



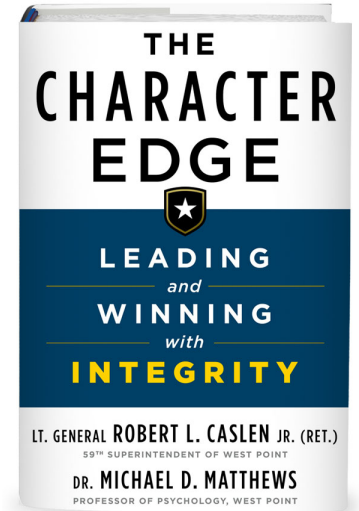
DODReads Executive Summary

The Character Edge

Leading and Winning with Integrity

Thesis: To sustain long-term success as an individual and an organization, having high character is essential and can take individuals and organizations to higher levels of performance.

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 - [Head Strong](#)



[The Character Edge](#)

Why this book is important for the Military Professional:

The most successful leaders throughout history display a mix of expertise and talents. However, their mastery in their field was not the secret to their success; their strength of character was. For a military professional, demonstrating “good character” is essential for success, as shown by the values the military attempts to exemplify. The authors of this book have seen through experience and scientific exploration great successes and significant failures in people’s character. Those with excellent character skills were always more successful, even if they were not as “talented” as their peers. This book highlights the essential character traits that contribute to character and account for many successes for individuals and teams.

Character / (ˈker-ik-tər) noun. 1. the **complex** of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation. [character](#)

Chapter ONE: Have Good Character, Don't Be One

“I am aware that a man of real merit is never seen in so favorable a light as seen through the medium of adversity. The clouds that surround him are shades that set off his good qualities.” -Alexander Hamilton.

- Think of the most successful leaders in history: Aristotle, Joan of Arc, Lincoln, Gandi, Marie Curie, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Eisenhower
 - Some were brilliant scientists, some were creative visionaries, and others were masters of strategy
 - Secret to their success was highly effective leadership—skills, grit, resiliency, charisma, courage, and credibility all emanated from one thing—their strength of character
- The research underscores the connection between character and leadership
- Character Defined
 - The moral values and habits of an individual
 - *“A person acting on his or her world in ways that benefit it and, in turn, the world, thereby providing benefits for the person”*
- Benefits of character education include a higher sense of well-being and better academic performance.
- Character can be developed, nurtured, and grown.
- Research shows 24 universal character strengths and six moral virtues
 - Wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective)
 - Courage (bravery, persistence, integrity, zest)
 - Justice (teamwork, fairness, leadership)
 - Humanity (capacity to love, kindness, social intelligence)
 - Temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation)
 - Transcendence (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope/optimism, humor, and spirituality)
- An assessment available called the Values-in-Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS)
 - www.authentichappiness.org
- **Leaders may be highly competent, but if they fail at character, they will fail as a leader**

Chapter 2: Strengths of the Gut

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers the fear.” -Nelson Mandela

- Courage consists of three factors
 - Free choice
 - Noble or worthy goal
 - Significant personal risk
- Personal courage is more than a one time response to an isolated situation
- True courage is selfless
 - Many heroes from Sergeant Mike Ranney (Band of Brothers) to Captain Sullenberger (pilot who landed a plane after engine failure on a river) demonstrate **humility**
- Grit
 - Special form of moral virtue of courage
 - Plays out over the long haul and best applies to tasks that take months or years to complete
 - Students with more grit, tend to achieve more academically
 - Grit was the best predictor of completing basic training for Cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point
- Building Gut Strengths
 - Know yourself
 - Practice Courage
 - Look for and be a role model
 - Use social persuasion and feedback
 - Embrace stressful conditions
 - Surround yourself with courageous people
- Leaders can build courage in others
 - For example: Army Football Program’s turn-around starting in 2013

- Coach Monken developed a team culture that focused on being a good teammate, not in being well liked and friendly, but in all knowing they could depend on each other to practice and play at peak effort

Chapter 3: Strengths of the Head

“Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than polish.” -Anne Bradstreet

- Strengths of the head are character traits that created the moral virtue of knowledge and wisdom
- Whether you have an IQ of 110 or 140, you can possess, nurture, and display these strengths
- The dimensions of Intelligence
 - Traditional Intelligence–IQ
 - Creativity provides innovative and novel ways of solving complex problems; sometimes called “thinking outside the box”
 - Curiosity is the trait of finding pleasure in exploring new ideas and possibilities
 - Linked to many positive outcomes such as having more positive moods and feelings
 - Open-mindedness is the ability to listen to and consider ideas and perspectives that differ from one’s own
 - Open minded people tend to outperform others on cognitive tests (e.g., SAT)
 - Leaders with this train allow diverse thought to be considered resulting in more empathetic, better solutions
 - Love of Learning is enjoying the learning of new skills and knowledge, whether formally or on your own
 - Benefits of this train include being positive about learning new things, increased ability to persevere in the face of obstacles, an enhanced sense of autonomy, better problem solving strategies, and a sense of self-efficacy
 - Perspective is equivalent to wisdom
 - In many ways, is the product of the other strengths of the head
 - Not arrived at “overnight”
 - Positively related to successful adjustment throughout a person’s life span
- Secretary Robert McDonald and the Transformation of the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
 - Secretary McDonald was charged with changing the VA, an organization that had significant challenges
 - He employed a High Performance Organization model designed to refocus the organization on purpose, values, and principles
 - Aimed to have every employee identify with the VA’s vision and mission
 - VA significantly improved
- Building the head strengths
 - Know your best talents and use them systematically
 - Practice creativity
 - Rediscover your innate curiosity
 - Open-mindedness is intentionally entertaining views that are counter to your own
 - Love of learning is engaging in learning that can aid your personal and professional career
 - Perspective and wisdom can build through complexity and richness of personal experience

Chapter 4: Strengths of the Heart

“Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking promotes profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love” -Lao-Tzu

- Strengths of the Heart: Key to Effective Leadership
- These strengths transcend culture, context, and time and represent what it means to be human
- Specific Strengths
 - Capacity to love

- If you are high in this trait, you will have close positive relationships with others, and your feelings of love for them will be reciprocated
 - Kindness
 - Society leads one to believe that this trait rarely exists
 - Kind acts rarely make the news
 - Volunteerism is a form of kindness
 - People who volunteer enjoy better emotional and physical health than non-volunteers
 - Forgiveness
 - Psychologists find that forgiveness diminishes negative emotions such as anger, hostility, depression and anxiety
 - Gratitude is the capacity to give and receive thanks in life
 - Gratitude reduces negative feelings, such as depression, while simultaneously increasing positive ones, such as happiness and life satisfaction
- Strengths of the heart are more impactful in times of adversity
 - Soldiers rally around a wounded or lost comrade
 - Law enforcement officers support the family of a fallen officer
- Building Strengths of the Heart
 - Roger's theory of human development
 - Belief that human adjustment is developed during childhood
 - Most important concept is that of unconditional positive regard—parents should love their children without conditions
 - Can be applied to other interactions as well

Chapter 5: Trust: The Straw that Stirs the Drink

“I came to believe that a leader isn't good because they are right; they're good because they're willing to learn and to trust.” -Stanley McChrystal

- Trust is a relationship between two or more individuals characterized by the expectation that the other will behave in ways that are mutually beneficial
 - Requires predictability and each person will behave in a consistent way
 - Involves risk
- Three C's of trust
 - Competence
 - Character
 - Caring
- A fourth C
 - Communication
 - Effective communication is necessary for building and sustaining trust
 - Not one-directional and must be effective in all parties within a relationship
- Impact of loss of trust in organizations
 - Culture of an organization is established by the leader (CEO, commanding officer, etc.)
 - Failures of trust can come in many ways such as a leader being incompetent, of questionable character, or failing to demonstrate care for those in the organization
 - Examples of organizations who lost trust
 - Catholic Church after child-abuse scandals
 - Kate McClur and Mark D'Amico's gofundme page for a veteran where they kept \$400,000 while only giving the veteran \$25,000
 - Larry Nassar, sports medicine physician at Michigan State University and medical coordinator for USA Gymnastics, abusing as many as 250 girls
- Building Trust and Leadership
 - Leaders can build trust within their teams and organizations by assessing where they stand on the three C's.

- Competence is easiest to assess
 - Character is less tangible and requires leaders to act in ways consistent with their values and the organization's values
 - Caring either is occurring or it does not
- A Trust Crisis?
 - Accusations of “fake news” and other impacts from the 24/7 news cycle and social media, at times, attempts to erode the trust in our institutions by magnifying failures
 - Social media allows “digital echoes” and enables bad actors to take advantage of irresponsible messaging that ultimately damage institutions, even when facts support those institutions
- The “Trust Account” builds incrementally with deposits of competence, character, and caring
 - When a person violates the bonds of trust, a withdrawal from the account occurs that may be impossible to build back up

Chapter 6: It is Not Just About You

“Culture does not change because we desire to change it. Culture changes when the organization is transformed; the culture reflects the realities of people working together every day.” -Fances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA

- Who you are is more influenced by your social environment than by any other factor, especially for character
- Developing High Character Organizations
 - Excellence requires deliberate and systematic efforts, requiring leaders to embrace the importance of character within their organization
 - Values-based trust is the foundation upon which high-character organizations rest
 - Individual Relationship Organizational Context (IROC) model
 - Individual credibility—competence, character, caring
 - Relationships Matter—respect and concern, open communications, cooperative interdependence, trust and empower others
 - Organization sets the climate—shared values, beliefs, norms, and goals; structure, practices, policies, and procedures
 - Context influences all—dependencies and needs, organization systems
- Individual Credibility
 - Organizations must carefully define the set of skills they need within their organization, select people into the organization who possess these skills, assign them to jobs that match their talents, then continue to train and develop each employee throughout his or her tenure within the organization
 - Character and caring can be nurtured and developed
- Relationships Matter
 - “Other people matter” -Christopher Peterson, pioneer of positive psychology
 - When leaders show respect and concern for their employees, communicate with them frequently and openly, and trust and empower workers at all levels, good things follow
 - Cooperative interdependence
- Organizations set the climate
 - Leaders make their greatest impact by establishing an organizational climate that embraces character and positive relationships
 - example—Johnson & Johnson’s Credo
- Context influences all
 - Organizations differ in mission and structure
 - Goals and strategies may differ, but IROC principles can apply in many different types of organizations
- Assessing your organization—see IROC Organizational Rating Form

Chapter 7: Good Ingredients Make for a Good Stew

“In determining “the right people,” the good-to-great companies placed greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialized knowledge, or work experience.” -Jim Collins

- Aptitude Myopia is a bias that occurs to people who have been denied a job or entry into a college because of test scores
 - Stems from over a hundred years of psychologists developing and refining tests for intelligence and aptitude, which are reliable and valid
 - **However, these tests only predict 25% of performance in work and academic success**
 - Organizations would do well to consider the non-cognitive skills (e.g., grit), that account for the other 75% of performance when selecting and assigning employees
- Identify the characteristics that matter most to you
- Focus on these strengths to select the best people
- Develop character within your organization—360-degree assessments, periodic reviews
- Respond to character failures
 - Sometimes “firing” someone for a character failure is not the best option, but coaching and mentoring that person can result in improved character and performance

Chapter 8: Nurturing the Seed of Good Character

“Good character is not formed in a week or a month. It is created little by little, day by day. Protracted and patient effort is needed to develop good character.” -Heracleitus

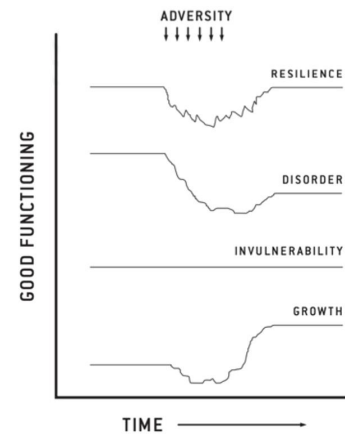
- Character must be continually developed; it is not something you have or don't have
- The Big Three
 - Positive and sustained mentoring
 - Skill-building curricula and training
 - Leadership opportunities
- Positive and sustained mentoring is fundamental to cultivating character
 - Positive mentoring can occur at all levels (peers, managers, subordinates, etc)
 - Be aware of the dark side of mentoring—in dysfunctional organizations, negative mentors may emerge
 - E.g., the manager who criticizes employees for being one minute over their lunch break but takes a two hour lunch break daily
 - Suggestions for being an effective mentor
 - Make it a priority
 - Formal sessions should be structured
 - Mentoring must be genuine
 - Do not confuse mentoring with performance evaluations
 - Be honest
 - Identify the informal mentors in your organization, encourage and reward them
- Skill building
 - Character development is an interaction between the individual and the environment
 - Growth Mindset—belief that a person can improve their skills
 - Increases grit
 - New employees character traits are not “set in stone” and can be developed with a growth mindset
- Leadership Opportunities
 - Placing people in leadership roles and helping to coach/mentor them helps them hone their character and leadership skills
- Character building techniques
 - Training activities (e.g., Leader Reaction Course)
 - Exercises (e.g., completing VAIS survey; “hunting the good stuff”)

- Youth Sports, if done right, promote positive youth development
- Formal Curricula

Chapter 9: The Crucible of Life Experiences

“That which does not kill us only makes us stronger.” -Friedrich Nietzsche

- Adversity in life is unavoidable
- Character helps us deal with adversity, but adversity can also shape our character
- Trauma, Adversity, Challenge, and Personal Growth
 - Post traumatic stress syndrome can also results in post traumatic growth
- Four outcomes of adversity
 - Resilience—occurs when, following a period of adversity, a persona’s adjustment returns to baseline
 - Disorder—when adversity results in negative change in adjustment, and the individual does not recover over time
 - Invulnerability—occurs when the person endures the adverse event with no apparent change
 - Growth—occurs when a person becomes stronger emotionally, builds better social relationships, or develops stronger character strengths as a result of a challenging experience
- Impacting the trajectory
 - Previous life experiences
 - Genetics and Biology
 - Social Support
 - The Nature and Intensity of the Adverse Event
- Make the best of the crucible of life experiences
 - Hardiness characteristic is consistently linked to positive outcomes in the face of adversity
 - Hardiness components
 - Commitment—seeing things through to their end no matter how difficult the task
 - Challenge—how we frame obstacles to desired goals
 - Control—a sense of control over one’s fate
- Plan of Action for Adversity
 - Anticipate adversity and plan ahead
 - Plan for the event
 - Unexpected adversity
 - Have a character action plan
- Leaders play a critical role when adversity occurs
- Recommendations for leaders
 - Conduct resilience training
 - Conduct team building
 - Make standards public and enforce them
 - Provide feedback



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Book by Michael Matthews and Robert L. Caslen Jr.

Chapter 10: Avoiding the Potholes

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” -Benjamin Franklin

- By virtue of being human, we will have errors in judgment and conduct resulting in doing things “out of character”
- Preventing character failure is a better strategy than mending the fallout stemming from that failure
- Character risk model

- Intrapersonal–personality traits that ultimately could lead to character failure
 - Dark triad: narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy
 - Hubris or excessive pride
- Social and Organizational–aspects of the social or organizational setting that create conditions that fail to properly guide and constrain behavior, making it more likely that some individuals will fail in character
 - E.g., sleep deprivation leads to increased risk of character failures
- Environmental–circumstances external to the individual that create pressure or stress that may lead to character failure
 - Individuals who lack supportive social networks are more vulnerable to character failures
- Organizational Hazards to character, adapted from an article “Managing Conduct Risk” by Deloitte
 - Consumer need and suitability are not guiding produce lifecycle practices
 - Failing to have a balanced scorecard for human resource decisions
 - Individuals and leadership are not responsible or held to account for misconduct
 - Failing to identify and manage conflicts of interest
 - Complex, disconnect, or growth at all cost business models
 - Manual and complicated processes and procedures
 - Weak systems for monitoring and surveillance
 - Disparate subcultures or a problematic prevailing culture
- Social media presents a significant threat to character
 - People say things on social media they would not say in person
 - Unfiltered content of social media may be incredibly disruptive to people who are at multiple levels of character risk
- Social isolation is a significant contributor to character failure

Chapter 10: Winning the Right Way

“Competing at the highest level is not about winning. It’s about preparation, courage, understanding and nurturing people, and heart. Winning is the result.” -Joe Torre

- An Existential Crisis?
 - America faces a character crisis due to erosion in trust of government and other social institutions
 - Elected leaders from all political parties carry burden when winning at all costs is what matters
 - Foreign entities have taken advantage of this by stirring anger and discord via social media and other means
 - However, trust lost can be regained as demonstrated by the leadership of Abraham Lincoln
- Winning the Right Way
 - For example: winning during World War II looks much different than winning in Iraq and Afghanistan
 - Much more stringent use of rules of engagement and focus on minimizing collateral damage
 - In Civilian world, there are many examples of organizations that ultimately fail in the long run when they operate inconsistently with positive values and respect for others
- Strengths of the Gut are vital to success as are Strengths of the Head
- Strengths of the Heart
 - Sharing hardships helps build strong bonds between people
 - Being kind and having a capacity to love ultimately allow a person to have more fulfilling and meaningful relationships
- Trust is the most essential ingredient to effective leadership
- Character can be developed
- Ethical fading–the deterioration or corrosion of ethical standards over time
- Avoiding the potholes–it is better to prevent character failure than to deal with its personal and organization consequences

- Leaders of character must show the same character in their private and public lives
- Have a personal “ethic-creed”

Resources and Additional Reading

- 1) [Angela Duckworth and Grit](#)
- 2) [Leadership is a Relationship: How to Put People First in the Digital World](#)
- 3) [MindVue: Non-Cognitive Skills Assessment & Training](#)
- 4) [Psychological Body Armor by Dr. Matthews](#)

*Thanks to Adam Werner for writing this Executive Summary. Adam is an Army Aviation Officer and a former Assistant Professor at the United States Military Academy's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership. Adam is now a DODReads Fellow, where he hopes to make a positive impact on military leaders by promoting the power of reading and life-long learning. This executive summary comprises verbatim excerpts and summarizations from **The Character Edge** by LTG (R) Robert Caslen & Dr. Michael Matthews. Adam can be reached through [LinkedIn](#).*



If your office or command is in need of one book or a hundred we would be honored to [source them](#)