerous writings on how to do this and apply the principles of their teachings. It is well documented that many people have made dramatic behavioral changes after having a major religious experience.

For centuries the military, through intense discipline and aggressive training, has taken civilians and prepared them to function

on the battlefield. That transition is probably the most dramatic change of behavior possible. It is done routinely and in most every country with varying degrees of success.

The key, as I implied earlier, is to go about change in terms of adjusting behavior. Jean Piaget was among the first psychologists whose work focused on character development. He believed that all development evolved from action; people create their understanding of the world through their interactions with their surroundings (Piaget, 1965). He believed that through this process character, too, was developed. Although he worked primarily with children, his theory applies to adults just as well. Through the results of and feedback from their behaviors, through reason and reflection, people can determine which behaviors are appropriate and effective and which are inappropriate and ineffective. Through this process of personal discovery and problem solving, they can then adjust their future behaviors.

My own experience is that adults change their behavior to gain something positive or to avoid something negative. In the first instance, what they stand to gain looks more important to them than preserving an old behavior. For example, people reduce how much they eat because of how good they expect to look and feel after losing weight. Regarding the second instance (avoiding a negative consequence), in a former role as an executive coach, I had clients sent to me who were told by their employer that if they did not respond to my coaching and change their behaviors they would be terminated. It was amazing how motivated these coachees were to avoid that negative consequence.

Adjustment (as opposed to wholesale, instant change) is really the key word in developing better leadership behaviors. The development process helps leaders make adjustments to current behaviors that will lead to greater influence and effectiveness. The process begins with understanding about the impact of current behavior that comes from feedback, personal reflection and introspection, and other sources. Once leaders understand the impact of their leadership behaviors, either positive or negative, they can choose to change how they behave.

Constructive and Affirming Behaviors

Having defined leadership character in terms of behaviors that have a positive influence on others, I need to say more precisely what behaviors are truly constructive and affirming, highly influential, and ideally universal. Later chapters go into more detail, but for now here is a useful overview.

First are the behaviors implied in what is known as the “Golden Rule”: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. The Golden Rule is essentially universal, inasmuch as it is found in all the major religions in the world. It tells us to use the same behaviors toward others as we would want them to use toward us. At a minimum this means treating others with respect, dignity, and equality, being sensitive to their needs and emotions, listening to them, paying attention to them, and so on. As an exercise, try listing your own specific desires for how you want to be treated by others. Then think about how that list might serve in guiding your own behaviors as a leader.

Less well known is the “Silver Rule.” The Silver Rule says that we should *not* treat others the way we would *not* want to be treated. Whereas the Golden Rule is active, the Silver Rule is restrictive—not using behaviors on others that we do not want to be used on us. For example, most of us don’t want to be

- Told a lie
- Deceived by false or incomplete information
- Injured by someone’s self-focused, thoughtless, rude, or insensitive behavior
- The subject of a negative rumor or gossip
- The victim of sexual innuendo, harassment, or assault
- Defrauded out of money, property, or goods
- Called stupid, ignorant, uneducated, or ugly
- Discriminated against because of race, religion, gender, or ethnic background
- Treated with disrespect, unwarranted distrust, or in an undignified manner

Many times when discussing patterns of behavior, the Silver Rule provides a clearer perspective and understanding than the Golden Rule. We know how frustrated and angry being treated in these ways can make us. We also know what we would think of someone who consistently did so.

Yet another perspective is provided by the “Law of Reciprocity,” which says that the way *you* behave toward and treat others is the way they are likely to behave toward and treat *you*. Leaders who behave in an unseemly manner open themselves to this law.

It is really in everyone’s best interests to behave according to the Golden and Silver Rules in attitude, speech, and conduct. But it is also possible to go beyond them in the search for universally acknowledged positive and negative attributes of leaders. In 1993, The Wharton School of Management at the University of Pennsylvania began a global study on leadership and organizations (House et al., 2004). The researchers interviewed 17,500 middle managers in sixty-two countries and eight hundred organizations. Among other interesting findings, there emerged a list of fifteen leader attributes or descriptions universally acknowledged as positive: communicative, informed, courageously decisive, positive (optimistic), trustworthy, honest, just, dependable, team builder, motivator, encourager, dynamic, intelligent, a win-win problem solver, and planner. For leaders exploring which attributes to focus on for leadership behavior development, this list is a good place to start. (Later in this chapter I boil it down to a smaller, more manageable set.) There were also seven universally acknowledged *negative* attributes for leaders: loner, asocial, irritable, dictatorial, ruthless, noncooperative, and egocentric.

Many of the constructive and affirming leadership behaviors on the list may strike you as intuitive, much like the Golden and Silver Rules—and perhaps they are. But in most situations they are still very useful. However, sometimes leaders face dilemmas that require other orders of thinking. For example, leaders may need to choose behaviors based on ideas of the greater good, the lesser evil, reconciliation of competing values, or consistency with their own

and the organization's broader systems of values. These challenges require thinking of behaviors not just in terms of rules but also in terms of personal values that underlie behaviors.

Values, Needs, and Behavior

Public opinion and the majority viewpoint are seldom good starting points for making decisions and choosing behaviors. History shows that the majority view has often been totally wrong. Vivid examples in U.S. history include the support for slavery prior to the Civil War, racial segregation for the hundred years after the Civil War ended, and the denial of women's right to vote as late as 1920.

Developing positive leadership behaviors requires some more independent concept of what drives individuals' behaviors in the first place. It is generally accepted that each of us has two broad types of drives: our values and our needs. Values generate needs, so I'll start with the former. In essence, values are those things that really matter to us, including our essential beliefs, attitudes, principles, and priorities.

How do people acquire values? Building on the work of Piaget, developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a theory of the development of moral reasoning and character. He saw the process as made up of six stages that an individual could achieve only in sequence, beginning in early childhood with relatively simple concepts of obedience and punishment and ranging up to an advanced stage of behavior based on values and independent conscience that most adults never actually reach. In Kohlberg's view each stage of moral reasoning represents a significant shift in the behavioral perspective of the individual, and the goal of character development is to help individuals build on experience to advance as far as possible in sequence upward through the stages.

Kohlberg's theory reinforces the concept of character and moral development as an ongoing, lifelong process. Other theorists have seen this development as a process in which, throughout our lives, our moral perceptions and values are formed and reshaped by various

experiences, communications, rules, laws, conventions, moral teachings, rewards, recognitions, punishments, and so on (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1995).

Every day, consciously or unconsciously, we base choices, decisions, and actions on our personal system of values. Everything we say or do (including our habits) reflects that system. But some elements of a personal system of values are more enduring and central than others. On one hand we possess core values that seldom change. These values are often related to family and other close relationships, health, security, and so on. On the other hand, we hold more transitory values that are important for the moment but change. These values may be related to the circumstances of a current job, place of residence, hobby, recreational activity, and so on.

Leaders need to be as aware as possible of their own values. With awareness, we can see how well we integrate and manifest those values in our daily life. A useful tool for this purpose is “values clarification,” a process that is well described in *Values Clarification: A Practical, Action-Directed Workbook* (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1995). It outlines seventy-six strategies for helping leaders understand their personal values system, ranging from “Rogerian Listening” to an exercise called “What’s in Your Wallet?”

Appendix A of this book is another resource—a brief assessment instrument for helping you clarify your personal value system. It can help you to identify what may be hidden or unconscious values, as well as help you notice where your values conflict with one another.

As noted, our values generate our needs, which brings us closer to actual behaviors. For example, if one of my core values is the welfare of my family, then I will have a need to spend time with them, support them, and ensure their safety and security. Determined by my values, these needs will then drive much of my behavior.

Two fundamental theories can greatly assist us in understanding our own needs. First is the work on human needs by psychologist Abraham Maslow. In 1943, he published the first edition of his core research on the topic (Maslow, 1987). He proposed a five-level hi-

erarchy of human needs. He believed that as we meet the needs at one level we automatically go on to have the needs of our next level met.

According to Maslow, the foundational level includes physiological needs such as food, water, air, sleep, and sex. The second level up includes needs related to safety and security—protection, stability, and consistency. The third level brings in our social needs, such as being part of something larger than ourselves and receiving validation and social acceptance from others. The fourth level is the need for respect and esteem from others. The fifth—top—level is a need for “self-actualization,” which means reaching our full potential and becoming all that we are capable of being.

Will Schutz provides more perspective on interpersonal needs. According to Schutz’s model, we all have three interpersonal needs: inclusion, control, and affection. Inclusion has to do with relationships and associations; it determines the amount of contact a person seeks. Control has to do with our need to be in charge, to have influence, and to bring order and structure to a situation. Affection has to do with our need for warmth in relationships, open and honest communication; it determines the closeness we seek with others. Schutz provides a means of assessing how much of each interpersonal need you express to others (what others see in your behaviors) and how much you desire from other people in each of the three areas of interpersonal need. Schutz developed a personality assessment to help individuals become aware of their own interpersonal needs. Called the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior, it is generally known by its acronym, FIRO-B (Schutz, 1958, 1996). The booklet has fifty-four questions. It can be of great assistance to leaders in understanding how their needs drive their behaviors.

But keep in mind that personal values systems have limits. Leaders of character know that under no circumstances should their pattern of leadership behavior, decision making, or efforts to influence be based on their own individual desires or whims. No individual has that degree of authority. The idea that every person can

make this determination can only lead to confusion, contention, and anarchy. Defining what are positive or negative behaviors isn't a matter of any one person's individual preferences but a combination of things including established laws; custom and tradition; cultural norms; social acceptability; personal values; organizational values and standards; spiritual beliefs; common sense, logic, reason, moderation, and balance; and the norms of honorable conduct. In other words, personal values are only one of ten items to be considered when defining leadership character.

Choices, Consequences, and Dilemmas

Approaching the end of this introduction, I want to underscore the importance of choice. The Greek philosopher Aristotle advocated an early form of the scientific method—that one should investigate the natural laws and facts of the world. From this experience, assisted by reason, Aristotle maintained that a person can then come to know the absolute truths of the universe, and from there go on to live in an ethical manner and thereby achieve *eudaimonia*, or happiness (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2006). In other words, Aristotle saw living a life of virtue as the perfection of reason, and ultimately a matter of choice. The life of virtue depended on consciously choosing behaviors in line with twelve virtues, among which Aristotle included courage, sincerity, modesty, temperance, and liberality. He believed that to achieve happiness, one needed to choose behaviors representing a balance among the virtues.

Every day as a leader you face choices, alternatives, options. At a critical moment in the movie *Precinct 13*, a character says that the most powerful thing in life is the ability to choose. I agree. So does award-winning actress Meryl Streep, who says that we are the result of the choices we have made over our lifetime.

In every situation we face, we can choose how to respond and what to do or not do. Because our choices matter so much, *how we go about making choices* is a key part of leadership character development. One general guideline is that our choices should be con-

sistent with one another, our value system, and our organization's value system. That often means reviewing a range of options, trade-offs, and alternatives, considering the consequences and impact of each, and choosing among them.

Beyond that, good decision making also means maturely owning and taking full responsibility and accountability for the choice. Good leadership character means being answerable and liable for choices and whatever other behaviors a leader commits. It involves the old-fashioned concept of being responsible and accountable for everything the organization does or doesn't do. That includes taking the credit for the decision and its results, whether it yields accolades or criticism.

When making major choices, leaders often face problems on every side. They may well have no clearly right choice, only sets of needs and disadvantages to balance against one another. Arguments can be made for and against every option in such a situation, leaving leaders with a number of alternatives, all of which may be filled with ambiguity. Arguments can be made on both sides of a dilemma. In such situations, leaders have a number of alternatives, all of which may be filled with ambiguity. For instance, one choice may conform with societal, cultural, or organizational values and standards of behavior, another may not, and a third may be open to interpretation. There may be a choice that will require choosing between increasing profits at the expense of the employees. Then there is the dilemma that arises when a leader's personal values collide with the organization's values. Sometimes the best choice may be among a group of options that are all weak. Because such dilemmas pose many problems, I will pay special attention to them later in the book.

In short, this book relies on your choice. It does not presume to deliver a program in support of any particular system of values or beliefs beyond the basically universal concepts of positive leadership behavior mentioned earlier in this chapter. The book does address general and best-practice leadership behaviors; it suggests and recommends; but again, it's up to you to choose behaviors according to your own frame of reference.

As a leader in your organization, it's also in some large part up to you to choose whether or not your organization can benefit from an active program of leadership character development. Only someone who is really providing leadership and not simply filling a leadership position will consider creating a character development process for the rest of the cadre of leaders. Developing people and helping them meet their full potential is a leader's—not a manager's—role.

The Five E's: A Framework for Character Development

The second chapter of this book explores a set of attributes that go a long way to clearly define the leadership behaviors that you and your organization probably want to develop. The five chapters after that lay out a framework for developing leadership character in an organizational context. I call the framework the “Five E's” (Klann, 2003a): *example*, *experience*, *education*, *environment*, and *evaluation*. As you will see, the Five E's approach makes intuitive sense. If you'd already stopped and asked yourself, “How can I build a program for developing character in my organization's leaders?” you might well have come up with a framework like this.

Example

Example refers to a leader's influence on others through their observation of the leader's behaviors. It is the most powerful way to develop character because it leverages the natural human tendency to emulate the behavior of individuals who are respected, held in high esteem, or in positions of authority. Within any organization the behaviors of these leaders set the standard for everyone else.

Experience

Experience refers to developing leadership character by exposing leaders to new and challenging leadership work. This can include a variety of assignments, such as serving on a task force or special proj-

ect, moving to positions with increased or different responsibilities and scope, heading a start-up or fix-it, or shifting from operations (line) to staff or vice versa. Experience also includes activities like attending a highly experiential leadership development training course—for example, the Center for Creative Leadership’s globally renowned organizational simulation, The Looking Glass Experience. Experience also refers to the developmental possibilities of hardship or failure.

Education

Education refers to providing knowledge and training to a leader related to leadership character development. Organizations can set up formal and informal training that focuses on relevant behaviors and how they demonstrate character, the potential pressures on and challenges to character resulting from such things as performance expectations and market competition, and the short- and long-term implications of a lapse of character. Education might include discussions of dilemmas and scenarios that involve difficult moral or ethical choices.

Environment

Environment is essentially the organizational culture and its values system, both formal and informal, in which a developing leader functions. An organization’s environment plays a huge role in either encouraging or impeding the character development of leaders. You can shape your organization’s culture to support and promote constructive leadership behaviors.

Evaluation

There are many ways to apply the feedback, performance appraisal process, and disciplinary practices of an organization to develop leadership character. In their own behavior, people will generally pay closest attention to things for which they know they are being

held accountable. Leaders will pay close attention to these areas of behavior that are being rated in the ongoing course of performance appraisals and decisions regarding merit increases, bonuses, and promotions. This accountability can play a key role in the process of developing leadership character.

Each of the “Five E’s” chapters emphasizes practical, how-to leadership character development. The final chapter provides more guidance for planning and initiating an overall program of character development for leaders.

Building Leadership Character: Getting Started

1. What in your own view is missing from leadership character today, in general or in your organization?
2. In what ways do you currently see yourself and your cadre of leaders as being effective and influential? In what ways not?
3. In your own experience, can you recall a situation in which you could see that a leader’s character went through some improvement, either as part of some deliberate training or in some other setting? (Think in terms of improved or adjusted behaviors.)
4. How well does the Golden Rule serve as a model for how to treat others? Make a list of ways that you want to be treated by others. Could that list also serve as a cornerstone for your own leadership behaviors? Try again, using the Silver Rule.
5. In what ways do the “Five E’s” make general sense to you as a complete range of approaches to developing leadership character among your own cadre of leaders?