Leaders of Character Model Values-Based Leadership

Angela Lumpkin

Leaders of Character Model Values-Based Leadership

> *Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny — Author Unknown*

ANGELA LUMPKIN
LUBBOCK, TEXAS, USA

Character matters! Values matter! Character is required of all leaders and may be the heart of leadership. Values shape each leader's character. The United States Army's values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage undergird how it seeks to instill these leadership values in each person who chooses to serve. Leadership in the Army is based on the concept of Be-Know-Do:

> *Character and competence, the **Be** and the **Know**, underlie everything a leader does. But character and knowledge — while absolutely necessary — are not enough. Leaders act; they **Do**. They bring together everything they are, everything they believe, and everything they know how to do to provide purpose, direction, and motivation* (Leader to Leader Institute, 2004, p. 12)

Character and values are inextricably interwoven. A leader of character models values-based leadership beginning with knowing who they are and what they value and always ending in what they do.

Crossan et al. (2012) theorized that competencies, character, and commitment are essential to a leader's success. Leaders of character become the best leaders. Leaders of character focus on values in recruitment, selection, and succession management and on coaching and mentoring about values in the development of followers. Leaders of character modeling values-based leadership affirms, "There is no right way to do a wrong thing!" (Author Unknown).

Since 1983, Kouzes and Posner (2023) have analyzed thousands of individual case studies to identify what leadership competencies resulted in extraordinary accomplishments in

organizations. Through this research they developed The Leadership Challenge® Model, which is shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: *The Leadership Challenge® Model*

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: *Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership*	
Model the Way	1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values. 2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a Shared Vision	3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. 4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the Process	5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. 6. Experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.
Enable Others to Act	7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. 8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
Encourage the Heart	9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10.Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Cooper et al. (2007) emphasized that good leaders are expected to be strong in character with a moral imperative underwriting their actions. Effective leaders authentically and consistently live their character by modeling ethical reasoning and values-based actions. They demonstrate confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience and are respected for their integrity. They described leadership character with these traits — respectfulness, fairness, cooperation, compassion, humility, courage, passion, wisdom, competence, self-discipline, loyalty, selflessness, integrity, and honesty.

George and Sims (2007) described values as the relative importance of the things that matter in your life, and then stated that leadership principles are a set of standards used in leading others, derived from these values. That is, principles are values translated into action. Kraemer (2011) offered four principles of values-based leadership. First, he described self-reflection as taking time to step back and see the big picture and reflecting on what is most important and why. Second, he identified balance as being able to consider and understand all sides of an issue holistically. Third, he explained true self-confidence as recognizing what a person knows and does not know along with accepting one's personal strengths and weaknesses while striving to improve. Fourth, he discussed genuine humility, which means forgetting the past that does not make a person better nor worse than anyone else and respecting and treating everyone equally. The values-based leader who demonstrates these behaviors will be a leader of character.

Using Bandura's (1977) social learning theory as a conceptual framework, the purpose of this work is to identify and describe leadership traits associated with leaders of character who demonstrate values-based leadership. A second purpose of this work is to align these traits

with the leadership theories of ethical leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership.

Conceptual Framework — Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977) proposed social learning theory as an expansion of behaviorist learning theories of classical conditioning and operant conditioning by emphasizing the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others and focusing on how mental or cognitive factors are involved in learning. He added two important concepts that mediating processes occur between stimuli and responses and behavior is learned from individuals and the environment through the process of observational learning (Mcleod, 2023; Sutton, 2012).

Brown and Treviño (2006) posited that social learning theory informed why individual characteristics of leaders and situational influences help shape followers' perceptions of a person as an ethical leader. Social learning theory suggests that for leaders to be viewed as credible role models they must live ethically by modeling effectiveness through their values-based character. Social learning theory assumes learning occurs vicariously in organizations. Followers regulate their own behaviors based on learning and doing what is acceptable and rewarded. Social learning of ethical behavior occurs only when role models are credible, such as when they treat others fairly, honestly, and considerately (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Brown and Treviño (2006) described three situational factors on ethical leadership — ethical role modeling, ethical content in the organization, and moral intensity of issues faced. Effective ethical modeling occurs only when leaders are worthy of emulation; it is not learned through power or position on the organization chart (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Brown et al. (2005) stated, "A social learning perspective on ethical leadership proposes that leaders influence the ethical conduct of followers via modeling. The term modeling covers a broad range of psychological matching processes, including observational learning, imitation, and identification" (p. 119). They conceptualized ethical leadership in terms of social learning when followers emulate ethical leaders who demonstrate openness and honesty and treat employees fairly and considerately. Mayer et al. (2009) concurred that through social learning followers learn to act ethically by observing the decision-making processes and actions of leaders.

Social learning theory described how followers through observation choose to learn from leaders who they can relate to, respect, and trust and who have integrity. Leaders continuously are in positions to be heard, but more importantly observed. Followers have perceptions about what leaders should be, know, and do and whether as followers they will choose to share leaders' values. In the next section, leaders' attributes are viewed through the eyes of followers with an emphasis on the values-based actions of leaders of character.

Leadership Traits Associated with Leaders of Character and Values-Based Leadership

In this section, 24 traits or attributes of leaders of character based on an extensive review of the leadership literature. Each trait is briefly described alphabetically, rather than with any prioritization.

1. **Accountable** — Accountable leaders take responsibility for followers having the knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve clearly stated expectations. Accountable leaders educate and prepare followers for success while building trust. Leaders of character accept accountability whenever things do not go as planned and for failures. Leaders of character eagerly bestow effusive praise on followers for their achievements and successes.
2. **Communicative** — Leaders of character care about communicating clearly and effectively. This includes listening to and talking with anyone who needs to express their feelings and concerns or to seek assistance and changes. Values-based leaders provide specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely feedback about followers' performances and help them set goals aligned with these five characteristics. Communicative leaders ensure their communications consistently reflect and align with their core values.
3. **Compassionate** responses by leaders are empathetic to the emotions experienced by a person who is distressed or hurting with a motivation to try to alleviate or ease their suffering. Through compassion a leader displays kindness and caring for others.
4. **Competent** — Leaders of character who already are or become knowledgeable, skillful, and experienced so they can enable followers to fulfill and improve their performances. The competent leader is not content with the status quo but rather by continuously learning more and accomplishing more leads effectively and successfully.
5. **Courageous** — Values-based leaders demonstrate the moral courage to always act and make decisions based on their core values. Regardless of circumstances, the courageous leader displays tenacity and fortitude when faced with risks, crises, interpersonal conflicts, and uncertainties to act and decide as a leader of character.
6. **Emotionally intelligent** leaders are self-aware and manage their emotions competently, and they are socially aware of the emotions of others and manage their interrelationships with others with sensitivity. Leaders make a positive and significant impact on organizational performance by displaying emotional intelligence that has proven to be a differentiator in others' career advancement.
7. **Empowering** — People want direction, challenges, and the resources needed to be successful. Leaders provide these when they empower others to act independently.
8. **Fair** — Leaders of character are just, equitable, impartial, unbiased, and dispassionate. They ensure equitable processes and make just decisions. Values-based leaders personify the *Golden Rule* to treat others the way they would like to be treated (and do not treat others the way you do not want to be treated — sometimes called the *Silver Rule*).
9. **Humble** — Leaders never forget who they are, leaders appreciate the unique value of each person in the organization, and leaders treat everyone with respect. Values-based leaders are authentic and act ethically without pretense or arrogance.
10. **Integrity** — Values-based leaders constantly display integrity through moral uprightness and honesty guided by strong moral principles. A leader's integrity contributes to a positive work environment and rewarding organizational culture.
11. **Inspiring** — The inspirational leader seeks to motivate others to get excited about, interested in, or enthusiastically engage in desired actions. Ethical, servant, transformational, and authentic leaders model through words, and especially their actions, expectations and standards. When this occurs, followers can be motivated to

change their attitudes, behaviors, and work to increase performance and job satisfaction.

12. **Listen** — Leaders of character listen actively to help facilitate openness, honesty, success, while building trust. Through active listening, leaders demonstrate concern for others, use body language to affirm others, ask questions, and paraphrase others' words to show understanding.

13. **Loyal** — Leaders of character demonstrate a strong sense of respect and support for those they lead. A loyal leader consistently treats others with kindness, fairness, and generosity of spirit with their best interests at heart.

14. **Motivational** — Motivational leaders inspire others to act ethically, overcome obstacles, and achieve success. Affirmations reassure other leaders at all levels and followers to consistently live their values.

15. **Passionate** — Effective leaders exhibit strong feelings and beliefs displaying purpose and pride in their work as their reach for even greater heights. Passionate leaders are more effective, enhanced problem-solvers and decision-makers, feel an urgency to follow-through and achieve goals, and engage in lifelong learning. Passion in alignment with core values becomes contagious as followers are motivated to engage more fully and productively.

16. **Patient** — Despite delays, problems, anxieties, and annoyances, leaders are patient. Values-based leaders remain calm, listen and reframe irritating situations, develop skills in dealing with uncomfortableness, prioritize win-win outcomes, and remember life is not about them.

17. **Positive** — Leaders focus on the good instead of the bad by controlling their attitudes about every situation. Leaders of character are optimistic, hopeful, confident, and optimistic while understanding the importance of affirming self-talk and positive feedback given to others.

18. **Relatable** — Leaders must enable others to feel they are approachable, cooperative, supportive, and responsive. According to self-determination theory, relatedness is one of three basic psychological needs (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Hester and Killian (2010) stated, "Leadership is about relationships and relationships are sustained by shared moral values; therefore, leadership is value based. Understanding this idea is a prerequisite to becoming aware of the basic moral principles that comprise the foundations of effective leadership behavior" (p. 69).

19. **Respectful** — Admiration for others' abilities, qualities, and achievements are ways leaders show respect. Values-based leaders accept others for who they are, while displaying kindness, courtesy, and compassion.

20. **Self-aware and self-reflective** — Leaders must be self-aware and self-reflective, which means they understand themselves — their values, motivations, strengths, and skills. Through self-awareness and self-reflection leaders learn more about themselves and how to improve and make changes as needed.

21. **Selfless** — Selfless leaders are concerned about and serve the needs of others as a priority. They are magnanimous givers who show friendship universally. They are considerate to ensure their actions do not negatively affect others while displaying a forgiving attitude toward others. As they serve, leaders of character contribute to greater fulfillment and satisfaction of followers.

22. **Transparent** — The transparent leader guided by core values welcomes others having accessibility to information. Leaders of character have no hidden agendas, so followers

are more likely to willingly trust and learn from leaders who are open and honest. Transparent leaders welcome questions and share feedback, opportunities, and challenges that results in followers having greater motivation and feelings of success.

23. **Trustworthy** — Leaders are trustworthy meaning they are honest, reliable, and principled. Only through trust will others agree to be led. Trusted leaders instill loyalty and trust in others to actively live their values as they pursue their dreams and desires.

24. **Visionary** — The visionary leader conceptualizes and focuses on the future with wisdom and imagination. Values-based leaders inspire through their passion by having confidence and the moral courage to advance in innovative, goal-driven directions.

These 24 leadership traits, while not listing every characteristic of values-based leaders described in thousands of books and articles about leadership, encompass the most essential attributes. Followers want leaders who possess these characteristics because it makes them more satisfied with their work and more successful. These 24 leadership traits consistently describe leaders of character. They also are visible in the leadership of ethical, servant, transformational, and authentic leaders with these connections described briefly in the next section.

Alignment of Leadership Traits with Ethical Leadership, Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Authentic Leadership

Brown et al. (2005) suggested connections between ethical leadership with servant leadership (Frick & Spears, 1996; Greenleaf; 1977; Hester & Killian, 2010), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978), and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007). Copeland (2014) examined research on values-based leadership and identified its shared characteristics and behaviors with authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and transformational leadership. The interconnections are extensive and synergistic.

Brown et al. (2005) were the first to conceptualize ethical leadership as a new construct defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p. 120). Ethical leaders influence follower outcomes of satisfaction with the leader, perceived leader effectiveness, and job dedication to give extra effort.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) suggested ethical leadership is founded upon the moral character of the leader, ethical legitimacy of the values embedded in articulation of the leader's vision, and morality of the processes of social ethical choices and actions of leaders followers may embrace and collectively pursue. Inherent in ethical leadership are authenticity, integrity, truthfulness, and credibility expressed in their actions. Mayer et al. (2009) agreed that ethical leadership is learned by followers through observing the leader's actions in alignment with social learning theory.

Greenleaf (1977) initiated the service leadership philosophy or theory when he proposed that the best leaders seek first to serve and as a priority serve the needs of others. Frick and Spears (1996) reported that Greenleaf characterized servant-leaders as individuals who want to do right and what is ethically sound. They described servant leadership through 10 characteristics of servant leaders identified in Greenleaf's writings—listening, empathy,

healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building community.

Hunter (1998) identified these characteristics of servant leadership — patience, kindness, humility, respectfulness, selflessness, forgiveness, honesty, and commitment leading to service and sacrifice. Hester and Killian (2010) emphasized that servant leadership is based on moral principles.

Self-determination theory suggested that humans have three basic needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Lumpkin and Achen (2018) reported alignments with each of these three needs among ethical leadership and servant leadership. Autonomy involved the shared characteristics of honesty, trust, respect, and fairness of ethical leaders and listening and awareness of servant-leaders. For competence, moral values were essential for ethical leaders and doing what is right for servant-leaders. Relatedness was associated for ethical leaders with being principled decision-makers and servant-leaders having empathy and empathizing service to others. In their summary that listed these shared characteristics among ethical leadership and servant leadership — awareness, empathy, fairness, integrity, moral values, motivation, trust, relationship management, respect, and self-management.

Burns (1978) first conceptualized transformational leadership with an emphasis on the moral values of leaders, and it was expanded upon by Bass (1985) through his identification of four elements that characterized a transformational leader. These four "I" were *idealized influence*, as the leader is a positive and ethical role model with authenticity and honesty; *inspirational motivation*, or inspiring followers to work and perform at a higher level; *individualized consideration* or coaching and helping followers grow; and *intellectual stimulation*, or promoting followers' innovation and creativity including taking calculating risks. Transformational leaders are viewed as role models displaying their core values. They are visionaries who inspire and encourage others, create open, communicative, and diverse cultures, and are supportive mentors. Transformational leaders demonstrate ethical and authentic qualities as they focus on the well-being of followers and organizations and foster trust and enthusiasm (Copeland, 2014).

George (2003) introduced authentic leadership in his book *Authentic Leadership*. Warren Bennis in his forward to this book wrote,

> *We need authentic leaders, people of the highest integrity, committed to building enduring organizations. We need leaders who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values. We need leaders with the courage to build their companies to meet the needs of their stakeholders, and who recognize the importance of their service to society* (p. xv).

George (2003) defined five dimensions of authentic leadership — purpose, values, heart, relationships, and self-discipline. An authentic leader must be self-aware of strengths and weaknesses. An authentic leader lives by core values transparent to everyone. An authentic leader is empathetic to themselves and others. An authentic leader builds and nurtures positive relationships with others. An authentic leader practices self-discipline. Authentic leaders pursue their purpose with passion, practice solid moral values, connect with others, demonstrate self-discipline, and lead with their heart as well as their head. Only in this way will a values-based leader follow their compass or True North (George, 2007).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) argued that authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers through self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling. They

characterized authentic leaders as knowing their values and beliefs and where they stand on important issues and conveying their values through actions. Avolio et al. (2004) suggested authentic leaders enhance the engagement, motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and involvement of followers leading to improvement in work and performance outcomes.

Values are the most important shared characteristic of ethical leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership. These shared values encompass all the 24 listed traits. Central to each of these leadership theories is that only when values-based leadership actions are enacted will ultimate success be achieved as a leader of character.

Conclusion

Based on the research of a multiplicity of authors including those cited in this work, values-based leaders model their character, that is, what they believe in and how they act. The 24 characteristics that were briefly described consistently emerged from the literature reviewed. Their close and consistent alignment with what ethical leaders, servant leaders, transformational leaders, and authentic leaders say and do provides evidence of why leaders choosing one or more of these leadership styles are successful. Followers learn the characteristics of values-based leaders through observation. They also may choose to develop many of these same traits themselves because they realize how positively they could impact their performance and lead to greater job satisfaction.

References

Avolio, B., & Gardner, W. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 16*(3) 315-338. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001

Avolio, B., Gardner W., Walumbwa, F., Luthans F., & May D. (2004). Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15*(6), 801-823. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.09.003

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Bass, B. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. Free Press.

Bass, B., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and transformational leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *10*(2), 181-217. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(99)00016-8

Brown, M. E., & Mitchell, M. S. (2010). Ethical and unethical leadership. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 20*(4), 583-616. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/business-ethics-quarterly/article/abs/ethical-and-unethical-leadership-exploring-new-avenues-for-future-research/073D6C535E7D86680F9C15E3E95C9E9D

Brown, M .E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(6). 595-616. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S104898430600110X

Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. (2005). Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 97,* 117–134. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749597805000397

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* Harper & Row.

Cooper, B. K., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2007, May/June). The character of leadership. *Ivey Business Journal.* http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/the-character-of-leadership/

Copeland, M. K. (2014). The emerging significance of values based leadership: A literature review. *International Journal of Leadership Studies, 8*(2), 105-135.

Crossan, M., Gandz, J., & Seijts, G. (2012, January/February). Developing leadership character. *Ivey Business Journal*. http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/developing-leadership-character/

Frick, D. M., & Spears, L. C. (Eds.). (1996). *Robert K. Greenleaf: On becoming a servant-leader.* Jossey-Bass.

George, B. (2003). *Authentic leadership: Rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value*. Jossey-Bass.

George, B., & Sims, P. (2007). *True north: Discover your authentic leadership.* Jossey-Bass.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant-leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.

Hester, J. P., & Killian, D. R. (2010). The moral foundations of ethical leadership. *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership, 3*(1), 66-76.

Hunter, J. C. (1998). *The servant: A simple story about the true essence of leadership.* Prima Publishing.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z., (2023). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations*. (7th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Kraemer, H. M. J., Jr. (2011). *From values to action: The four principles of values-based leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Leader to Leader Institute. (2004). *Be-know-do. Leadership the Army way.* Jossey-Bass.

Lumpkin, A., & Achen, R. M. (2018). Explicating the synergies of self-determination theory, ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, and servant leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 12*(1), 6-20. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jls.21554

Mayer, D. M., Kuenzi, M., Greenbaum, R., Bardes, M., & Salvador, R. (Bombie). (2009). How low does ethical leadership flow? Test of a trickle-down model. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 108*(1), 1–13. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749597808000551

Mcleod, S. (2023). Albert Bandura's social learning theory. https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html

Sutton, J. (2012). What is Bandura's social learning theory? 3 examples. https://positivepsychology.com/social-learning-theory-bandura/

About the Author

Dr. Angela Lumpkin

Angela Lumpkin earned a B.S.E. from the University of Arkansas, M.A. and Ph.D. from Ohio State University, and a M.B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a professor and Chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Management at Texas Tech University (TTU). A former dean, Distinguished Visiting Professor at the United States Military Academy, department head, and intercollegiate women's basketball coach, she conducts research and publishes in the areas of teaching effectiveness, leadership, sport ethics, intercollegiate athletics, and women in sport.

Dr. Lumpkin can be reached at angela.lumpkin@ttu.edu.