

**Basic Assumptions About
Character Education
by
Ohio Partners in Character Education - Utility Division
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I. Overview

Character Education must transcend all races and socioeconomic levels. In addition, for businesses to realize the value of character education there must be linkage with customer needs and expectations.

The following report consists of comments made by members of the utility division of the Ohio Partners in Character Education (OPCE) after the June 23, 1999 meeting. Members of OPCE utility division include: Jeff Hubbard, City of Columbus Water Division; David Pemberton, Suburban Natural Gas Company; Bruce Rose, Cinergy; Bruce Klink, Consolidated Natural Gas; Dave Robinson, Ameritech Ohio; Rose Smith, Columbia Gas of Ohio; Bob Skaggs, Columbia Gas of Ohio.

Many of these comments were generated after a review of the Manufacturing and Processing Sector (MPS) Report on Character Education. The MPS sector report is thorough, complete, well organized and clearly presented. The following comments from the Utility Division should be considered a supplement to the MPS report.

II. Character Qualities

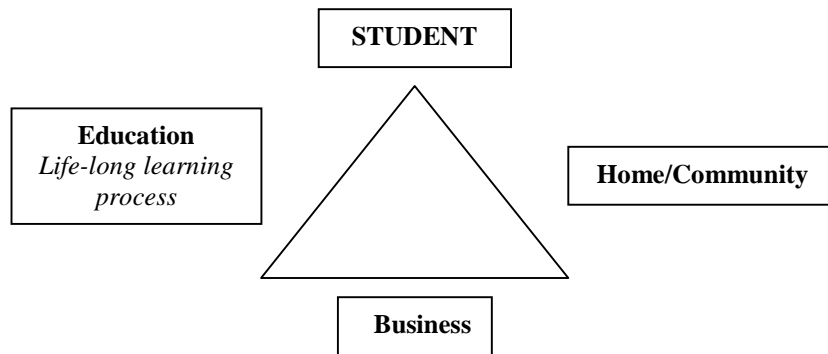
Students should be provided with clear definitions of a value, a trait and character. The Utility Division considers the six character traits that employers most highly value in employees to be:

- Respect for others
- Flexibility
- Honesty
- Reliability
- Dependability
- Teamwork

III. Summary of Recommendations

Attached are recommendations developed by the Utility Division. For these recommendations to be successful, distribution and reinforcement mechanisms will have to be in place.

- The MPS report identified several ways in which employers can support school-based character development programs. Stronger school partnerships with corporate community outreach personnel should be added to the list. In addition, businesses may be able to strengthen support for school-based character development programs by partnering with state-funded colleges and universities. For instance, collaboration with colleges of education on character education curriculum development, teacher training and materials may be beneficial.
- Utilities need to work hand-in-hand with local education systems and the educator workforce. See character value model.



IV. Preparing Young People for Workplace Success

- An excellent matrix in the MPS report summarizes how character traits are manifested in the workplace and suggests how schools might nurture development of these qualities. The Utility Division would like to include additional student resources and experiences such as Junior Achievement, student government and course offerings in applied economics, business basics, etc.
- One recommendation would be to establish selection criteria for students to hold office within student government and other school-based organizations. Criteria would include demonstrated application of defined character traits/values.
- Additional criteria for holding office in a school organization might include a simple 360-degree feedback exercising involving parents, peers, employers and other community input.
- Utilities may work with schools to identify youth liaisons to business and community groups, such as chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis and other community groups.
- A speakers bureau of public educators could be created to provide knowledgeable speakers to Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis, and chambers of commerce events. Educators are aware of the problems faced by today's youth and are concerned about addressing them constructively. This message needs to get out to diffuse unfair and unfounded criticisms of school administrators and teachers.

- Business sponsorships for students to attend public business conferences on specific topics such as diversity, safety, etc., could be created.
- Goal setting and follow-up processes could be taught by involving organizational development experts. This would encourage the development of strategic thinking skills and help build an understanding of how organizations work.
- Teach the Golden Rule and the Platinum Rule. The Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as they would like you to do unto them." Both rules have religious connotations.

V. Scenarios: Teaching Points

- **Scenario 1. You supervise union employees.** You work for a natural gas company and supervise a unionized workforce. The company's contract with the union states that the company will provide adequate safety equipment for employees.

This morning Joe, a union member, asked to talk with you directly about a safety issue. Even though the contract states that union members should address safety concerns only through their union leaders, you agree to sit down and talk directly with Joe about it.

Joe tells you that no oxygen monitors are available to his plant crew. Since natural gas plant crews sometimes work in oxygen-deprived environments, this is a serious safety hazard. You agree to talk with your boss about it.

Your boss confirms that she has cut the budget for oxygen monitors and there is no money to order more. She becomes very defensive about her decision and orders you never to tell union leaders why there are no monitors. "Joe's a good guy," she says. "Go back to him directly and tell him that the monitors are on order."

What do you do?

- **Scenario 2. You are the member of a plant crew.** There are three people on your team led by a crew leader. Random drug tests are performed at your company to ensure the safety of everyone on the job.

One day, your crew leader takes you aside to tell you that his name has been picked at random to submit a urine sample for a drug test. He's worried because he doesn't think he can pass the test due to marijuana smoking. You've suspected drug abuse because his reaction time has been slow and now your suspicions are confirmed. He considers you a friend and wants you to help him out by giving him a sample of your urine to submit to the lab.

What do you do?

- **Scenario 3. You are one of two supervisors in a work unit.** One day, an employee who reports to the other supervisor asks to talk with you alone. She wants to share information with you but first, you must agree to keep it confidential. You agree. Then she tells you that other supervisor is making unwelcome, offensive and intimidating sexual advances toward her when no one else is around. She is obviously frightened but insists that you stand by your agreement to keep the information confidential.

What do you do?

- **Scenario 4. You are employed by a major corporation.** Your children are getting ready to start school and you have been swamped with work at the office. You saw a co-worker raid the department supply cabinet for school supplies for his children. You are so busy with work that you are starting to think about doing the same thing. A healthy supply of pens, pencils, notepads and other supplies to get the children started will never be missed. But you know the supplies are company property and not intended for personal use.

What should you do?

VI. Advice to educators

The Utility Division was asked to consider what pieces of advice they would give to educators and young people about the character demands of business and the workplace.

- Learn how to be a team player while maintaining individual uniqueness and performance.
- Develop creative thinking processes.
- Consistently demonstrate dependability, integrity and safety.
- Character still counts. Despite an apparent public and personal cynicism regarding the importance of character in achieving personal success in our society, character remains important and is a strong consideration in evaluating a person's fitness for both employment and advancement in business as elsewhere. While some "bad guys" win, most still do not.
- Character encompasses more than being a nice person. In addition to personal honesty and integrity and the ability to care about and get along with others, personal responsibility, loyalty and reliability to fellow employees and one's

employer are essential to "workplace" success and advancement. Character is more than a popularity contest.

- Be willing to stand on principle even if it feels, sometimes, that you are standing alone. This is the essence of courage that is essential to character. It is also essential to leadership. There will always be more sheep than shepherds, but leadership requires that we sometimes be shepherds.