Creating a culture of excellence and civility

Good governance. Public trust. Civility. How can state legislators and their leaders reach positive outcomes like these? At the The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, where I serve as executive director, we believe the answers begin with a commitment to ethical leadership and character development.

That is because an intentional focus on fostering and demonstrating character-based leadership competencies can lead to excellence — and excellence with integrity — in the public arena. Excellence comes from personal habits and individual mindsets, which are formed from an organizational culture shaped and built by leaders. In short, leadership shapes culture, which influences character, which leads to optimal performance. In public service, there are several leadership competencies that, when demonstrated with intentionality, result in a positive culture and optimal performance — in self and others. Good outcomes will follow.

1. **Intentional relationship building**

Leadership is based on relationships. The challenge in our fast-paced society is to take the time to intentionally build relationships. It is more challenging to move from surface-level relationships to substantive relationships with others, especially those who hold different viewpoints and perspectives than our own. Thus, leaders must have the courage and curiosity to build relationships, especially with those who are new and different.

2. **Shared ground rules for engagement**

When working with others, it is important to establish shared ground rules for engagement. Begin by identifying what it will take to do the best work and treat each other with care and respect as you work together. When intentional norms and processes for working together have been defined and agreed upon in advance, the outcomes for success are significantly enhanced.

3. **Character-based leadership**

Leadership skills are enhanced when we reflect and build on our strengths and areas of improvement in our core competencies. Research shows us that a synergy of moral character and performance character is necessary for optimal performance. “Performance character competencies” include perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, initiative and creativity. These habits and traits enable us to do our best work and achieve our goals. "Moral character" competencies include caring, courage, respect and responsibility. These traits ensure that we achieve our goals in ethical, fair and harmonious ways.

4. **Integrity**

Excellence, optimal performance and public trust are rooted in the concept of integrity. Integrity (integrum) speaks to the wholeness needed to lead effectively, such as honoring our word (including commitments to ourselves) and communicating with others promptly when we are unable to fulfill our commitments. Integrity also includes the quality and consistency of systems and organizations. When individuals and systems are "out of integrity," it negatively impacts performance, reliability and workability.

5. **Clear communication**

Thinking through the "who, what, where, when and how" leads to positive outcomes. In addition, clear communication begins with clarity regarding what we want to achieve, and avoid, as outcomes of our communication. And it is essential to seek to understand as well as to be understood.

6. **Assessment of process**

Optimal performance in organizational structure and processes requires periodic organizational assessments. Implement an intentional practice with colleagues to audit which systems and processes should be stopped, started, continued and improved.

7. **The ‘CHAMP’ operating system**

The operating system for optimal performance is captured in the acronym CHAMP. Great leaders shape character through: Clarity of expectations, pro-active Habits, Accountability of self and others, and a positive Mindset, which leads to optimal Performance. When one of these elements is weak, or missing altogether, the expected performance outcome will not be achieved.

**Guest Author: J. Scott Raecker**

J. Scott Raecker is executive director of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University. He was a state representative in Iowa from 1999-2012; his leadership positions included serving as chair of the House Appropriations Committee and Ethics Committee. Scott is also on the faculty of BILLD.

**BILLD Alumni Notes: Midwest’s leaders on education policy**

Prior to being elected to the Ohio House, Rep. John Patterson (BILLD class of 2009) taught U.S. history for 29 years. His dedication to K-12 education has continued as a legislator.

The Ohio Democrat is co-chair of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education. Along with his Republican co-chair, Rep. Bob Cupp (a longtime BILLD faculty member), Patterson led a 15-month, comprehensive study of the state’s school funding formula. Their study group released a Fair School Funding Plan earlier this year to address issues of equity in school funding. The group’s plan, the two lawmakers say, “is fair, rational and justifiable, in contrast to our current system that is often unfair and nearly always incomprehensible.”

The proposal remains under consideration.

Many other BILLD alumni hold leadership positions on the K-12 education policy committees of their respective state legislatures.

**Committee Chairs**

- Indiana Sen. Jeff Raatz, class of 2017
- Iowa Sen. Amy Sinclair, class of 2016
- North Dakota Rep. Mark Owens, class of 2006
- North Dakota Sen. Don Schaible, class of 2012
- Ohio Sen. Peggy Lehner, class of 2010
- Wisconsin Sen. Luther Olson, class of 1996

**Committee Vice Chairs**

- Kansas Rep. Brenda Dietrich, class of 2017
- Michigan Sen. Ken Horn, class of 2005
- Nebraska Sen. Lynne Walz, class of 2019
- North Dakota Rep Cindy Schreiber-Beck, class of 2015
- Wisconsin Sen. Alberta Darling, class of 1995

**RANKING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- Iowa Rep. Ras Smith, class of 2017
- Kansas Sen. Dinah Sykes, class of 2017
- Minnesota Rep. Sandra Erickson, class of 2008

Please submit Alumni News to Laura Tomaka, CSG Midwest program manager for BILLD. She can be reached at ltomaka@csg.org.