

PART ONE

POWERFUL
MODELS OF
RESPONSIBILITY

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

I

TAKING ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY

William Damon
Kendall Cotton Bronk

*It's not enough that we do our best;
sometimes we have to do what's required*

—Sir Winston Churchill

The buck stops here.

—Sign on President Harry Truman's desk

SOME PEOPLE, WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN, can be counted on to step forward and do whatever they can to salvage a difficult situation. They “take responsibility” for finding a solution, no matter how burdensome, risk-laden, or even hopeless the situation may seem. Others, fearing the personal costs of becoming entangled in a hard problem, find excuses for absenting themselves or looking the other way. They disclaim the problem, perhaps because they believe it was not of their making, or because they have not been given sufficient resources to solve it, or because they have other business that they consider more pressing. Whether explicitly or not, they proclaim “it’s not my problem,” assuming that someone else will step in to fix things.

Stories of people who have assumed difficult responsibilities to a heroic degree are well-known, as are those of people who have famously (or

infamously) shirked them. Mother Teresa, for example, felt an intense personal responsibility to care for the ill and impoverished. She once said, “When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed. Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those people throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day, their daily bread, and by our understanding and love, give them peace and joy” (Global Catholic Network, n.d.).

Mother Teresa did not leave this consuming job to others, nor did she merely pay lip service to it. Instead she labored for years to help some of the world’s neediest citizens. Even though she knew she could never eradicate hunger or end human suffering entirely, she did as much as she could. “I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor. It was an order” (Global Catholic Network, n.d.). Unlike many of us who are concerned about the world’s poor but fail to do much about it, Mother Teresa took ultimate responsibility for helping them.

On the other end of the responsibility spectrum was Emperor Nero of Rome. In about 64 A.D., a devastating fire swept through Rome, destroying everything in its path. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, the self-indulgent emperor “sang and played the lyre while Rome burned” (Bible History Online, n.d.). No psychologist was present at the time to analyze Nero’s behavior, but we might speculate that he threw himself into a state of denial because he felt inadequate to cope with this formidable challenge. Or perhaps it was all a self-serving ploy: at the time it was rumored that Nero had started the fire himself in order to make space for a new, more beautiful palace. But whatever the reason, it is clear that rather than taking responsibility for the people he ruled, Emperor Nero shirked his duty in dramatic fashion, thereby becoming an emblem for irresponsibility.

While Mother Teresa and Emperor Nero provide extreme historical examples of responsibilities assumed and shirked, more ordinary instances abound in contemporary society. Our focus in this chapter falls on the workplace. In most work settings, some team players can be counted on to stay until the job is completed while some leave as soon as their part is done, regardless of the state of the project. Some are committed to seeing a project succeed while others are content seeing themselves succeed. Why are some people willing to put themselves on the line in order to resolve a tough problem while others around them think it more prudent to withdraw? (Compare Horn and Gardner, Chapter Eleven, this volume.) How, that is, do some people acquire a sense of *ultimate responsibility* for the way things turn out?

The Psychology of Ultimate Responsibility

In recent years, psychologists have taken an interest in life goals. Such goals have been referred to, variously, as “current concerns” (Klinger, 1977), “life tasks” (Cantor, 1990), “personal projects” (Little, 1989), “personal goals” (Brunstein, 1993), and “personal strivings” (Emmons, 1999). In the Emmons formulation, which is closest to our own framework, personal strivings are aimed at enduring objectives that motivate the person’s behavior over the long haul (Emmons, 1999). Many people strive for enduring objectives in their lives, but there is enormous variation in the intensity of their strivings, in how well articulated the strivings are, and in how much influence they exert on the person’s life choices. Personal strivings that are especially profound, long-lasting, and central to the person’s identity (who I am, what I’m here for, what I’m trying to accomplish with my life, what kind of person I want to be) are considered *ultimate concerns* that transcend and guide the person’s lower-level goals. (Emmons, 1999).

Ultimate concerns differ from other types of personal goals in important ways. A personal goal, such as acing a math test or finding a date to the spring prom, is typically short-term; in contrast, an ultimate concern, such as finding a cure for cancer, reflects a long-term purpose that subsumes a string of short-term goals. Short-term goals can act as means towards the fulfillment of ultimate concerns (or they may come and go on their own, without larger significance). Ultimate concerns, however, are ends in themselves. An ultimate concern may serve as an organizing feature for one’s personal goals. Returning to the cancer example, someone may have the short-term goal of getting a high mark on a test in order to be admitted into a competitive college so that he or she can go on to medical school and begin researching cancer cures. In this way, personal goals may move the individual closer to achieving an ultimate concern.

People with ultimate concerns usually act in service of those interests, and such activity can provide profound and enduring sense of purpose for their lives. A purpose may reflect a commitment to faith, a social cause, a talent, or a domain. A purpose may be noble or ignoble. Hitler clearly had a purpose in his life, though it was surely not a moral one. Although distinguishing between noble and ignoble purposes can be difficult, it is possible; however, that challenge is beyond the scope of this chapter.¹

¹For a discussion of ways to distinguish noble from ignoble purposes, we suggest the following source: Bronk, K. C., Menon, J., and Damon, W. (2004). *Youth purpose: Conclusions from a working conference of leading scholars*. Available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/adolescent.ctr>.

In a study of adolescents, we interviewed a seventeen-year-old girl whose ultimate concern was caring for the environment. She felt it was her duty as a human being to preserve and protect her natural surroundings.

What I believe is that God created [the environment], and God created [it] for us to take care of it. . . . All those little trees out there, and every bird that flies and every unique sunset and sunrise, was created by God for me to be able to see and enjoy, but if I don't take care of it, it's not going to be there for me to enjoy. So I guess that's one of the big parts of why I'm so passionate about what I do. Because this is given to me, for me to take care of, so I need to do my part for it to be there later for somebody else. [Bronk, 2005, p. 214]

This young woman did not just talk about her passion; she eagerly tackled a local environmental problem. Farmers with no place to dispose of significant amounts of motor oil were pouring it into their fields and the oil was beginning to contaminate the local water supply and damage the vegetation. This enterprising young woman started an innovative oil recycling program that became so successful that it was eventually implemented statewide. Creating and expanding the oil recycling program gave her life a purpose because she was able to work toward her ultimate concern of conservation. She then enrolled in a college environmental engineering program as a further means to advance her longstanding purpose and is eager to pursue a career toward that end as well (Bronk, 2005).

An ultimate concern may take a variety of forms. For some people, the call of a particular responsibility can become an ultimate concern—for example, responsibility to a person (such as a spouse or child), a community (such as one's country or company), a cause (such as civil rights or liberty), a value (such as truth or compassion), or an ideal (such as personal integrity or excellent work). In such cases, responsibility may be fueled by a deeper purpose, often a moral one. Mother Teresa's stated ultimate concern was serving God. That concern inspired a deep sense of responsibility for God's children, particularly the neediest of them. Caring for God's children provided a moral purpose for her life. In this way, Mother Teresa's sense of responsibility, driven by a powerful moral purpose, became an essential and inextricable part of her ultimate concern.

When is responsibility guided by a deeper purpose? How does that happen? In this chapter we argue that responsibility is likely to become an ultimate concern when (1) it stems from a highly articulated sense of moral identity, (2) it reflects the moral purpose at the center of that moral

identity, and (3) it is supported by an organized group of respected peers and mentors (such as a faith community, a profession, an army or business team, a nongovernmental organization, and so on). Such personal and social conditions maximize the likelihood that people will strive to take ultimate responsibility, although in the end this stance remains to some extent a personal choice subject to the vagaries of will. In other words, while such conditions make it likely that people will take ultimate responsibility, they do not guarantee it.

Moral Identity and Moral Purpose

People differ in the centrality of their moral concerns to their senses of who they are and who they want to be. For some, moral convictions largely define who they are—these are people with strong senses of moral identity. For others, material concerns (how much money they have, how powerful they happen to be, and so on) are far more central. It is the former who are most likely to act in accord with their moral beliefs. We have found that moral identity is the best predictor of a person's commitment to moral action, because it determines not merely what the person considers to be the right course of action but also why the person would decide that "I myself must take this course." For example, most persons will express the belief that allowing others to starve is morally wrong, but only some of these people will conclude that they *themselves* must do something to prevent this occurrence in a particular circumstance, such as a famine in Africa. Moral identity engenders a sense of *personal responsibility* for taking action: it provides a powerful incentive for conduct because it triggers a motive to act in accord with one's conception of one's ideal self. Moral judgment alone cannot provide this motive: it is only when people conceive of themselves and their life goals in moral terms that they acquire a strong propensity to act according to their moral judgments.

Colby and Damon (1992) found that the moral exemplars they studied were convinced that the work they were doing fulfilled both their personal *and* moral goals. People who define themselves in terms of their moral goals see moral problems in everyday events, and they see themselves as necessarily implicated in dealing with those problems. From this sense it is a direct step to taking responsibility for seeking a solution.

In the workplace, moral identity means defining the self in a way that includes not only work-related skills and interests, but also the purpose for one's work, one's sense of ethical restrictions, and one's responsibility to one's community. In this way, personal responsibility in the workplace is fostered by a strong moral identity.

Over the course of human development, when a person makes a moral choice regularly, the choice becomes habitual: a child who has learned to tell the truth does not usually need to decide whether to lie, cheat, or steal every time the chance arises. The honest behavior comes naturally—or to use a familiar idiom that in this case has psychological validity, it becomes “*second nature*.” Through a system of acquired action, the behavior becomes habitual. Well-established moral habits are commonly known as virtues, which in turn form the behavioral basis of moral character.

People who function at the highest levels, maximizing all their potentials, strive for a unity in the self as a kind of ultimate concern in itself (the concern of personal integrity). Although absolute unity is rarely achieved (other than by extraordinary moral exemplars with high degrees of moral commitment), every person can approach this ideal over time. Cultivating a strong moral identity—the sense that moral concerns play a primary role in determining who I am and who I want to be—is the psychological means to this end.

Often at the center of one’s moral identity a powerful moral purpose resides. The moral purpose may serve as an organizing feature for one’s moral identity, compelling an individual to define himself or herself not only in moral terms but also in terms of his or her moral purpose.

A moral purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the broader world (Damon, Menon, and Bronk, 2003). There are two important features of this definition. First, a purpose is a goal of sorts, but it represents a long-term aim rather than a short-term goal such as to learn a new computer program or to finish the laundry. Second, purpose is a part of one’s personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component: the desire to make a difference in the world, to contribute to matters larger than the self. Purpose is always directed at an accomplishment toward which one can make progress. This accomplishment may be material or nonmaterial, external or internal, reachable or unreachable. Its necessary characteristic is not its concreteness but the sense of direction it provides in creating an objective for purpose. Returning to the example of Mother Teresa is helpful here. Her purpose was to serve God, and this long-term, overarching aim clearly had an external focus. It served as a compass, providing direction throughout her life.

People who possess a moral purpose that is central to their lives feel obliged to act in service of that purpose. They feel responsible for its outcome. In this way, purpose may fuel a sense of personal responsibility.

In the empirical study mentioned earlier, we found a dozen adolescents who exhibited intense dedication to their individual purposes. Their commitments tended to be driven by a strong sense of moral identity (Bronk, 2005). In other words, their sense of who they were revolved around their purposes. So the environmentally minded young woman called herself “a tree hugger” and a religious adolescent described herself first and foremost as a Christian. The young people identified themselves by their purposes, and when this happened they felt personally responsible for working in service of their ultimate concerns. When a twelve-year-old boy learned that people in Africa were dying from a lack of clean drinking water, he felt personally responsible for raising the money to build wells in the neediest parts of the continent. His belief that he was ultimately responsible for providing clean drinking water likely resulted from a strong sense of moral identity, and in taking responsibility for the cause, he found a purpose for his life. Similarly, workers who find purpose in their jobs are more likely to take ultimate responsibility for resolving difficult issues at work.

Finally, a sense of ultimate responsibility is more likely to develop when social support for that effort exists. In the empirical study of adolescents, social support took the form of mentors, clubs, organized or informal groups of like-minded peers, faith communities, and supportive families (Bronk, 2005). In the workplace it may take the form of advisors, mentors, and professional associations.

In sum, regardless of the form it takes, social support in conjunction with a personal sense of moral identity and moral purpose maximizes the likelihood that people will develop a sense of ultimate responsibility for the work they do.

Ultimate Responsibility in the Workplace

In the GoodWork study, we sought out people with a deep sense of personal responsibility for their work. We conducted in-depth interviews with them to examine their personal beliefs, histories, and strategies for accomplishing good work. The interviews were semistructured and extensively probed, in the tradition of “clinical interviews” that we and others have used in previous studies to examine moral commitment and judgment (Colby and Damon, 1992).

In the GoodWork study, we found three types of ultimate responsibility in the workplace: (1) responsibility for the ethical conduct of an organization and its workers, (2) responsibility for fulfillment of the organization’s professional or business purposes, and (3) responsibility

for the broader social good. For this chapter we have selected three cases to illustrate these three types of ultimate responsibility.

While each of our examples exhibits all of these types of responsibility to some degree, each provides an especially powerful example of one type in particular. For example, Max De Pree, who worked in the business domain, illustrates the first type of ultimate responsibility; he took ultimate responsibility for the ethical conduct of his organization and its workers. Katharine Graham, who worked in the journalism domain, exemplified a strong sense of responsibility for the fulfillment of journalism's professional or business purpose. And John W. Gardner, who worked in the philanthropy and nonprofit domain, took ultimate responsibility for our society as a whole.

Max De Pree

While Max De Pree illustrates aspects of all three faces of ultimate responsibility, he provides the clearest example of someone who exhibits a sense of responsibility for the ethical conduct of an organization and its workers.

De Pree is chairman emeritus of Herman Miller, Inc., an innovative company in the furniture business. Under De Pree's leadership, Herman Miller was regularly included in *Fortune's* list of the twenty-five most admired companies in the United States. In addition to writing several books on leadership, De Pree was elected by *Fortune* magazine to the National Business Hall of Fame and won the Business Enterprise Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award.

De Pree owes his success in business to his innovative leadership style. In his book *Leadership Is an Art* (2004) De Pree shares his decidedly humble approach to being a leader. He begins his book with a short story that contains a simple moral: "no one is perfect" (p. 5). His approach to leadership naturally flows from this premise. Admitting that individuals are neither perfect nor all knowing "enables us to begin to think about being abandoned to the strengths of others" (p. 9). Accordingly, De Pree encourages leaders to identify others' talents and to remove obstacles in order to allow them to use their talents to the greatest extent possible. De Pree endorses Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership; rather than workers serving leaders, leaders should serve workers.

De Pree's confidence in others stems from a strong sense of moral identity. Central is his belief that "each of us is needed. Each of us has a gift to bring. Each of us is a social being and our institutions are social units. Each of us has a desire to contribute" (p. 66).

De Pree's moral identity reflects a moral purpose at its core. In his capacity as a leader, his purpose was to run a business that served its customers' needs fairly and ethically. This goal entailed helping his employees use their strengths to make their own contributions to a larger cause. In an interview with us he said, "For me, one of the very important things that happened in the course of a business career was the slow discovery that business and business people have to be a positive part of a society." De Pree defined himself by the work he did, and he encouraged his employees to do the same. He believed that the way people see themselves as workers should not differ from the way they see themselves as individuals in other contexts. People should strive to live at work according to the same value system by which they strive to live in other areas of their lives. "For many of us who work there exists an exasperating discontinuity between how we see ourselves as persons and how we see ourselves as workers. We need to eliminate that sense of discontinuity and to restore a sense of coherence to our lives" (2004, p. 32). Because De Pree believed that people should act at work as they would in their personal lives, he tried to create a corporate culture that encouraged ethical practices and a strong sense of responsibility to one's community.

Through his powerful sense of moral identity De Pree took personal responsibility for his company and his employees. One way he took responsibility for his employees was through a program he instituted called silver parachutes. The company was functioning in a time when hostile takeovers were common, and De Pree felt it was unfair for only the top executives to receive significant financial compensation, or golden parachutes, in the case of such a takeover. So he instituted a program by which all employees were entitled to compensation should the company be acquired. In our interview with him he told us how this program served two aims: "If [another company] really wanted to take you over, they had to pay the extra cost, which helped to inhibit the idea that you could take us over. But, you see, it wasn't primarily designed to prevent a takeover. It was primarily designed to bring equity." Such a program points not only to De Pree's business acumen, but also to his deep concern for the welfare of his employees. This program evidences De Pree's sense of responsibility for the Herman Miller workforce.

A critical component of De Pree's philosophy on leadership was accountability. Leaders, he believed, should have enough faith in their workers to allow those workers to be personally accountable for the work they do. De Pree put this idea into practice at Herman Miller through the Scanlon Plan, a program that offered financial rewards to workers who saved the company money and that gave employees partial

ownership of the business. By making his employees owners, he gave them a personal stake in the company's performance. In *Leadership Is an Art* (2004) he wrote, "Another implication is that everybody must live up to some important expectations. In the position of owners, we become more accountable for our personal performance. Owners cannot walk away from concerns" (p. 99). Of course, another word for accountability is *responsibility*. This is yet another way that De Pree encouraged his workers to take ultimate responsibility for their work, and in which he took responsibility for his employees.

Not only did De Pree take responsibility for his employees but he also took responsibility for the company's practices. He assumed that the ethical integrity of his company was *his* job to promote and enforce. Unlike so many of the corporate chieftains who have made news in recent times with their claims that they were blithely ignorant of their employees' or associates' criminal shenanigans, De Pree made it his business to communicate high ethical standards all through the ranks of the company and to ensure that his employees were acting accordingly. Evidence of this was the strict policy that De Pree set against accepting bribes—in those days a common practice for doing business overseas. In our interview with him he shared an anecdote regarding this practice:

One of our senior salespeople was dealing with an important decision-maker at [unnamed company]. We were talking about it, and my recollection is that it was about a \$12 million order. And the guy said, "Well, I can arrange for you to have this order, but we have to talk about what my share is going to be." And our man said, "Well, there isn't going to be any share for you. Our company doesn't do this." "Sure," the guy said, "everybody does it." "No," [our man] said, "we don't." And [their man] said, "Well, I'm going to have to call your boss, and you'll probably lose your job." And [our man] said, "Oh no, we just lose the order." Because he knew that's what I'd say.

De Pree believed strongly in ethical business practices and he took ultimate responsibility for seeing that his company functioned accordingly.

De Pree had a series of mentors who helped him see his work in a broader context. In our interview he talked about the important role that ethical businesses play in the support of the societies they serve. "I think that my business career was a kind of pilgrimage away from, you know, how can you build up the revenues . . . towards a goal of figuring out what are the preserving principles of the free market system in a democracy." Mentors helped De Pree connect his work life to his religious life. They helped him see how his work life could serve society and, in doing

so, serve his religious aims as well. As a result of the powerful role that mentors played in his life, De Pree later served as a dedicated mentor to others. In addition to having the support of mentors, De Pree had the support of his family. Before him his father and his brother had run the company, and both of these men supported De Pree in his “social approach” to business.

In sum, not only did De Pree help his workers feel personally invested in their work but he also took ultimate responsibility for the ethical conduct of Herman Miller and for the welfare of its employees.

Katharine Graham

The second example of responsibility in the workplace is Katharine Graham. She provides a powerful example of someone who exhibited responsibility for the fulfillment of the organization’s professional or business purpose.

Graham grew up in New York and Washington, D.C., the fourth of five children in a wealthy, politically active family. Her mother was a socialite with a deep appreciation for books, art, and politics, and her father was a wildly successful businessman with a keen sense of civic responsibility. As a child, Katharine admired both of her parents, but as she grew older she became particularly close to her father, Eugene Meyer. As a young man, Eugene had plotted a “map of life” in which the first twenty years of his life were to be spent learning. Accordingly, much of this phase was spent in school. The next twenty years he planned to dedicate to earning a living to support his family, which he did through a variety of highly successful business ventures. Finally, the last twenty years of his life were to be devoted to public service. During this time he moved his family from New York to Washington, D.C., to assume a series of political positions. He also bought the struggling *Washington Post*. While Eugene ran the paper, he and Katharine routinely engaged in discussions about journalistic ethics and political issues.

Once leaving home, Katharine majored in journalism in college and worked briefly as a reporter for the *San Francisco News* and the *Washington Post*. She married Philip Graham, a lawyer who clerked for Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. Phil and Eugene became close friends, and when Eugene was ready to retire from the *Post*, he installed Phil as its new publisher. Phil grew the paper’s readership and acquired other media companies. In his forties Phil began to suffer intense bouts of depression and committed suicide. Katharine, fearful that her family could lose the paper, took over as publisher. For a wealthy woman in

1963 this was a surprising move; women of means at that time did not typically work. Initially Graham planned to assume the role only in title and until her son was old enough to take over. However, she soon realized that being publisher required a good deal of time and attention, and she found the demanding job surprisingly engaging. During her tenure as publisher, Katharine made enormously difficult publication decisions, including whether to publish stories about Watergate and the Pentagon Papers; these decisions evoked the fury of the administration and the justice department at that time.

Graham's sense of moral identity included at least three distinct facets, and each played out in the context of the journalism domain. First, Graham saw herself as someone who owed something to the community in which she lived. In her autobiography she wrote, "We grew up with the belief that no matter what you did professionally, you automatically had to think about public issues and give back, either in interest in your community or in public service—you had to care" (Graham, 1997, p. 46). She saw her role as publisher as an opportunity to serve the public good. Like her father, she believed that "a newspaper was a public trust, meant to serve the public in a democracy" (p. 63).

Second, her moral identity included a deep concern for people of lesser means. In her autobiography she recounts the following story: "Once in 1952, after a visit to a Utah copper mine that had yielded my father great financial gains, [my mother] wrote in her diary, '[The mine] was an interesting sight but the village that led up to it appalled me. . . . This is where [the money] comes from and I spend it on Chinese art but it was a shock to think that we live on money that is produced under such conditions'" (1997, p. 52).

Upon hearing this story Graham could have moved to Utah and taken personal responsibility for the miners' welfare. With her wealth she could have significantly improved their working conditions. Instead she took her concern for the miners and embedded it in the mission of the paper. Rather than becoming a class paper that catered only to the wealthiest readers, she saw to it that the *Post* remained a paper for the masses, serving readers from all socioeconomic levels, including, as she told us in her interview, "Maryland housewives . . . [and] the government people and the guy behind the State Department desk." In doing so, she did not completely ignore the miners' plight. Instead she took responsibility in the area of her moral identity, using the paper to serve the public good. Her personal mission, or purpose, interacted with the mission of the domain to produce good work, as her concern for the masses played out in the context of trustworthy journalism.

Finally, humility was another important part of her moral identity, and it too played out in her job. As a publisher she insisted that her editors listen to readers. “You have to make them listen,” she said in our interview. She also listened to readers and made an effort to hear not only their praise but their critiques as well.

Graham’s highly articulated sense of moral identity was revealed by her decision to publish the Pentagon Papers. This was a very controversial choice that essentially defined her tenure as publisher. In our interview with Graham she told us that she had about thirty seconds to make the call. Her ability to make this snap decision reflects a powerful sense of moral identity. She did not need long to consider the decision; the right course of action was “second nature” for her. In Colby and Damon’s 1992 study, moral exemplars exhibit this same strong sense of moral identity. Rather than waffling over difficult decisions, these individuals clearly determine the proper course of action. The ability to make decisions like this quickly points to Graham’s powerful sense of moral identity.

Running the *Washington Post* was more than a job to Graham; it gave her life a purpose. She cared deeply for the paper, and throughout her autobiography and in her interview with us she often spoke about the *Post* almost as though it were another member of her large family. She described her “passionate devotion” to the paper and said she always “cared a lot and invested a lot” in it, just as a parent would in a child. Graham felt a deep sense of responsibility for the paper, and just as parents routinely fight for custody of their children, she worked hard to keep the paper in her family.

Graham’s moral identity reflected her purpose of running a high-quality newspaper. As a publisher she believed that being a profitable paper was important, but it was not her primary aim; it was simply one necessary step toward achieving her ultimate concern. In her interview she said, “I used to make pious speeches to Wall Street about profitability and excellence going hand in hand. I really started on that theme. . . . I had to convince them that I really wanted to be profitable, which in fact I did, because you have to be profitable to survive. You have to be profitable if you want to invest in editorial—you know, reporters and quality people.” Graham’s purpose, to run a superior newspaper, subsumed her aim of profitability and gave her life a deep sense of meaning. Because this was her purpose, Graham took ultimate responsibility for seeing that the paper served its readers.

Graham’s ability to take ultimate responsibility for the paper was scaffolded by the social support she received. Both her husband and her father felt the same way about the paper. In her autobiography Graham

said of her husband, “[Phil] insisted that newspapers should not ‘brush off our defects by blithely saying that people can cancel their subscriptions if they disagree’” (1997, p. 184). Like Katharine, Phil felt that the paper served an important civic function. When Katharine took over as publisher she continued many of the practices her husband and father had put in place. For example, her father started a policy of not endorsing presidential candidates because he did not want the paper to appear biased, and Graham kept this policy in place.

Like De Pree, Graham took ultimate responsibility for her work. She felt responsible to the paper and to the civic function it played in supporting a democracy. This strong sense of responsibility was fostered by the social supports and resulted from a well-articulated sense of moral identity.

Unlike De Pree, however, Graham was working in an area—journalism—that had a long and noble tradition as a professional domain serving the public interest. As our GoodWork model indicates (see Introduction), the mission and standards of domains can play a strong role in helping individuals find and accomplish their moral purposes in the workplace. GoodWork, as we have written, arises from interactions between people and the fields and domains in which they are working. In Graham’s case, she had the benefit of the grand tradition of journalistic ethics as well as the company of people, such as Ben Bradlee, her distinguished editor, who were pillars of the field of first-rate news reporting. The evolution of Graham’s own moral identity owed a significant debt to these associations. Graham’s own moral choices as an individual were critically important for the good work she accomplished; but the historic domain of journalism also played a part in shaping the nature and directions of her decisions.

John W. Gardner

John W. Gardner, former president of the Carnegie Corporation; former secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare; and founder of Common Cause and Independent Sector, is our third illustrative case. In his distinguished and widely celebrated life as the foremost leader of the American nonprofit sector, Gardner exemplified ultimate responsibility for the broader social good.

Gardner was born in Los Angeles in 1912. He received his doctorate in psychology in 1938 and taught briefly at the University of California, Connecticut College for Women, and Mount Holyoke College. In 1943 he joined the U.S. Marine Corps and served as an intelligence officer.

When he was released from active duty he joined the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a large and influential philanthropic foundation. He served as vice president in 1949 and as president in 1955. Also in 1955 he became president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson awarded Gardner the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, and in 1965 named him U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Gardner held this position until 1968, when he resigned to become head of the National Urban Coalition. In 1970 Gardner founded Common Cause, a nonpartisan citizens' lobby. He served as its chairman from 1970 to 1977. He also chaired the organizing committee that led to the founding of Independent Sector, a national forum for organizations in the voluntary sector, and served as chair until 1983, when he became professor of public service at Stanford University. Engaged throughout his adult life in a variety of civic pursuits, Gardner is impossible to pigeonhole. Independent Sector's Web site refers to him as "the ultimate builder of ideas and unifier of people and causes" (n.d.). His varied resume is held together by the common commitment to community building.

Gardner was driven by a strong sense of ultimate responsibility not for himself and his own organization, as De Pree was, nor for a domain, as Graham was, but for all of his society. His adult life was spent in pursuit of jobs that would allow him to strengthen the social fabric.

In our interview with Gardner he spoke at length about the values that constituted his moral identity and served as a source of ultimate concern for him. These values guided his life. "You run a lot of risks when you try to articulate neatly your value system. . . . It starts with the first week in life, and by the time you are ten you have downloaded so much in terms of values and ways of looking at the world that it is impossible to sort it all out." While Gardner found it difficult to talk about his complete value system, he had no problem identifying a particularly salient personal value. "I want to stress one [value] that you have heard me talk about before, and that is responsibility. . . . It clearly traces back to childhood and early development of a sense of responsibility for the other." "Responsibility for the other" was the basis of Gardner's moral identity. It defined who he was and what he spent his life trying to do. This striving was central to Gardner and to his ultimate concern with improving society.

Gardner believed that a sense of responsibility among citizens was essential to solving social problems. A community could not function effectively, he argued, without a populace that felt personally responsible for its vitality. "Responsibility is the absolute key to community." So

Gardner took ultimate responsibility for encouraging people to feel personally accountable for the health of their communities.

Working to improve society gave Gardner's life a purpose. Throughout his life he moved from job to job as opportunities to work on social problems presented themselves. While he talked about how it was "extraordinary luck that Carnegie Corporation" offered him a position, in his interview with us he acknowledged, "I was determined to find work that exposed me to a broader range of social issues, social problems, the way the world functioned." He intentionally sought out opportunities to work on improving the society in which he lived. In his book *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society* (1963) Gardner wrote, "The storybook conception [of happiness] tells of desires fulfilled; the truer version involves striving toward meaningful goals" (p. 97). According to Gardner, true happiness required a purpose, and taking responsibility for the betterment of society served as a deeply meaningful source of purpose for him.

Responsibility for the other served as the basis of Gardner's moral identity, but humility was another important aspect of it. Though he did not directly talk about humility in our interview with him, his actions repeatedly point to the central role it played in the way he viewed his role as a philanthropist. For example, when discussing the role of philanthropy in a democracy, he pointed out that foundations need to grant the groups they fund a high level of autonomy.

We let people do the thing they want to do within a moral framework, but still letting them be creative in their way. . . . I think one of the very worrisome things today is the tendency of foundations to gravitate toward a view that "we around this staff table or board table really know what the truths are. Let's find people, let's go out and find people to pursue those truths. We'll support them to do what we want them to do." You'd be surprised what a live impulse that is. You have a pot of money and you feel that entitles you to make decisions.

Humility played an important role both in the way he viewed the social role of philanthropy and in the way he pursued his ultimate concern.

In addition to possessing a well-articulated moral identity and a powerful sense of purpose, Gardner sought out mentors who supported his aims and assisted his efforts. "I had marvelous mentors . . . [and I've been] spared untold missteps and disasters by my mentors." In our interview he spoke about a number of mentors who helped him use each new position he acquired to tackle social problems effectively. With the support and assistance of these people he was able to effect serious social change.

Conclusions

De Pree, Graham, and Gardner shared some important characteristics. For example, they all functioned, either intentionally or unintentionally, as servant leaders. DePree talked about his high regard for Greenleaf's servant approach to leading and spoke at length about his intentional efforts to be a servant leader. As such he sought to remove obstacles so that his employees could do their best work.

While Graham did not use the term *servant leader* to describe her leadership style, her actions suggest that she also embraced the philosophy. For example, in our interview with her she talked about the delicate way in which she worked with her editor. Rather than simply telling him which stories to publish and which ones to omit, she served as a sounding board for him and typically allowed him to make the final decision.

Gardner too acted as a servant leader. For instance, a creative effort he led to build a low-income housing development aptly demonstrated this leadership style. Rather than simply building the community for the residents, he and his team empowered the would-be residents to build their own community using Gardner and his team as a source of support and guidance.

You go in and you say, "If you want some affordable housing, we'll show you how to get it." The neighborhood people . . . don't know how to design a housing plan. It takes people very familiar with construction, financing, et cetera. You give them the pattern. You go with them to the insurance company, to the banks, even to the city council. . . . You say, "It's your project, not ours. . . . [But] you can always call on us for technical assistance."

This approach to building their domiciles fostered a sense of ownership in the future residents that led to a greater sense of neighborhood. In this way, being a servant leader helped Gardner achieve his aim of community building.

The servant leader concept was so central to Gardner that it shaped his sense of philanthropy's primary mission. "There isn't anything you can congratulate yourself on except spotting good people. I financed David Riesman's first book. I am proud of that. I financed John Kenneth Galbraith's first book. I am proud of that." Gardner saw his philanthropic role as one in which he provided the means for others to do great acts. In this way he functioned as a servant leader.

Consonant with the servant leadership approach, humility was another hallmark of this group. Despite their positions of power, the exemplars

exhibited a sense of openness to new ideas and new approaches. They made a habit of listening to others, even if the people speaking had less expertise than they did. They recognized the strengths of their colleagues and used those strengths to advance their efforts. According to Tangney (2000, 2002), these practices characterize an authentic form of humility. In describing his approach to leadership, De Pree called for giving employees a good deal of responsibility and then stepping back and letting them do their work. He believed that leaders should tell employees what needs to be done but not how to do it, because workers are better equipped than leaders to determine the best way to do their jobs.

Graham's humility was particularly evident in her practice of listening intently to her readers. "I used to go out and have lunch with communities in various places and take the editors and circulation people and just talk to them and let them criticize us." Listening and learning allowed her to assume successfully the position of publisher with minimal prior journalistic experience, and to be effective in taking responsibility for the domain of journalism.

Gardner also demonstrated a surprising degree of humility. In our interview with him he repeatedly described himself as a "learner" and spoke of the importance of listening to others. "I thought of myself as an observer, a student, trying to understand." Had he not possessed this humility, he likely would not have been able to involve himself in as many different projects as he did with as much success as he achieved.

An authentic sense of humility allowed the exemplars to be effective in their efforts. Had they not listened to others or been open to new ideas and novel approaches, it is unlikely they would have achieved the success they did in taking responsibility for their respective concerns.

Finally, each of these individuals was also willing to take risks. In De Pree's book *Leadership Is an Art* (2004), he talked about how he never wanted Herman Miller to be the largest furniture company because then it could not risk losing its leading position. Instead, he sought to keep Herman Miller relatively small and to make it an innovative company that was not afraid to try new things.

Graham too was a risk taker. Her career was defined by two significant risks. First, she chose to take over as publisher of the *Post* with very little professional experience. She had minimal experience in journalism and no experience managing people, yet her risk-taking personality allowed her to assume the position anyway. Her second major risk was publishing the Pentagon Papers. In making this decision she risked her professional reputation.

Finally, Gardner's professional life was also defined by risk-taking behavior. In our interview with him he said,

I have always been a risk taker. I thought I was going to be a writer of fiction until I was about twenty-one and had a big investment in that and dropped it to become a psychologist because I felt I had to earn a living. . . . When I left psychology, many of my colleagues just thought I was crazy. Assistant professor, great chance of moving ahead, just leaving the field. . . . I have very little sensitivity to risk.

Gardner was self-aware enough to recognize his own propensity for risk. He not only accepted it but also seemed to thrive on it. While most people feel that attaining a high level of proficiency at their job is a desirable goal, Gardner consistently left positions when he reached this point. "For a good year before I was offered the job, I had a real feeling that my situation was too comfortable. I knew all the answers to being a foundation president in New York City. I was able to open practically any door and deal with my problems, and that's not a good sign."

In this way, Gardner shared with our other two exemplars a willingness to put himself on the line for the sake of his ultimate concern, even in conditions that others would find unacceptably risky in a personal sense. As with the moral exemplars in Colby and Damon's (1992) study, none of the three discussed here worried much about such risks: they shared an almost instinctive sense that they had no choice in the matter, that their ultimate concerns could broach nothing less than their full commitments, that their sense of ultimate responsibility demanded nothing less than doing whatever it would take to get the job done. None of these exemplars could have taken ultimate responsibility had they been deterred by the risks that confronted them; and they dealt with these risks preemptively, by not allowing them to enter into their considerations in the first place. In short, they did what they had to do, and knowing that this was the course to which they were committed liberated them from worrying about the personal consequences.

Although these individuals shared some characteristics, they also differed in many ways. They each had a very different moral identity. De Pree saw himself as an ethical business leader, while Graham saw herself as a protector of journalism and Gardner saw himself as an agent of social change.

All three prized certain values, but those values varied greatly in content. De Pree sought to abide by the virtues of equity and fairness, as evidenced by the company stock option plan he introduced. Graham valued truthfulness and transparency. Her decision to publish the Pentagon Papers points to her desire to be open and honest with the public. Finally, Gardner's entire professional life revolved around the value he placed on responsibility to others.

Neither these commonalities nor these contrasts were accidental. Instead, all three individuals were prepared for their positions by their moral identities and the experiences that shaped them.

As these examples illustrate, people can assume ultimate responsibility in the workplace at different levels of societal concern. For this chapter we chose our three exemplars of ultimate responsibility to illustrate three different levels of concern. The three cases reflect purposes that are all highly moral but that deal with different sorts of social issues arising from work.

De Pree took personal responsibility for his employees and for his company. Through the Scanlon Plan and the silver parachutes program, he took care of his employees. Through policies such as not allowing his employees to accept bribes, De Pree took ultimate responsibility for his company's ethical practices. But his reach ended, figuratively, at the outer walls of his company.

Graham's sense of responsibility was broader. She took responsibility for the integrity of a domain—journalism—that plays a crucial role in any democratic society. Graham saw to it that her paper served the public good by implementing the mission and standards of good journalism, because she firmly believed that a free press exists to support democracy. Accordingly, she made sure that the *Post* remained a paper for the masses and made choices like publishing the Pentagon Papers in order to keep her readers informed. She believed in the potential of the journalism domain and took responsibility for seeing that it was used to benefit the general public.

Gardner's sense of responsibility extended ever more broadly than Graham's. It did not stop at the edge of a particular domain; instead he accepted responsibility for all of society and worked to ensure society's well-being in whatever domain he felt he could be most effective. In the course of his legendary career, Gardner moved across domains, from philanthropy to politics to social entrepreneurship, always in pursuit of his broader mission of progressive social change. The working life he forged for himself created a model of leadership and a standard of social commitment that is widely emulated in the present and will likely remain influential for years to come.

Those who assume ultimate responsibility for the choices of any group, whether a company, a professional domain, or an entire society, place themselves in a pivotal position. They subject themselves to the requirement of constantly evaluating the choices and, when necessary, resisting or altering the choices in order to bring them in line with their own moral commitments. Such a role is always difficult and often risky. Sustaining it

is possible only when it is consistent with the purposes that emanate from a firmly established moral identity.

It has been said that people create their own destinies through the choices they make over the course of their lives. Society's destiny too reflects choices made by people, sometimes collectively and sometimes as individuals. Most make conventional choices that contribute to society's prevailing trends; but some people leave their mark on history by resisting or altering the trends. Although there is no way to do this without facing opposition and accepting the attendant risks, it is the only course that those who exert moral leadership in transformative times can take.

REFERENCES

- Bible History Online. (n.d.). *Emperor Nero*. Retrieved March 6, 2006, from <http://www.bible-history.com/nero>
- Bronk, K. C. (2005). Portraits of purpose: A study examining the ways a sense of purpose contributes to positive youth development (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2006). *UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations*, AAT 3187267.
- Brunstein, J. (1993). Personal goals and subjective well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 1061–1070.
- Cantor, N. (1990). From thought to behavior: "Having" and "doing" in the study of personality and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 45, 735–750.
- Colby, A., & Damon, W. (1992). *Some do care: Contemporary lives of moral commitment*. New York: Free Press.
- Damon, W., Menon, J., & Bronk, K. C. (2003). The development of purpose among adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 119–128.
- De Pree, M. (2004). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Doubleday.
- Emmons, R. A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gardner, J. W. (1963). *Self-renewal: The individual and the innovative society*. New York: Norton.
- Global Catholic Network. (n.d.). *Mother Teresa: Her words*. Retrieved March 8, 2006, from <http://www.ewtn.com/motherteresa/words.htm>
- Graham, K. (1997). *Personal history*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulis Press.
- Klinger, E. (1977). *Meaning and void: Inner experience and the incentives in people's lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Independent Sector (n.d.) *The life of John W. Gardner*. Retrieved March 6, 2006, from <http://www.independentsector.org/about/gardner.html>

- Little, B. R. (1989). Personal projects analysis: Trivial pursuits, magnificent obsessions, and the search for coherence. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), *Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions* (pp. 15–31). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Tangney, J. P. (2000). Humility: Theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and directions for future research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19, 70–82.
- Tangney, J. P. (2002). Humility. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 411–419). New York: Oxford University Press.