The Consistent Importance of Character and Leadership In Action

Kevin Basik
David Keller

It is almost cliché to suggest that today's environment for leadership is complex and dynamic. Indeed, there has likely never been a moment when that was not the case, whether the context is business, education, military, parenting, politics, or countless other domains. However, it seems like the rate of change and complexity is on an exponential curve, increasingly elevated by rapid globalization, financial constraints, technological advances, and an ever diversifying population. Despite this, we can find comfort and challenge in the fact that some things hold constant – leadership is critical, and the character of those leading (and being led) has tremendous impact on both processes and outcomes.

Our intent with the JCLI is to offer a collection of thoughts and perspectives that can help moor us to the important insights regarding leading with character in these turbulent seas of change. Theodore Roosevelt reminds us, "To educate a man in mind and not morals is to educate a menace to society." Conversely, to have a man or woman of character who cannot exercise effective leadership when the moment calls is, arguably, a wasted resource. We hope to foster understanding, reflection, and discussion that advance both of these important capacities. Indeed, character and competence are 2 sides of the same coin.

Lt Col Kevin Basik, PhD, is a 1993 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, and is currently the Assistant Director of Scholarship at the Center for Character and Leadership Development. In his time in the Air Force, he has served as a process design consultant, manager of leadership programs, an award-winning instructor of leadership development at the Air Force Academy and the Citadel, Chief of National Training for Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC), and executive officer to the Air University Commander. He received his Masters in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Virginia Tech, and his PhD in Organizational Behavior from Florida State University. His areas of focus are behavioral integrity, leadership development, and accountability.

Lt Col Dave Keller, PhD, is currently the Assistant Director of Cadet Character & Leadership Development for the United States Air Force Academy. He is a Behavioral Scientist for the Air Force, and recently returned from a deployment to Iraq where he was the senior U.S. advisor to the Iraqi Air Force Academy. He later served as a deployed Deputy Group Commander, where he helped guide the efforts of military personnel in 8 locations across Iraq. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Human Behavior & Leadership from the United States Air Force Academy and a Master' Degree in Industrial/ Organizational Psychology from St Mary's University in San Antonio. He earned his doctorate from Texas A&M, where his primary research focused on moral and ethical development of leaders through transformational teaching methodologies.

So often, a simple glance at the news and world events offers far too many examples of leaders at all levels who, in those critical, testable moments of character, acted in ways that leave us to wonder, "Can we expect better?" Luckily, there are also, on occasion, examples that reinforce the power and potential of people who live and lead with character-- despite all the pressures to not do so. Without a doubt, we can learn from both. This issue of the JCLI presents a collection of articles that, individually and collectively, remind us that both leadership and character are manifested through decisions and actions. These articles capture the opportunities and challenges associated with the "as lived" experience of leading with character (or not).

In the opening article, Matthew Valle and David Levy remind us that there is value in the study of bad, as well as good leadership and virtues. Their examination of the antecedents and consequences associated with abusive supervision extends the work of Tepper and others to further explore the factors that contribute to the multi-stage consequences of such bad leadership in the military context. Indeed, it is important for us to acknowledge that abusive supervision is still character and leadership "in action," and that such destructive action has consequences for the individuals and organizations involved. Interestingly, the model they offer teases apart the actual abusive behaviors from the subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. In doing so, they offer propositions regarding individual differences and environmental factors that might moderate whether leader behaviors are interpreted as abusive.

In the second article, Jack Clarcq, Richard DeMartino and Michael Palanski present a remarkable perspective on the man Winston Churchill described as the "Architect of Victory": General George C. Marshall. This expose', profiling interview data from individuals who worked directly for General Marshall, is a first-of-its-kind examination of the leadership and character from those who saw him "in action." These accounts create a unique and informative glimpse into the personal and organizational effectiveness of a remarkable leader, and the qualities of his character that brought that effectiveness to life.

Both of the previous models also demonstrate the impact that a leader can have on an organization's culture – positive and negative. The third article, by Matthew Davidson, Vladimir Khmelkov and Kyle Baker, provides a compelling practitioner-based approach to intentionally developing a culture of character and leadership in an organization. They describe in detail the Institute for Excellence & Ethics' "Culture of Excellence and Ethics" framework and approach for fostering a sustainable environment of norms and reinforced behaviors that develop character habits through learning, practice and support. This approach is grounded in the "belief in the power of character and culture as an essential catalytic force in the realization of organizational goals – regardless of the organization's specific mission or focus" (p. 38, this publication).

In an extension of the practitioner-grounded discussion, we are excited to showcase our interview with Dennis Muilenburg, CEO of

Boeing Defense, Space and Security. In this article, Mr. Muilenburg describes his views on how an intentional commitment to character virtues and the Boeing values translates into a significant competitive advantage for his company. In addition, he recognizes the challenges with being in a global environment with significant pressures to disconnect with those values, and describes the organizations' and his personal approach for ethically confronting those challenges in a way that protects the organization's bottom line, as well as its integrity. Finally, Mr. Muilenburg discusses the role of feedback from subordinates, "reverse mentoring," and learning through failure.

A critical element in many leadership or ethical decision-making models is an awareness of the importance of the situation at hand (e.g., Center for Character & Leadership Development model, 2011; Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986). Joe Doty presents an interesting qualitative analysis, based on interviews of students who have violated their school's honor code, about the necessity for self-awareness as a precursor for moral awareness. Specifically, he examines his proposition through the lens of many moral and cognitive decision making theories to ultimately recommend strategies for individuals and character development programs to expand capacity for self-awareness as a necessary antecedent to moral awareness.

Finally, our Student Leader Perspective is provided by 2nd Lieutenant Megan Hoskins, U.S. Air Force Academy class of 2011 graduate, and the recipients of the 2011 Air Force Academy Schulte Award for Outstanding Character

and Leadership, as well as the 2011 Colorado Leadership Alliance's Student Leader of the Year. In her reflection piece, Lt. Hoskins discusses the essential steps for pursuing inspiration in leadership and life. She highlights the roles of exploration, connecting with your commitment and purpose, and the responsibility of connecting those you lead with their commitments and purpose.

Again, the articles in this issue of the JCLI cast a broad net, from interviews to theoretical frameworks, from case studies to practitioner-based approaches, from corporate contexts to the military. But despite this range of topics, approaches and domains, we find ourselves, yet again, moored to the fundamental truth: character and leadership matter. We hope that you find something in this issue that sets you on a successful course through the changing and dynamic path that lay ahead.

References

Conceptual Framework for Developing Leaders of Character (2011). Guiding document, Center for Character & Leadership Development, United States Air Force Academy, CO.

Jones, T. M. 1991. Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review, 16:* 366-395.

Rest, J. R. 1986. *Moral development: advances in research and theory.* New York: Praeger.