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LEADING WITH CHARACTER

By [Jim Loehr](#) and [Caren Kenney](#)



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*The constant change, increasing expectations, stress and uncertainty of the current business landscape puts immense pressure on leaders to demonstrate integrity, honesty and compassion. Performance psychologist and co-founder of the Johnson & Johnson Human Performance Institute, Dr. Jim Loehr, and CEO of Evolve Leadership, Caren Kenney, lay out the case for character-based leadership in their book *Leading with Character*.*

What is leading with character? Is it different from leading with morals?

Caren Kenney: Leading with character means consistently acting in accordance with your deeply held values and in the support and betterment of others. The highest level of character demonstrates a strong emphasis on ethical and moral values such as integrity, honesty, empathy, caring, compassion, humility and respect for others. Those who truly lead with character consistently do the right thing—even when no one else is looking—and regardless of the circumstances or personal consequences. The strength of one's character is never truly revealed until it is put under intense pressure.

What are the two dimensions of character? Explain.

Jim Loehr: There are two types of character. The first is performance character which consists of the acquired competencies that enhance and support high achievement. Examples include confidence, focus, self-discipline, drive, mental toughness and resilience. The second is ethical/moral character, which consists of the acquired

competencies that enhance and support one's treatment of others. Performance character drives "what" one achieves and ethical/moral character drives "how" one achieves it. The two types of character are not connected. In other words, one can possess an array of performance character assets but few ethical/moral assets and vice versa.

Examples of leaders without character are easy to find. Can you give examples of leaders that are leading well?

Loehr: One person that immediately comes to mind is Chip Bergh, CEO of Levi's, who has been courageous and vocal in addressing social injustice and other issues that align with his deepest moral values despite the potential impact of losing customers who hold opposing views. There are many other examples of leaders who have demonstrated strong character; however these are situational and only a snapshot of those individuals at a particular moment in time. The strength of a leader's ethical/moral character cannot be known fully until it is tested under pressure. Just like the strength of a physical muscle cannot be determined until it has been exposed to stress, so too the strength of a leader's character cannot be truly assessed without enduring stress. No leader is a perfect model. Every leader and individual possesses ethical/moral weaknesses that must constantly be confronted and addressed to prevent muscle failure precisely when leadership is needed most—when the storms of corporate life are raging.

When morality fails, what are some reasons why?

Kenney: When morality fails, it is typically because the leader is experiencing fear, uncertainty, stress or other pressures (all of which are prevalent in today's current environment) and defaults to decisions or behavior that favor self-preservation and/or personal gains. This stems from a flawed or weak moral foundation and lack of a strong, values-based personal code of ethics (which we refer to as a personal credo) that guides judgment, decisions and behavior. Leaders who are not aware of this vulnerability and who do not intentionally train to strengthen their character "muscle" are at greatest risk. This is why it is such a critical and integral component of our training with senior leaders.

How can leaders cultivate their highest self?

Loehr: One's highest self is one's highest moral self. Our treatment of others is the ultimate measure of health in human beings. Without trust, integrity, caring, honesty, compassion and honor, all we have is chaos. The process of credo building is active "best moral self" construction.

What is a personal credo? Why is it important?

Loehr: A personal credo is the lens through which every moral decision is to be vetted. It represents the clearest, most precise, self-determined articulation of one's core beliefs, core values, mission and purpose in life. Credo building begins with identifying your personal purpose and assessing how well your actions and behavior enable you to successfully live into it. This is followed by intentional reflection and daily journaling for several months to articulate a process and code of ethics that guide your ethical decisions and moral behavior. A personal credo represents one's best effort to rise above any flawed inputs, blind spots, sloppy thinking and character weaknesses to

courageously do the right thing. In the final analysis, our capacity for sound moral judgment has no equal.

Do leaders need to be heroes? Why?

Kenney: Leaders do not need to be heroes but there are certain qualities that both great leaders and heroes possess, including courage to do what is right regardless of the consequences, prioritizing the welfare of others over themselves and consistently acting with moral integrity. Leaders who are able to identify and articulate their personal purpose, manage and invest their energy to activate that purpose in service of others, and consistently operate according to a clearly defined code of ethics aligned with their deepest values have the greatest opportunity to emerge as heroes.

The Authors:

***Dr. Jim Loehr** is co-founder of the Johnson & Johnson Human Performance Institute. He is a bestselling author who has written 16 books including Toughness Training for Life, Stress for Success, The Power of Story and The Only Way to Win.*

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