



embark

the journey to effective leadership

program sample

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1st Edition • Printed in the U.S.A.



CHARACTER SPOTLIGHT

Virtue:

**the moral excellence evident in my life
as I consistently do what is right**

In order to be a really good leader—one whose leadership guides and develops people into better versions of themselves, one must be a good person. Virtue is the inward motivation to do the right thing, even when others encourage you to do something else.

What does it mean to be excellent at something? When you are excellent you excel. You go above and beyond. When you excel at doing what is right and good, people will notice. Your positive influence on others by demonstrating how it is important—and possible—to do what is right and good is the foundation of good leadership.

1. Is it possible for a group of individuals to share or agree on a moral standard? To what extent? Why or why not? Why might it be important to be able to agree on what is right or wrong?
2. What does it mean to do something consistently?
3. A person can excel in sports, academics, or a skill. Can they excel in morality? What might this look like?
4. What does it mean to be a moral person?
5. To be moral is to have morals or guiding principles. To be immoral is to act against those guiding principles. The opposite of being moral is to be amoral, to not have inner principles to guide behaviors or decisions. Without morals to prevent them from acting, what might an amoral person choose to do?
6. Why is it important for a leader to demonstrate virtue?
7. Heroes (also called protagonists) in movies, books, and television often display virtues such as justice, honor, compassion, loyalty, forgiveness, courage, and determination. Name a few of your favorite virtuous heroes and tell why you feel they demonstrate virtue.

attitude and altitude

Character can be changed, and your attitude has everything to do with it.

Let's face it. We live in a negative world, and if we're not careful, negative influences can profoundly affect us and those around us. It takes **constant and intentional effort to be positive** in a negative environment, and pushing against the negative grain creates stress in our lives.



Values Drift

When we talked about cognitive dissonance earlier, we mentioned how either our actions or outside influences change, or we change on the inside in order to reduce the stress we feel. This particular type of stress, when your inward values conflict with outside influences, has a negative impact. Instead of strengthening our inner moral compass, **we often try to resolve the tension by shifting our values so we fit better into the culture.** This might ease the stress for a short time, but new situations and more negative influences will soon press us to modify our values again. Like a swimmer caught in a rip tide, we look up one day and realize how far we have drifted away from our values and how much ground we have lost to negative influences. Leaders need to be aware of this so that they can be strong.

This values drift does not need to happen. It is not an inevitable consequence of living in a negative world. If we are proactive and intentional in our approach to life we can grow our character rather than being pushed by the outside influences. We can strengthen our leadership skills and abilities and learn to be a good example to those around us.

Good leaders encourage good choices and behavior in others. Your effort to model and encourage good character will help create a positive culture in your classroom and in your group—a culture where members feel good about participating, contributing, and doing the right thing.

Is Luck Real?

In 1993, a researcher named Richard Wiseman placed an advertisement in a newspaper. He asked people who believed they were “lucky” or “unlucky” to contact him. He gave each of them a newspaper and asked them to count the pictures inside. An interesting thing happened. People who believed themselves to be unlucky completed the task in about two minutes, while the lucky individuals finished in just seconds. What was the difference? On the second page of the newspaper an advertisement instructed participants to stop reading because there were forty-three pictures. The lucky people spotted the information and processed it, while the unlucky folks missed it.¹¹

Leadership Snapshot: Angela Merkel

Born July 19, 1954, Angela Merkel has served as Chancellor of Germany since 2005—the first female to hold this position. The daughter of a Lutheran minister, Merkel holds a doctorate degree in quantum chemistry. Prior to German reunification in 1990, she served as deputy spokesperson for the first democratically elected East German Government. In 2007, Merkel became President of the European Council and has consistently played a major role in managing financial crises at the international level. During her administration, Merkel has faced many challenges—the economy, trade, energy development and, most recently the migrant crisis. The longest-serving incumbent head of government in the European Union, she is considered by many to be the most powerful woman in the world.¹⁷

Inside the newspaper a few more pages, a second advertisement informed readers that if they found this ad, they would win a cash prize. The results were the same—spotted by the lucky ones and missed by the unlucky.

What is the lesson of Wiseman’s research? Simply that a strong correlation (possible relationship) exists between having a positive perspective or attitude and achieving success. As Wiseman goes on to point out in his research, **success has less to do with luck or good fortune and more to do with a person’s determination to overcome challenges and make progress, even when progress is difficult—their character.**

Creating Luck

According to Wiseman, people often “create their own luck” by seizing opportunities and working through problems. These people exhibit (show) several characteristics:

1. **They create and notice opportunities.** Do you know someone who seems to always notice when things go on sale or when a new opportunity presents itself? These individuals are very alert to the world around them. They open their eyes to new opportunities and aren’t afraid to take reasonable risks.
2. **They heed intuition when making decisions.** Instead of hesitating too long or remaining on the sidelines, lucky people listen when their hearts and their heads urge them to take action. This does not mean they are hasty or reckless. Quite the opposite—they consider the options, choose a course of action, and make the best of their decision.
3. **They create positive self-fulfilling prophecies.** Lucky people envision a positive future or outcome. Like the *Little Engine that Could*, they tell themselves they are capable of doing their best and reaching their goals. Having a positive vision for the future leads them to act in ways that turn that vision into reality.
4. **They turn bad situations into good ones.** Lucky people look for the good in each situation or setback. They don’t let hardship or tragedy keep them down; they are resilient (they get back up). Having a positive attitude gives them the energy they need to overcome challenges and come out better and stronger in the end.

Do you see some themes starting to develop? Successful leaders are **determined, dependable, respectful, patient, tolerant, take the initiative, and have a positive attitude.** They don’t wait for their character to be shaped by outward influences, they work to **strengthen and develop their character to withstand outside pressure.** They **make decisions and develop their character based on their inner core values** which they do not let drift with the tides of the culture. **Leaders lead—they know who they are, what they believe, and where they are going.**

JOURNAL TIME!

READ

what have you learned?

REFLECT

how do you feel?

RESPOND

what action will you take?

the interview

a scenario about character, attitude, and opportunity

Addison and Evie were sitting in the entrance area of the Pizza Palace with about twenty other young people their age. Everyone was there to apply for three openings on the wait staff of the popular restaurant. Pizza Palace was always busy and seemed like a fun place to work, and both Addison and Evie desperately wanted the job.

As they waited their turns, Addison and Evie filled out employment applications. Addison thought to herself, *These forms are ridiculous! How in the world am I supposed to remember every place I have ever worked and the dates I worked there?* The more questions she read and tried to answer, the more discouraged and upset Addison became. *I know I don't have as much experience as half the people in this room, she thought. There is no way they are going to hire me. In fact, I'm not even sure I want to be hired. I mean, look at these people here and how they are making us wait!*

Addison finished the application with a big sigh. *This is going to be terrible,* she thought as she glared at the people sitting across from her.

Evie was also struggling a bit with some of the questions. She laughed as she recalled some of the other fun places she had worked, like when she worked at the Burger Lot with Jason and they competed to see who could get the most customers to smile. She paused a moment and glanced around the room. There looked to be a lot of qualified people who want this job. But she reminded herself that it had been the same when she applied at the Burger Lot. *I'm just going to have to smile and be myself,* she thought. *I'll try my best and see what happens.*

Evie smiled at Jonathan who was sitting across the room from her. She whispered "Good luck!" when his name was called for an interview. Evie looked at the application form in her hand. *You've got this,* she told herself. *Just go in there and show them what you can do.* The man calling names looked around, and



Community Leader: Paco Balderrama

Major Paco Balderrama is a 19-year veteran of the Oklahoma City Police Department. He has a Masters in Criminal Justice from the University of Central Oklahoma, and is a graduate of FBI National Academy. Major Balderrama's areas of expertise within the police department are in police-community relations, youth outreach, and media relations. Major Balderrama is a product of inner-city schools and a single parent household. "Discernment, good judgment and the ability to make good choices are inside of each one of us. We just need to have the correct perspective when making those decisions. Making a good choice when being pressured by our peers and friends can be very difficult. We all want to be liked by others and valued as a peer, but sometimes, going along with the crowd can persuade us to make the wrong choice. Before you decide to do something that you feel may not be the right thing to do, ask yourself the following; 1) Is this good for me? 2) How will this affect my future? 3) Will this choice carry negative consequences? Our upbringing and family environment can be a guide for our reasoning. Listen to your instincts, and have the courage to do the right thing, even when no one is looking!"

Evie smiled back at him. “Addison O’Neal, you’re next followed by Evie Mendez,” he announced.

Addison frowned, grabbed her application form, and slowly walked into her interview. When she came back to the waiting area ten minutes later, Evie smiled and gave Addison a big hug. “Maybe we will both get positions,” Evie said as she went cheerfully into her interview.

Discussion Starters

- How can having a positive outlook make you feel? How can your positive attitude affect those around you?
- How can being negative impact other people’s impression of you?
- Do people tend to gravitate toward positive or negative people?
- Who makes a better leader—someone who is negative or someone who is positive? Why?
- Who do you think has a better chance of getting a job—Addison or Evie? Why?
- What was the difference between Addison’s and Evie’s outlook on the situation? How different were their approaches to the job interview process?
- Can being positive increase your chance of being successful? Why or why not? Can being positive help you be a better leader? How?
- Would you agree that negativity can influence someone? How are people affected when they hear negative things all of the time? In contrast, what can people accomplish if they think others believe in them? Why do you think this is the case?

Having a good attitude not only involves being a positive person, but also doing what you should do with that good attitude and a willingness to be humble firmly in place.

Great leaders approach challenges with a positive, “can do” attitude.



SERVICE
PROJECT

HOW IS YOUR
SERVICE PROJECT
PROGRESSING?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Virginia Smith is the President of Character First Education and a former high school teacher. A Kamm Distinguished Fellow in Research, Scholarship, and Leadership, she holds a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership with an area of concentration in curriculum design and instruction. Her other publications include *Why We Run*, the official curriculum for the Oklahoma City National

Memorial & Museum; *Engage: An Active Response to Bullying*; *Elevate: Take Your Game to the Highest Level*; *G.O.A.L.: Get Out and Lead*; *Raising Positive Kids in the Negative World—A Handbook for Parents and Teachers*; and various articles published by Johns Hopkins University, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, *Charter Focus*—a quarterly journal for Charter School Business Managers, and the Oklahoma Educational Research Association. She also is the editor of the *Character Core Magazine*, a monthly publication of Strata Leadership, LLC and a speaker and presenter.

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