



RESEARCH PAPERS

How Character Development Builds Business Culture

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Abstract

Character development is probably somewhere on most people's wish list for improvement of corporate culture. Our guess is that most people get no farther than wishing for character development, either because the concept seems too elusive to grasp or because the task seems too big and impractical. This article is written to raise the level of understanding and advance discussion of the topic to the level of practical application. The good news is that character development is a practical and accessible way for leaders to build a business culture.

Introduction

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ment is a practical and accessible way for leaders to build a business culture.

To understand the ways and means by which character development builds company culture, we need to grasp some underlying concepts concerning human interactions, and to review the developmental processes involved in creation of company culture. We'll briefly look at personal development in its relational context. Then, with a basic understanding of relational systems, we'll see how the personal resources of leaders create a specific kind of relationship, which is replicable and conducive to the development of character within the company as a relational system.

Then we put together the pieces and describe the process by which the culture of a company is built through the intentional practice of character development. Our conclusion provides a brief summary of the process for those who want to "get it quickly;" however, we expect that readers will be interested to look at the entire article, as the content is both personal and spiritual, as well as familial and corporate in scope. Our hope is you will be encouraged and informed, as well as challenged to adopt character development in practice; not just for your own development, but as way of extending the best of who you are to those you love and lead.

PART I

KEY CONCEPTS

For character development to occur in any relational system, the existing social culture must be accurately assessed. We might ask, "What kind of social culture do I experience in relation to others here? What regularly happens here that helps me be produc-



tive? What do I experience here that holds our team-work back?”

Business Culture

Like families, businesses have and develop their own cultures, based on their histories, common values and shared aspirations. Although it functions like a family culture, a business culture is different, because it is performance-based. Fortunately, a business is not obligated, as are some families, to tolerate indefinitely or work around every employee demand or destructive habit; but for better and for worse, in both business and family cultures, everyone matters. Everyone and each action counts; like it or not. That's because families and businesses are relational systems. Each of them generates a culture and that culture subsists in that system.

Business cultures exist primarily to sustain productive work and service to others. For that to happen, the culture needs to be built and shaped on purpose through direction and caring discipline. Similar to the parents in a family, leadership in building a company's culture must come first from the company's owners or top executives. However, because it subsists in a relational system, business culture is not created by leadership alone. It is a daily creation of all of the members of the system, no matter what their role or position in the company.

A business culture must enable its people to face challenges, solve problems, allocate their resources and be productive in their work together to profitably deliver real benefits to others. As this is done for paying customers the business thrives; otherwise, it consumes its capital and atrophies, eventually to death. In contrast, families, whether functional or



dysfunctional, may continue in existence supported by the wider communities in which they live.

Character Development

Character is the productive energy constituent in a healthy relational system.¹ Character is a product of relationships, and it is a developable resource in every relational system. Character is acquired from others through positive and accountable relationships, therefore, it cannot be developed well where leadership is concerned primarily with the company's financial success, growth, or other factors to the exclusion of the character and welfare of its people.

Similar to a loving parent, the life and heart of a company leader is the place from which character development first arises in the company. This is the true and personal conviction that all persons in the company, including himself, can benefit from developing good character. As the leader acknowledges the leader's own desire to develop character, those who follow will experience the truth of its importance. Beginning in this way, character development becomes a productive, energetic constituent of every day at work. This is how business culture and character development intersect.

CULTURE AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: BASIC TERMS

It is not intuitively obvious why character development should be necessary or beneficial in the functioning of a company's culture. If we look under the hood, as it were, into the relational mechanics, we

¹ Although "good" character and "bad" character are meaningful categories, here and throughout this article, "character" is used in the sense of good or virtuous character generically.



can see why it matters. Indeed, we can see why companies have cultures, whether they like it or not. Here we develop an understanding of how all relational systems function, whether at home, at work or elsewhere, and how our participation in relational systems can benefit others the most.

Understanding Human Personhood as Social Being

Philosophically and developmentally, it turns out that, as humans, we cannot be who we individually determine ourselves to be. Instead, we are who we are in relation to others.² An individual human being is not an abstraction of personal being apart from others; rather, each human being is a person in relation to others. This means that for each of us, human life is a multipersonal, social certainty (cf. Newbiggin 1986:141). The key leadership advantages to understanding this social element of our personhood are:

- Orienting our “I” toward other persons, instead of merely toward things, and outside and beyond the myopic or illusory concerns and goals of “myself.”³

² Martin Buber considered the individual an abstraction of being, saying the subjective “I” must always stand in relation to the “You” or the “It.” The spoken “I” is the way an individual speaks with another, how he or she is present in relation to the personal or non-personal other. Persons always relate to the other with either a “You” or an “It.” When one speaks “I” to another with human respect, the whole being is present and open to the other as “You” in personal encounter; however, when one speaks about another person or about something else, the “I” cannot be entirely present. The personal fulfillment of the present moment occurs only where the “You” and “I” both become present. “I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You” (Buber 1970:54-62; cf. Macmurray 1999a:77-82).

³ The “I” is human only in relation with and for another “I” similar to the self. Wherever the “I” encounters a “You,” there is an encounter of two different narrative histories. Each is claimed by and occupied with the being of the other. Each necessarily places a limit upon the other. Through this mutual encounter, each person is distinguished anew. Being human means being continually established through a



- Valuing time as the arena of action with and toward others rather than as a waiting period or mere passage to a future ideal.
- Satisfying and fulfilling the yearning for transcendent meaning and purpose in life.

Understanding Relational Systems: Family as Prototype

Human persons are born into a family and participate with others in a relational system known as a “family.” Physically conceived through social relations, human life is everywhere established in families. Family members rely on one another in ways that impact all the members. They all send messages to one another and interact together about the messages that are sent (Bork 1986:45).

In the family relational system, though it may appear otherwise to us, there are no autonomous, individual choices or actions. Family members tend to function according to their position in the system. Each family member is systemically unique and functions differently depending on where, and with whom the member is placed in relation to the other family members. Each family member is strongly influenced by the feelings, decisions, and actions of other family members who share the connection of their original family unit (Kerr and Bowen 1988:ix, 346; Bork 1986:26; Papero 1990:4). This characteristic is an aspect of relational systems generally, not just of families, and it becomes very important as character development is pursued in building a business culture.

After the family, each of us encounters and participates in many and usually multiple relational

dynamic reality of personal encounter (Barth 1960, Vol. III/2:246-248).



systems in life. Each of these systems is a relational composition with similar components, but each system is unique, like a snowflake. Each relational system we encounter or participate in will have as its primary social foundation, a laminar or composite framework consisting of the structure and functioning of the original family systems of ourselves and all of the other persons with whom we are relating. The family system concept is simple in form but is very complex in its action (Milikan 2003:14; cf., Friedman 1985:15; Kerr and Bowen 1988:9-11).

Understanding Human Attachment

If our past relational systems are so dominant in our lives, how does anyone gain the ability to form character and provide a positive influence in a relational system such as a business culture? The answer comes from attachment theory.

From the earliest moments of our lives, personal attachments are essential to our human development. Children are affected and influenced by the relational attachment they necessarily have with primary caregivers. Personal attachments formed at the beginning of life provide the basis for the historical-relational development of each and every person.

“What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (Bowlby 1982:xi-xii). Proper growth and development of the human being is tied to this secure parent-base. Close personal attachments between individuals are imperative, not just in infancy but throughout the school years, adolescence and into mature adulthood. Intimate, personal



attachments with others give strength and enjoyment to human life (Bowlby 1980:442).

Human attachment behavior is distinct from feeding and/or sexual behavior. A child's attachment behavior is mediated by the social system where the child's early development is regulated by training. The developmental goal for attachment behavior is for the child to maintain a consistent degree of proximity to, or communication with, the primary attachment figure(s) (Bowlby 1980:39)⁴.

Attachment theory sheds surprising and refreshing light on our adulthood. Paradoxically, a truly self-reliant person is not nearly as independent as some cultural stereotypes assert. Self-reliance necessitates the capacity to trust and rely upon others; to know whom to trust and rely upon when occasion warrants. Self-reliance grows from the capacity one has to rely upon others. This interdependent relational quality is most likely a product of a family system that supports its members and respects their personal boundaries and aspirations. A secure base of family support and respect cultivates self-reliance in later adulthood (Bowlby 1973:359-362).

Understanding Personal Isolation

Personal isolation is a term we have utilized to refer to the separation experienced by a person who, as an individual or as part of a collective, turns away

⁴The infant depends upon both human reason and action of caregivers to survive and thrive. Paradoxically, the child does not depend upon adult reactions to his crying. Similar to the animal, the infant needs food, water, sleep, and protection from danger; however, as distinct from non-human creatures, all the needs of the human person are contained within a single need—the need for love from the Other. Wherever this human need is met, all other organic and material needs are also provided for the child's development (Millikan 2003:62; cf. Bowlby 1980:39f).



from a responsible relationship with another person or group of people (the “Other”). In every case this particular kind of turning away harms the actor and others as well the Other. The harm occurs on account of the determined refusal to acknowledge the Other as the human and God-given limit for personal relations.

We all no doubt have suffered it. We probably have also all perpetrated it at some time or other, but that does not mean that personal isolation is either integral or essential to our life together. Personal isolation is hostile to the flourishing and spiritual well-being of human life. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that dealing with personal isolation is and will remain an unavoidable problem for every person in this penultimate age.

Personal isolation can be experienced consciously or unconsciously; however, it is always a destructive movement against the dignity and worth of self and others. This kind of isolation is embedded in every social system and structure, often existing between family members or between people in other various relational systems.

Personal isolation is a behavioral phenomenon, an aspect of personal relationships that intermittently yet relentlessly impinges upon persons in relation. Where one person chooses to isolate, turning unilaterally, irresponsibly, harshly or even silently away from personal relationship with another, that other has thus been rejected and negatively impacted. This ongoing threat of personal isolation has potential to keep persons frozen in fear, arrested from developing to their full potential.⁵

⁵ Work toward authenticity between self and others in family relationships is healthy; whereas neglect of authenticity in relation with family members can deter one’s ability to become all that is possible for others in the world (cf. Bowen 1998:531-543). Autonomy is a term often used positively referring to an adult who maintains a



Understanding Differentiation

As attachment theory helps us understand the resources for personal development, the concept of “personal differentiation” helps us grasp the process by which the individual develops as a positive person and contributor in relation to others. In the family, “differentiation” of oneself occurs as one develops clear self-boundaries in relation to each parent and sibling. Differentiation is a development of the ability to navigate through emotional forces that often dominate a family system without injury to self or other members of the system. A differentiated family member is one who has developed sufficient self-boundaries to become present and available for the benefit of family members and for others beyond the family. As differentiation is gradually achieved by a family member, that member becomes more confident and able to enter into intense relationships with others outside the family, without becoming swayed by the outsider’s emotions. Differentiation is accomplished in a relationship when one maintains creative openness or “space” within the relationship between oneself and the other and does not resort to the introduction of a third person or a problem topic into the relationship in order to alleviate its emotional stresses (Bork 1986:27-33; Stoop and Masteller 1996:289-306; Steinke 1993:66, 91).

It is evident that in order for character development to take place in a business culture, personal differentiation is required; however, personal differentiation is not a native organizational capacity. Business leaders must possess it from beyond the business in order to spread it within the business.

home away from parents or other authority figures. This term can mislead young or immature people by encouraging them to avoid facing challenging emotional situations with parents and others (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1984:32).



Persons become differentiated by establishing a personal identity in between fusion with another person or persons (I am we) and complete separation from others (I am not we, but rather some remote other).⁶ This is a self-definition which is honestly expressed to others in non-negotiable terms. Differentiated self-identity is neither debatable nor negotiable between the defining person and the other(s). This kind of self-definition is stated clearly in an “I-position” such as, “I am here to receive your request; however, I may or may not be willing or available to do exactly what you ask of me” (Bowen 1998:473). A well-differentiated person distinguishes accurately between thoughts and feelings and acts upon the basis of what he or she knows well to be both right and true (cf. Bowen 1998:472-473; Augsburg 1996:35).

Understanding Mutuality

What is the form or structure of relationship in which character can be developed and personal isolation can be countered within a relational system? We have identified that form as a positive and attainable form of relationship which we call “mutuality” (Milikan, 2003: 234, indexed). This is a personal relationship that is shared within a relational system between two or more persons where each “I” acts with and for the other “You”—*expressly and intentionally* for the benefit and blessing of others beyond them. Mutuality thus turns the open relational space created by the differentiated person into a channel or conduit to benefit or bless others, the means and requisite of which is development of character. Where this particular kind of mutuality takes place, the very best po-

⁶ In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed that humans naturally desire complete fusion of the self with the beloved other. Fusion occurs overtly or covertly, often through coercion of the other into one’s own sphere of power and influence, where human ideas and personal bonds are the most meaningful (Bonhoeffer 1954:33).



tential is realized for the benefit of all persons.⁷ This is a multipersonal, spiritual reality⁸ wherein all others are honored on account of their human dignity—whether or not they are confused, misled, or personally isolated.⁹ Mutuality is thus the primary resource for character development in a company or in any relational system, including the ongoing challenge of forming and maintaining a character-based business culture. In mutuality, we establish the secure base identified by attachment theory as a necessity for healthy personal development.

The structure of mutuality necessitates a minimum of two persons. However, as mutuality is extended to and received by others, it takes up its own life, as it were, building energy through their unique differentiation. This extension of mutuality allows each participant in mutuality to conceive and act for the well-being of all persons within the scope of the company's action as defined by its mission.

If we think of character as the toolkit for facing problems, change and challenges, and mutuality as the

⁷ “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Jesus Christ: Matthew 18:20). My personal understanding of mutuality and its benefits is grounded to this Biblical quotation.

⁸ Mutuality honors the God-given boundary, or human limit of this unique Other, the one who is similar to myself. Where the will of one person encounters the will of the other person, an ethical relation exists. This is where individual responsibility before God takes on human flesh in personal relations (Bonhoeffer 1998:50; Green 1999:36).

⁹ Some desire passionately to overcome social injustice through human solidarity. However, human solidarity often manifests a disguised form of personal isolation, gathering people together to one side to establish justice for their group over against that of another group. This is not mutuality. Solidarity that gathers an in-group for protection against the out-group has necessarily been conceived as an end in itself. This group may soon oppress the others from whom protection is first sought. Only solidarity in mutuality with God's interest in others beyond our group can answer human injustice and oppression with faithfulness, suffering, divine love and forgiveness.



fitting room and training table of character, then we will be on track. Mutuality does not solve problems in and of itself. Instead, mutuality fits people with the focus, energy, character and grace they need in order to face inevitable challenges and problems.

Understanding the Value of Character

With the understanding of personhood as social being, and a grasp of the elements of personal development in relation to others, we can appreciate the value of character. “Character” refers to the qualities that are built into a person’s life that determine his or her response, regardless of the circumstances. Good character is a product of relationship. A person cannot know or understand his or her own personal character within the moment, for character is discerned and experienced externally to the self. Our character is experienced by the other person or persons with whom we relate.

Knowledge and business skills are important, but they do not determine what we will do with them, as recent business scandals tragically have revealed. True success lies not in what we own, acquire or accomplish through knowledge or skills, but in who we are personally in relation to others. That is a matter of our character, revealed in our behavior, especially in what we are willing to do when no one else is watching. Good character is the internal commitment to do what is right in every situation, no matter what the personal cost. What each of us does each day speaks louder to others than the words we use.

Character is the most valuable possession a person can acquire. It is our primary faculty or toolkit for dealing with change, challenge and adversity. Challenges can often be overcome with faith and determination; solutions are often achieved with creativity and



resourcefulness; aching hearts can be soothed with sensitivity and compassion. All these are resources of character. Since problems and difficulties will always be with us, we can look to character development as a way to work with reality as it is.

The most powerful internal motivation for developing character is the perceived connection between highly desired goals and the character qualities needed to achieve them. Consider the significant contributions of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. Each of them achieved admirable success, yet it was their personal character that propelled them and guided a majority of their life decisions.

We should note that character is not built in a day or a week, but developed over a lifetime. Significant progress is possible in a fairly short time; however, building character requires personal awareness, personal accountability and dedicated human effort (CTI, 2004: “Character”).

Understanding Culture

“Culture” is that particular, sometimes peculiar set of beliefs, values, perceptions, history, rules, tasks, behaviors, expectations, and aspirations which characterize a group, family or organization of people, enabling them to think and speak of the group and themselves intelligently as “we” for certain purposes. A culture develops directly from the attitudes and behavior of all the group members. An organization’s culture consists in the shared beliefs, values, norms and practices that operate within the organization. A company’s culture helps to determine what is important to accomplish and how its people act, think, feel and work together. The culture of a company can encourage compromise or responsibility, peacefulness or discontent.



Although everyone participates in culture formation, the attitudes and behavior of responsible leaders set the cultural tone for all others. Nonetheless, destructive or negative attitudes and resulting behaviors of even one person can affect the performance of all the others, whether in a civic group or on the job. If destructive behavior and attitudes remain undisciplined, behavior that once was questioned can become the cultural norm—an accepted part of that culture. Correcting small behavior problems *before* they bring destructive group consequences is a key component to building business culture and guiding a successful organization.

Regardless of the position one holds at work or in the family, the personal attitudes and behavior choices demonstrated each day at home and in the workplace affect the culture there—for better or for worse (cf. CTI, 2004 “Culture”).

PART II

THE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The development of character is a process that must take place in one or more relational systems. The components and stages required for that process to succeed are similar across the spectrum of relational systems. Every person’s essential worth is expressed and valued in the context of relationships. Leaders of character consistently emphasize knowing what is true and doing what is right and best in each relational system, despite costs and risks. These are differentiated leaders, committed to consistent development of character in themselves and others through mutuality.



Building a character-base in a culture necessitates a distinct leadership focus turned directly upon character and character development. Character must become a central priority within the cultural understandings that sustain the relational system or organization. How does that occur?

The Precedence of Leadership for Others

The leader or leaders seen as most responsible for group success are the ones charged with leading everyone in formation of the culture in that relational system—whether positively or negatively. They serve as parent-figures for the group in that respect. They must model what is desired from others in the group. This top-down responsibility is a necessary function of leadership in a relational system. To the extent character is demonstrated by leadership, it will be confirmed by others in the system. If leaders desire true success for everyone in the system, that will be expressed through their initiation of mutuality with as many others in the group as possible.

Bottom-up accountability of leadership is implicit in the interdependent nature of relational systems. For example, the degree of match between “walk” and “talk” of a leader—measured by such character qualities as honesty, humility, wisdom and attentiveness to others—will define integrity for the group. Integrity is of primary importance to the well-being of the group, as the leader’s refusal or inability to be accountable in that respect is an act of personal isolation! The character-based leader therefore understands the value and importance of mutuality as a reciprocal relationship. He or she honestly acknowledges being a work of character development in progress and offers the same to each other person in the system. In that respect, we can affirm that character formation in any system is good not merely for the sake of that sys-



tem, or of its individual members, but for everyone else in every other system with whom they may interact.

The Important Emphasis: Character

To be developed, character must be emphasized. It is a mistake to take its growth for granted or to overlook it. Although the roots of a tree are often not acknowledged, without an extensive root system there would be no tree, and nothing nourishing from it. The same holds true for character in relation to personal achievement. Achievements are the visible fruit, but character is the supportive root system of a lifetime of pursuits. While personal achievements are most often visible, the character qualities that support those achievements are often overlooked, despite the fact that a person's commitment to character made them possible.

Paradoxically, the need for character is an important discovery that each person must realize and act on alone. No one can be forced to develop character and no one can develop character for another. We are led to it by those who emphasize character, but we must drink for ourselves.

Emphasizing good character simply means to heighten the awareness of character and its importance to personal attitudes and behavior choices. This emphasis communicates volumes to those who are led. For example, can you think of and list some of the character qualities of men and women you truly admire? Training sessions and teachable moments highlight character and ways to develop good character traits. Considering which character qualities we appreciate and most need to develop makes it easier to make these qualities part of our lives.



The Important Requirement: Character

Character can be required in a performance-based relational system. This is done by raising the character and behavior standards and lowering the tolerance for and acceptance of poor behavior choices. Two or more leaders of the group can evaluate and discuss their own values and behavior standards, then list and define the necessary character qualities to yield desired behavior.

Each member of the system needs to know the standards and commit to follow them if they desire to continue with the group, no matter how high or low the role or position they may fill. The responsible leadership then demonstrates what they want to see the others demonstrate toward one another and outsiders. The culture will rarely, if ever, exceed what the leadership exhibits in character.

Requiring character means leadership that accepts evaluation of its own attitudes, words, and actions toward others. It means conveying character qualities to one another throughout the group. It involves demonstrating personal commitment to specified character qualities, especially when circumstances challenge them. It means having conversations with others in the group about how to align action with character. This is where mutuality is at work.

The Important Recognition: Character in Others

Nearly everyone appreciates being recognized, thanked and praised; in fact, it is natural for people to want to please others, especially their leaders. Because of this common human tendency, it crucial to character development for leaders to look for and recognize character in the persons they lead. Recognizing and praising character is different from telling someone



that she's done a "good job" or "great work." By recognizing the underlying character quality, that her work was perhaps thorough, resourceful or timely, more is gained, because character is built by that affirmation. How satisfying and encouraging to learn that one is a resourceful person!

Recognition of character is a discipline. It is easy to overlook the character we see. So we not only must see it, but look for daily opportunities to praise others for it. That builds both our character and theirs. Recognizing a person's character lets them know why their behavior is important. To do this, we have to develop the habit of looking beyond achievement (the fruit) to the character that lies behind and supports it.

Until a tree develops a full root system it cannot bear good fruit. Similarly, unless the personal life is rooted in character, any achievements that come along will be empty and unsatisfying in the long run, both individually and systemically. Character development builds relational roots and encourages adoption of the kind of goals and achievements that weave joy and satisfaction into a person's life story.

PART III

BUILDING BUSINESS CULTURE

Building the culture of a business is an important task for everyone in the company, and a key responsibility of its leadership. In some respects it requires change; in others, sustenance and continuity, but in all respects it requires character. The effort and commitment to enact change requires character, as does the upholding of core values and vision. The missing link in the business literature in this area (leadership, innovation, emotional intelligence, learning or-



ganizations, lean systems, and other topics) has been the role of character and character development.

Traditional Leadership and Management Essentials

Business leadership has been studied much and the literature has advanced greatly in recent years. Every company needs direction, values, the right people on the bus, good systems, effective processes, successful marketing and profits. For that reason, a company mission is stated to communicate what is done there and how its clients or customers are served. Company values are gathered and formally stated, allowing workers and customers to know “who we are at this company” and “the way we serve, both internally and externally.” Processes and systems are revamped for leanness, greenness and productivity. Initiatives are undertaken voluntarily or required by law that establish broad-based new commitments to ethics and corporate social responsibility within companies.

All of these steps and practices are helping many companies move ahead, but without a focus on character and character development, their internalization and enculturation of values, vision and mission remains haphazard and doubtful. Their cultures are not actually strengthened, and entropy and urgency still tend to take over as cultural norms.

The Missing Link—Personal Character and Character Formation

A focus on character and character development will provide the company with continuous fuel for the process of building and sustaining its business culture. That fuel is needed today as never before. Values-based companies, customer-focused companies, flat, non-hierarchically organized companies, lean companies; all need to hire for character and to de-



velop character in order to sustain their business model.

External agencies (schools, churches, families, neighborhoods) are less reliable sources of character formation and development than in the past. The same is true of voluntary associations, service clubs and professional associations. They don't generate enough qualified persons of character to meet the formidable demand for people of leadership character.

As a result, in-house development of character is essential. When coupled with the other practices of good leadership and management, in-house character development builds a culture with the strength and energy necessary to navigate strenuous social climates, make difficult trade-offs, and achieve performance goals without loss of integrity.. Hiring practices can be grounded to character development, and character can be given equal weight with production numbers in advancement and promotion in the company.

PART IV

HOW CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT BUILDS BUSINESS CULTURE

This section lists the point of beginning and the steps involved in building a character-based business culture. The beginning point is the personal commitment to character growth and culture-building on the part of the company owner/leader and at least one other person (remember, mutuality requires participation by at least two people, one of whom must already possess a high degree of differentiation; *see basic terms*). From that beginning point, an extraordinary company can be created, one that develops and honors the life potential of every one of its people while retaining a clear focus on business success.



Emphasize Character

For character to be emphasized, character must be defined and specific character qualities chosen. What kind of character qualities and behavior does the company seek to hire in its people? What character traits does the company want to encourage, develop and reward? Those traits must be selected, verified and formulated into presentable educational formats.

Managers are then trained to value character in every person under their supervision, and taught why character development is foundational to the company culture. Assistance is provided for them to learn how to recognize character in their direct reports. Orientation of new employees is provided to learn what character is and why a character focus is central to company policies and practices. Education in the development of character is a regular feature of worklife for everyone in the company.

Require Character in Behavior

Each employee is hired for character, advanced on account of character and disciplined toward the need for developed character. A written policy states the company purpose and explains why character is actually more important than achievement. It lists the character qualities sought to be trained and exercised throughout the company. The policy states that selection and advancement of employees is based upon character, and that character training for all employees is provided and an integral part of working for the company.

Behavior that dishonors anyone; including self, authority figures, co-workers or company property is immediately addressed, curbed and redirected toward



the need for specific character qualities. If the person involved honors the discipline provided, all is well. If not, specific steps are taken to remove the employee from the workplace with adequate compensation and care given to honor the employee's dignity.

Recognize Character

Learning specific character qualities monthly at work allows everyone in the company to know what those qualities are and how they benefit from them both at work and beyond. Looking for these character qualities to praise in the behavior of co-workers and family members can be developed as a satisfying habit. Honest recognition that comes from the heart of a friend or co-worker will often "make the day" at home or on the job.

Regular monthly meetings where employees already gather to hear or discuss company matters are excellent occasions in which to introduce a featured monthly character quality. One character trait should be presented in such a way that everyone understands (i) its definition, (ii) its personal meaning, and (iii) its business application.

Dramatizing the character quality is also helpful, allowing it to come alive with business and family illustrations. At the end of each meeting, every employee receives a copy of the character definition and related materials to take home for family members.

Each person in the company is honored annually, during his or her hiring anniversary month, for character demonstrated during the year. Spouses are encouraged to attend. Certificates of appreciation are awarded, with a copy for the personnel file. At each monthly meeting, employees are honored publicly by their supervisor for a character trait observed in a spe-



cific instance, with an explanation of how everyone in the company benefited from that act. These few minutes at all-employee meetings often prove to be a powerful aspect of business culture formation.

Summary and Benefits

Business culture and character development intersect when a company leader of character begins to understand the importance and the means of character development for everyone in the company. Having become differentiated in one or more existing relational systems, such a leader understands who he or she is and begins to identify the character qualities, which will be required for company success. The business culture to be built with one or more co-workers will be one that is intended to benefit everyone in the company.

When character is *defined*, and character qualities are *emphasized and required* in company policy, hiring, promotions, management training and employee orientations, everyone in the company will be thinking, demonstrating, and learning about character from others. Character will be *recognized and verbalized* to deserving co-workers. Character development is then in action—not just from the top-down but also from the inside-out. Through mutuality, the people in the company will have become engaged in a spirited and sustained effort to extend the benefits of character and character development, not just to one another, but to others beyond—to customers, suppliers and family members. Company visitors might even overhear co-worker recognitions in the hallways, on their way to a community meeting in the boardroom.

By implementing a character-based business culture, many organizations are already reaping lasting benefits, including:



- Markedly Reduced Turnover
- Lower Workers Compensation costs
- Strengthened Customer Relationships
- Increased Productivity
- Improved Product/Service quality
- Heightened Profitability
- Improved Co-worker Relationships, Vertically and Horizontally
- Enhanced Company Morale
- Help for each person in the company to reach his or her full potential.
- Guidance for each person in the company in becoming a better friend, spouse, parent, employee, neighbor and citizen (cf. CTI, 2008: website)

Business owners and leaders who invest in character development among their people not only develop a truly successful business culture; but they make the best investment possible, one with the surest gains and the smallest downside for everyone, including themselves. Is it too good to be true? No, it's just good enough to be worthwhile.

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