Character:
The Cornerstone of Christian Leadership

GOT GRACE?
5,000 Christians reveal their weak spots in character – and some valuable remedies

BECOME A HIRE AUTHORITY
Learn how to measure character in your job applicants

TRAIN THEM UP...
A new way to train your people to do the right things at the right time

RBR MINI-CASE:
He had everything and he had nothing. The Case of "Successful" Sam

Are You Being Shaped Into a Leader of Consistent Christian Character?

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The Regent Business Review is an electronic magazine published by the Regent University Graduate School of Business. The mission of RBR is “to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers.” As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to “excel still more” (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ by Dallas Willard (NavPress, 2002)

Dallas Willard is best known for his work on spiritual disciplines and personal transformation. Renovation of the Heart reinforces his previous work in The Spirit of the Disciplines, as well as his more recent treatment of the importance of integrating daily life, spiritual disciplines and the transformational power of God in The Divine Conspiracy. His emphasis on Christian character development and the necessity of disciplined living is familiar territory. However, in Renovation of the Heart, Willard offers additional perspective on the process of character development.

According to Willard, spiritual formation is the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite form or character. And it’s not an option – we all undergo some transformation whether we realize it or not. However, not everyone chooses to participate in a process that results in Christian character development. The ideal of the spiritual life, in the Christian understanding, is one where all of the essential parts of the human self are organized around God as they are restored and sustained by Him. Spiritual formation is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is the love of God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and love of neighbor as oneself.

Specifically, Willard frames the process in terms of six aspects of human life: (1) thought, (2) feeling, (3) choice, (4) body, (5) social context, and (6) soul.

For Willard, our actions always arise out of the interplay of these universal aspects in human life. He describes the transformation process in terms of each of these six aspects. Ultimately, he argues, spiritual transformation results in Christian character and Christian living: our actions are expressions of who we are. Therefore, situations are never as important as responses. Situations become the proving ground for expressions of character.

Willard describes the general pattern in terms of vision, intention, and means. And for those who might object to what seems like a formulaic treatment of character development, Willard concedes that some of the means are directly under our control and some are the actions of God toward us.

Finally, Willard considers spiritual formation in a corporate context. He provides some assessment of the current state of Christian congregations along with recommendations for improvement. In keeping with his desire to provide practical means for development, each chapter concludes with “matters for thought and discussion.” This contributes to the usefulness of the book for personal or group development.

Overall, I would recommend the book, even for readers who are familiar with Willard’s previous work. The systematic treatment of Christian character development in Renovation of the Heart indeed makes the book a worthwhile investment.

Review by Paul Metler, Ph.D. Paul is an Associate Pastor at Heritage Fellowship in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. You can reach him at paulmetler@hotmail.com.

Courageous Leadership by Bill Hybels (Zondervan, 2002)

After more than thirty books, Bill Hybels’ latest work,
Courageous Leadership, is his self-described “magnum opus.” Why now? And why this book? Simply because its time has come. The contemporary church needs solid teaching on how to lead and no one is better positioned to offer it than Hybels, a man with an impeccable track record of leadership success at Willow Creek Community Church.

The power of this book is not so much in its list of leadership practices. Many books offer such lists. Rather, its power (and its uniqueness) lies in Hybels’ connection of leadership, the local church, and hope. Written in his trademark anecdotal style, Hybels argues that the local church is “the hope of the world,” but that this hope hinges on churches being led by those who have and use the gift of leadership. Local church leadership has the potential to bring hope and influence the entire world, he says, by renewing the heart and mind of one person at a time through the power and love of Jesus Christ.

This is no small matter to Hybels. In fact, he goes so far as to say that the difference between thriving churches and declining churches is not location, denomination, facilities, or the quality of the preaching. Although these elements can surely be important, it’s the leadership that’s determinative of success. At flourishing churches, the members of the leadership team “possess and deploy the spiritual gift of leadership...[they are] uniquely equipped to come up with strategies and structures that provide opportunities for other people to use their gifts most effectively.”

Given how much depends of excellent – courageous – local church leadership, Hybels issues an audacious challenge: “People supernaturally gifted to lead must yield themselves fully to God...cancel your career plans. Do something important with your one and only life. Lay it down for Christ and the church!”

I must admit, opening yet another leadership book for the church did not really excite me. Initially I was a skeptical reader, but as I grasped Hybels’ vision and his hypothesis – that the local church leadership is a critical and central catalyst for the kingdom of God – I found myself compelled. So be forewarned before you embark on what will no doubt be Hybels next best-seller: reading this book might spark a new (or previously side-stepped) calling in your own life. Hybels is a powerful messenger and Courageous Leadership is an empowering message for those who are blessed with the gift of leadership.

Reviewed by Myra Dingman. Myra is a doctoral fellow at the Regent University. You can reach her at myradin@regent.edu
Jesus said “forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Yet by their own admission, Christians struggle quite a bit to forgive others. They also experience significant challenges with patience and gentleness, according to a new study from Regent University, now published as a book entitled *Cultivating Christian Character.*

The conclusions are based on survey information from more than 5,000 Christians, representing all 50 states and almost 60 countries. According to the study, “Part of the rationale for this research is to determine where we’re weak so that we’ll be in a better positions to become strong. As we identify our weaknesses, we’ll know what to work on, what to pray about, and what to deal with in the study group, in the classroom, and from the pulpit.”

Our struggles to be forgiving, patient and gentle are pervasive: they transcend gender, age, race, and denomination. A few of the many statistics from the study reflect the problem. Christians are called to be consistently Christ-like, but only:

- 62% of Christians say that they are “often” or “always” gentle with others,
- 61% of Christians say that they are “often” or “always” forgiving of those who hurt them,
- 44% of Christians say that they are “often” or “always” patient and 20% admit that they do not remain patient even “sometimes.”

**The workplace implications are enormous. As we get work done, many of us may leave behind a trail of hard feelings, broken relationships, and unimpressed unbelievers.**

The Leadership Implications

What, then, might these results mean for Christians in leadership and management? Perhaps that many believers are too hard on people, too sharp with their tongues, too easily irritated, too quick to criticize, and too unwilling to give second or third chances. In even more concrete terms, the findings may implicate challenges with conflict resolution, performance management, teamwork, negotiation, and even routine day-to-day interactions with co-workers. Indeed, it’s plausible that as many Christian leaders get work done and accomplish important goals in the workplace, they leave behind a trail of hard feelings, broken relationships, and unimpressed unbelievers.

In fact, another recent study provides further evidence of just that. When asked how others perceived them at work, over 300 Christians in leadership positions reported that they were known more for their ability to “solve problems” and to “get results” than they were for their patience or gentleness. As shown in the chart on page 6, this group of Christian leaders did not even “moderately agree” that their co-workers see them as patient or gentle.

So What’s The Solution?

If patience, gentleness, and forgiveness are some of our major problems, the obvious question is: what are the solutions? “What can I do to change if I’m lacking in these areas?”

Of course, there are a plethora of books and other resources that speak to these issues, some from a clinical perspective, some from an exegetical one (see “For Further Reading” below). The Regent study examined the question scientifically, analyzing information from more than 1,500 people assessed as “well above average” in Christ-likeness and comparing it to information from the other 3,500 Christians in the sample. The analysis revealed...
not just pathways to
generally;
that is, the means by which
we can grow in all areas of
Christian character.

In short, the research
identified three qualities –
gratitude, God-centeredness,
and consistent joyful living –
as the reasons that Christians
become more Christ-like in
character. To quote: “This
seems to be how Christians
go from good to great. We
found that those who have
sown these three seeds into
their lifestyle are far more
likely to reap maximum
Christian character. Elusive
virtues like forgiveness,
patience and gentleness, as
well as those of kindness,
compassion, inner peace, and
self-control, all flow from the
root virtues of gratitude, God-
centeredness, and joyful
living. If we want to grow in
any area of our character –
including the toughest areas
that have plagued us our
whole lives – we would be
well-advised to start with
these three root virtues.”

The full book-length report
unpacks in some detail each
of these three pathways to
better character, but
interestingly, this is a formula
that implies a convergence of
scientific knowledge and
Biblical knowledge. It was the
Apostle Paul who wrote: “Be
joyful always; pray continually;
give thanks in all
circumstances, for this is
God’s will for you in Christ
Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-
18). It’s not often that the
New Testament makes the
direct statement “this is God’s
will,” but it does here – here
where the blueprint appears
to parallel the
recommendations of the
Regent study. Joy, continual
prayer (an indication of God-
centeredness), and gratitude
may be the keys to permanent
change.

So the bottom line for those
who have misplaced their
patient hat, or for those
struggling with their temper or
with forgiveness, is to pursue
change by focusing not just on
those specific issues, but on
deeper issues as well – their
relationship with God, their
gratefulness for His blessings,
and their impediments to real
joy in life.

This story compiled from
several sources. To order the
study, entitled Cultivating
Christian Character, call toll-
free 1-866-909-BOOK.

FOR FURTHER READING

The Bible is, of course, a
tremendous resource for
cultivating character, setting
forth not only the targets for
our sanctification, but also the
myriad pathways that lead us
toward that objective. As you
review various resources,
seeking to develop your
character, consider reading
these resources in tandem
with scripture, not as a
substitute for scripture.
Here are some contemporary resources of real value:

**Resources for Cultivating Forgiveness**

- The Art of Forgiving by Lewes Smedes (Ballentine, 1997)
- The Choosing to Forgive Workbook by Les Carter and Frank Minirth (Thomas Nelson, 1997)

**Resources for Cultivating Patience and Gentleness**


**Resources for Cultivating Christian Character Generally**

- Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster (HarperCollins, 1978)
- Conformed to His Image by Kenneth Boa (Zondervan, 2001)
Michelle stood at the bay window, staring out into the neighborhood. With each passing set of headlights, she grew a little more impatient. She wasn't worried that something had happened to Sam – twelve-hour workdays had become the norm recently – she was just a bit lonely and eager to see her husband. After briefly returning her eyes to the television, she heard a car door close.

“Hi there stranger!” Michelle greeted him with a cheery grin. “Want some dinner?”

Sam managed a warm but sagging smile, dropped his briefcase and loosened his tie. “Already ate,” he mumbled. “But thanks anyway. I missed the kids again, didn’t I?”

“Well it is 9:30. Ryan colored this picture for you, though. I told him you’d hang it in your office.”

Admiring the multi-colored scribbles, Sam shook his head. This was the third day in a week he hadn’t seen his preschooler at all. And his ten-month old daughter barely seemed to know who he was. He peeked into the nursery and then into Ryan’s room. “He’s getting so big,” Sam thought as he adjusted Ryan’s blanket and kissed him on the head. “Where’s the time going?”

“Can I at least fix you a snack?” offered Michelle as Sam returned.

“Thanks, but I’m completely wiped out,” he replied. “Besides, I’ve got to catch a plane at 7:00. I just need to turn in.”

He knew that despite all of his business success, he was not succeeding in God’s eyes. Not even close

On the plane the next day, Sam started to compare the life he was living with the life he really wanted. Indeed, a chasm separated those two things. But as usual, work thoughts quickly crowded out his personal reflections. Taking out his PDA, he outlined the day – the meetings, the objectives he’d like to accomplish, the remarks he’d make in addressing the Clients’ Dinner that night. Sam was good at his job – very good – and at age 35, he was moving up the corporate ladder rapidly. So as usual, Sam spent the plane trip planning and prepping. He’d be sharp on this trip and he’d be successful.

As the flight attendant leaned over to serve Sam his drink, he caught himself casually looking down her blouse. Something similar happened in his interaction with the woman at the hotel’s registration desk. Sam looked at other women a lot, and he knew he had to deal with this. A lackluster marriage sent him down this dubious path years ago, but he knew that was no excuse.

Neither was there an excuse for the way he interacted with his co-workers and subordinates. When it came to clients, Sam was smooth – gracious, considerate, patient – the model human being. But within his own firm, Sam had developed a reputation for being brusque with people, for being condescending, for belittling their ideas, and for being argumentative and arrogant. To his credit, Sam’s ideas tended to be superior to those of his colleagues, and top management recognized and rewarded his acumen, but Sam was a lousy team player and, increasingly, a heavy-handed boss, prone to steamrolling people to advance his own agenda. Sadly, his persona was not much different with Michelle.

Occasionally, Sam did reflect on such problems, as he had started to do on the plane. But his life was so incompatible with his Christian beliefs – with what he knew God wanted from him at work and at home – that this type of reflection was painful. The guilt and shame was just too much to deal with given his limited time, so he’d...
usually supplant the thoughts with a re-focus on work.

Two days later, Sam attended a Sunday church service, as he often did on business trips. As usual, though, his worship time was sidetracked by thoughts of work and by the shapely woman sitting in front of him. The trip was going well from a business perspective. Just one more deal to close in the afternoon and he could fly home late that night.

Then it happened. Perhaps it was pastor’s eloquence regarding the value of family or his citation of divorce statistics. Maybe it was his anecdotes about difficult people masquerading as Christians or his passionate call to become “pure in heart.” Whatever the trigger, something in the sermon resonated with Sam. He knew that things had to change and change soon. He knew that despite all of his business success, he was not succeeding in God’s eyes. Not even close.

But what should he do? He had tried to change before, but each time he achieved only patchy, fleeting results.

He had tried to change before, but each time he achieved only patchy, fleeting results

He genuinely wanted to be a great father, a great husband, salt and light in the workplace and everywhere else. He wanted to control his thoughts, his eyes, and his tongue, and to live a life pleasing to God. But even when he tried to pray for such things – he knew prayer to be the starting point – the words just weren’t there.

Sam wasn’t one to cry – not ever, in fact – but now, a lone tear fell into his NIV, somewhere in Romans. He found that ironic, given the one verse he remembered from the book – something about the wages of sin being death. Sam closed his Bible and left before the service ended.

Frustrated and overwhelmed, Sam sat in his car in the church parking lot, now shedding more than one tear.

What Should Sam Do?

Response from Cheryl Ludvik, LCSW, Christian Therapist

| Sam needs the clean slate that comes only through confession to God |
| All too often someone like Sam makes his way to my office. His is not an easy case. But one positive thing that I do see in Sam’s situation that’s not always true of my clients is that he’s sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. |
| Sam is aware that something is egregiously amiss in his life; he just doesn’t know how to fix it. And at those times where he has started to travel that potential road to recovery, he’s quickly found an off-ramp because of his unconscious fear that he will fail. |
| Sam should use that PDA of his to schedule some time with his wife and kids |
| What should Sam do? First, he needs to acknowledge and repent for all his sin. Sam should confess to the Lord the issues with which he is struggling. God desires to have a close relationship with us, sharing in the both the good and the bad. Our closest friends, the ones we trust the most, are the ones who know us inside and out. Sam must allow God to be his best friend and to assist with his struggles. For that to happen, he needs a clean slate. |
| Second, Sam might want to find an accountability partner – a male who will pray with him and ask him the tough questions to hold him accountable in his marriage. He must also do something to hold himself accountable. Sam, when tempted to allow his eyes to wander, should claim and maybe even state out loud Job’s promise: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1). When we acknowledge our weaknesses this way to ourselves and to our God, it makes the presence of our sin more apparent to us and it reduces |
the likelihood of our falling further into sin.

Third, Sam should share with Michelle his desires for their relationship, and he should humbly listen to her recommendations. If Sam wants a closer relationship with his wife and children, he needs his wife’s input. And in addition to considering her advice, he should follow what he knows from his experience is sure to work – he should use that PDA of his to schedule time with his wife and children. If he plans something and schedules it, it’s much more likely to actually happen.

Fourth, Sam needs to gain more maturity in Christ and he can do so through daily prayer and scripture reading. These disciplines keep our mind focused on the things of God and help make us more God-centered people. Moreover, Sam should find a bible study that he and his wife can attend together. This will probably bring both intimacy and conversation to their marriage. It will likely foster some welcome changes in his work relationships as well, namely the humble willingness to listen, to value others’ gifts, and to be a team player.

Response from
Dan Chamberlin,
Professor of
Management, Regent
University

Sam is at a place where positive change can occur. Now he needs an accountability partner

Long ago, a popular pipe tobacco was advertised under the slogan “When a feller needs a friend.” (It had no relationship to pitching legend Bob Feller and his failure ever to win a World Series game!). If ever a slogan applied to a situation, it applies now to Sam’s.

Sam should set out a course of specific actions for change and ask a trusted friend hold him accountable

There are some very hopeful signs in Sam’s character. He’s compared the life he was leading to “the life he really wanted.” “He knew” he had to deal with his propensity to look lustfully at other women. He identified Christian beliefs as “what he knew God wanted from him.” He often went to church on business trips. “He knew things had to change and change soon.” “He genuinely wanted to” control his thoughts, his eyes, his tongue, be a great father and husband. Sam’s clearly not content with the life he is leading. If he were, there would be much less hope for change.

Stated differently, Sam is already at the place from which positive change can occur. He has no self-righteousness that separates him from knowing his need in Christ. Peter, despite his adamant statement that he would never deny Christ, had to go through a very painful time of triple denial before he saw himself as the sinner he was. Sam already knows this. Satan needn’t “sift” Sam any more, as he did Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

But Sam needs help in his battle – surely help from the empowering Holy Spirit, but additionally, a little help from an earthly confidant “couldn’t hurt so much,” to quote a Jewish idiom. If Sam is the only one aware of his attempt to change, he can easily rationalize away his failed attempts and move on to less painful matters, as he has. The best way I know to prevent such evasion – and to effect lasting changes – is to become accountable to another person.

Sam must find a close personal friend, one whose spiritual maturity and confidentiality he trusts implicitly, and ask that friend to be an accountability mentor. Sam must confess his own weaknesses and tell his confidant about his commitment to reform. He should set out a program of specific actions that he will undertake (perhaps confessions and daily prayer on the subject, among other things). Equally critical to success, Sam must require of his confidant frequent face-to-face meetings, in which Sam will report (1) progress (if any), (2) his times of apathy, and (3) his specific failures. The confidant, on the other
hand, has a solemn responsibility to meet with Sam often, to hear him, to pray with him, to encourage him, and most of all to hold Sam to his commitment to change.

So “what should Sam do?” He needs to answer both to God and to a close Christian friend. Ultimately, God is the one who will change Sam, but He will do so indirectly, through the power and presence of an accountability partner.

Response from Fred Garmon, Ph.D.
Senior Pastor, Heritage Fellowship
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Sam should start by being thankful for the conviction produces such crises of the soul

We are not called to success, but to faithfulness – a healthy reminder to those like “successful” Sam who suffer from an unhealthy drive for success. Burning the corporate candle at both ends has allowed Sam to climb the ladder of success, but now Sam finds his lifestyle incompatible with his Christian beliefs.

The good news is that Sam’s sobering realization is from the Holy Spirit and the preached Word of God, creating in him a crisis of awareness – a situation loaded with potential. Paul explains that such godly sorrow (i.e., Sam’s realization) is intended to produce “repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Sam and anyone encountering such a visitation of the Spirit should be thankful for the conviction that brings to light such incongruities and produces such crises of the soul.

And, in a way, Sam is quite fortunate. God could have gotten Sam’s attention through the threat of divorce, through a mutiny by his subordinates, or through other fruit of his prideful life. But instead, God has spoken to him gently through an inner voice. The Holy Spirit is pricking Sam’s conscious, triggering feelings of conviction, warning of a crisis situation, just as the Spirit does with all those called according to God’s purpose.

So now Sam sits in his car crying. An “a-ha moment” has occurred, representing a fork in the road. He is now aware of his predicament and persuaded by the Holy Spirit that change (positive or negative) is imminent. Too often, however, people become aware of their problems and the potential for improvement, but do nothing to change. They are “like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:23-25). Sam, therefore, must do more than cry. With God’s help, he must act.

What, specifically, should Sam do? It’s a long road to lasting change, but a good, proactive start would include the following three things:

1. Sam should schedule time with his family and schedule “date” nights with his wife, just like he schedules time with clients. Family must be top priority.

2. Sam should become accountable for his future actions. First he should get better connected to a local church family and become accountable to that family. Second, Sam should find a Christian brother of like experience to whom he can talk several times a week. This one-on-one relationship would be designed to keep Sam on course daily, setting priorities and behaving in a way that is congruent with a life that glorifies God.

3. Sam should develop the habit of building up his co-workers. Every week, he should show appreciation to at least two co-workers (subordinates or peers) and commend two others to their bosses.
Here’s an arresting exercise for you techno-savvy folks. Search your favorite database of newspaper articles using the terms “youth pastor” and “criminal.”

Probably not something you do everyday, I know. I’d never conducted such a search either until I started looking for a compelling story to open this article. The search results shocked me: not one compelling story. Instead, I found dozens of compelling stories. A youth pastor near Denver tried to poison his wife. Another in Seattle introduced CPR to his youth group so that he could fondle the girls. On went the list, one scandalous tale after another.

Intrigued, I tried a new search using the terms “church” and “embezzlement.” This time I received a message telling me to add more terms because my search produced more than 1000 “hits.” So I added “treasurer.” That was more like it. Only 191 stories.

My point here is certainly not to bash churches. My point is that all organizations – even churches where most job candidates are saintly – are susceptible to hiring people of very poor character. You probably need not search beyond your own experience to know that. But here’s the rub. Hiring mistakes usually occur not because we’re cavalier in screening applicants. More typically, hiring processes fail to screen out potentially problematic applicants because they build in few valid measures of character.

Well, sometimes. Sometimes we’re right in our assessment of the applicant and the process is a success. The new hire does the exemplary job we predicted that he or she would do. Mysteriously, though, the identical staffing process occasionally betrays us. A new hire’s nefarious behavior can shake the very core of a work group, if not a whole organization, decimating trust, creating factions, encouraging similar counter-productive behaviors, and so on. It might be the type of person who ends up in newspaper databases. Or, more commonly, it may be someone prone to gossip, to slothfulness, to envy. It may be an autocrat intent on building his own little fiefdom in our midst. How did such a person slip through the cracks? How was the search committee so blind? Was there nothing more they could have done to expose this person’s character flaws before extending the offer?

There was – and there is. Before such a crisis visits your organization (or before it does again), sophisticate your approach to staffing. Take some road-tested steps to more accurately predict who’s of strong character. The good people will still make it through. Miscreants probably won’t.

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**Take these road-tested steps to gauge applicant character. The good people will still make it through. Miscreants probably won’t.**

Why is that? Look at how the employee selection process operates in most places. It typically entails the involvement of well-meaning people (sometimes an official “search committee”) who have some knowledge of the position and, perhaps, some previous experience with staffing. These folks review the resumes, conduct the interviews, check the references, and ultimately, select the lucky winner. Standard fare. But few of these people invest much time in crafting creative or probing interview questions, and fewer still dig beyond the references provided by the candidate. Busy people have more important things to do and besides, we’re all adept at identifying the red flags, right? We can read people.

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**BECOMING A HIRE AUTHORITY**

How to Measure Character in Your Applicants

by Michael Zigarelli

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**REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW, JANUARY 2003**

12
First, Identify The Character Traits You Want To Measure

An effective staffing system begins with knowing what you're trying to measure in applicants. In human resource parlance, this often-neglected step is called conducting a “job analysis” for the vacant position; that is, identifying all the specific tasks of the job, as well as the knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (like character) required to successfully perform these tasks. Organizations often rely on some form of job analysis before conducting a search. They may use the current one or create a new, updated analysis, but most do try to define the target here.

Trouble is, too often they neglect to draw the bulls-eye of character.

What I mean is this. Consider any job analysis you have lying around your workplace. It probably lists the responsibilities of the job as well as education and experience prerequisites, and basic attributes like energy, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills. But how many specific character traits are enumerated there? Where's honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, emotional control, patience, or humility? Aren't these critical prerequisites as well? If so, why are they not explicitly part of our target?

In general, it's true that you'll get what you measure. So to hire people of strong character, begin by defining exactly what you're looking for. Also consider this from the flip side: what character flaws might seriously inhibit a person from achieving excellence on this position? What flaws might culminate in counter-productive, even destructive behaviors? Include this information in your revised job analysis for the vacant position. Then, bulls-eye in the cross-hairs, use the following to build some valid measures of these qualities into your selection process.

Check References, But Go The Extra Mile (or two)

Search committees tend to measure character traits in two ways. First, they check references and second, they take the candidate through a gauntlet of interviews. Both are imprecise, risky metrics.

Think about the folly of traditional reference checking, for a moment. We ask applicants to identify people who can vouch for their character and abilities. The applicants, who of course want the job, find some people who will tell us exactly what we want to hear. We talk to the references, and – surprise! – they tell us exactly what we want to hear. Then we move on, thinking we've measured something of value!

Even those of us who teach management sometimes fall into this trap ourselves. Like most business schools, ours asks prospective students to forward references. Guess what we receive. I thought Jesus and Peter were the only ones who ever walked on water, but I was wrong. Almost all of our applicants can too! All are “above average” or “superior” in everything, according to the refs. None have any significant weaknesses. But then, after they enroll, we meet them in the classroom. The reality is that only the above average ones are “above average” and all the students, being merely mortal, have weaknesses. Some, in fact, have weaknesses that preclude them from succeeding in the program. But oddly enough, the references never mentioned any of these.

So what's the answer? Dan Chamberlin of the Regent School of Business – and a veteran of the staffing trenches – recommends that you “go deep.” Three iterations deep, in fact. As you talk with any reference person provided by the applicant, diplomatically probe issues of character – work ethic, integrity, and so on. But don’t stop there. After getting the inevitable glowing recommendation, ask that voice on the phone to refer
you to another individual who knows the applicant well. Then interview that second person, asking the same character questions and once again asking for still another person who knows the applicant well. After three iterations of this, you should have a fuller picture of your candidate – not a perfect picture, mind you, but certainly a picture that’s a lot closer to reality than the one you started with.

Consider Using Some Employment Tests

The explosion of testing instruments over the past two decades bears testimony to deficiencies in other selection tools. These tests purport to predict things like applicant Smith’s cognitive ability, his job skills, his leadership potential, and his illicit drug use from this past weekend. They’ll forecast for you whether Smith is emotionally stable or if he might come to work toting an AK-47. Does he have a propensity to steal or is he so uncompromisingly honest that he’ll turn in his own mother for pilfering a girdle?

Skeptical? That’s healthy. Historically, we’ve seen some abysmal tests that measure absolutely nothing. That’s been especially true for tests that probe applicant character. Some such tools have been quite transparent in what they seek to measure and consequently, yield only socially desirable answers. After all, what applicant is going to offer a self-deprecating response to a question like: “Have you ever stolen from your employer?”

Let me assure you, though, character tests (sometimes called “integrity tests” or “organizational delinquency tests”) have evolved rapidly and impressively in recent decades. And in the scholarly community, there has been no lack of zeal for scrutinizing their accuracy. The upshot of this ivory tower scour is this: some employment tests can indeed effectively assess character. To date, research appearing in leading management and applied psychology journals has affirmed the validity of a few of these instruments. Moreover, recent large-sample studies have concluded that test-taker attempts to distort answers are not much of a threat to the better tests’ validity. Bottom line: through testing, we can gather some of the sensitive character information that we need to make judicious staffing decisions.

Two cautions here. First, if you go this route, remember that the adage “you get what you pay for” was never more applicable than it is here. There are plenty of bargain-basement tests that are worthless – even dangerous since they afford you a false sense of comfort. So carefully research character tests before you buy them. You might want to consider evaluating their predictive abilities by taking the test yourself, in the mindset of a person who wants the job. Then, add one of the better tests to your hiring process (see “Some Useful Character Assessment Tools” on page 15). In doing so, you will procure a powerful tool for raising red flags.

Notice: red flags, not red carpets. This is the second caution. Don’t roll out the red carpet for those who pass with flying colors. These tests are best conceived as tools for alerting your committee to potential problems that you might want to investigate more deeply before making any employment decision. They will also indicate potential strengths in your applicants. However, employment tests should not be used as the determinative criterion in staffing. Use test results to assess attributes and to identify more pointed questions for applicants and for their references.

If the position warrants, spring for the $150 to do a background check

Use Background Checks When Necessary

If the position warrants (for example, a school bus driver or a nursing home attendant – maybe even a ministry treasurer), you can spring for the $150 or so to do a background check.
background check. A lot of money, for sure, but in the long run, it might be a lot more expensive to neglect this step. Reputable background checking firms can legally search past criminal activity, motor vehicle records, credit history, eligibility to work, and other things that might be germane to the job. They can also verify educational and licensing credentials and employment histories. Careful, though. Applicants must sign off on having their background checked, and some will infer negative things about your organization from your request. So use these with prudence.

**Don’t Try To Assess Character In The Interview**

Thus far, this article has been focused on the “do’s.” But here’s one important “don’t.” Don’t interview for character.

Over-reliance on job interviews has been responsible for countless dreadful hiring decisions, not to mention the oversight of some exceptional people we chose not to hire. Why? Largely because we interviewers pride ourselves on being accomplished forecasters of ability and character. As a result, we often give controlling weight to the thirty minutes we spend with an applicant. Indeed, many times we make what later seems to be the right call. Other times, though, this is not the case.

Let me defer to scripture on this one, rather than just citing the studies that underlie this conclusion. The Book of Proverbs suggests that some job applicants have an infinite capacity to mislead:

A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be

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**Some Useful Character Assessment Tools**

**The ERI System:** This is an instrument that has been validated by the academic community. It measures trustworthiness, emotional maturity, courtesy, conscientiousness, long-term job commitment, and reliability. See [www.eri.com](http://www.eri.com) for details.

**The Hogan Development Survey:** This instrument has also withstood significant scrutiny in the academic community. Like ERI, it measures a range of character and “organizational delinquency” traits. See [www.hoganassessments.com](http://www.hoganassessments.com) for details.

**Graphology / Handwriting Analysis:** Before you dismiss this as akin to astrology, understand that there is good reason to believe that a professional graphologist can ascertain personality and character traits. Your handwriting is a manifestation of your personality (notice how your handwriting has changed over the course of your life?) and so it says something about you – even things you might not want to say on a traditional integrity test. In fact, good graphologists can assess dozens of personal qualities (like affability, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, emotional control, patience, and so on) in just about anyone for a fee of $25 to $100 per sample.

Although the empirical evidence is mixed on graphology’s validity, the work of graphologists is accepted as valid in a court of law. Moreover, it is a tool used by an overwhelming number of European and Israeli firms in personnel selection.

A general search of the Internet using the term “handwriting analysis” or “graphology” will net you generous results. However, before adopting this tool for your organization, be sure to test the abilities of any prospective graphologist using your own handwriting sample first.
exposed in the assembly. (Proverbs 26:24-26)

The verses remind us that regardless of our experience, we can still be hoodwinked. If we naively or stubbornly ignore this possibility, we’ll probably make more staffing mistakes than if we humbly acknowledge it. Moreover, the proverb teaches that when we do make such a mistake, the blunder will ultimately become public information. In the day this proverb was written, an “assembly” referred to a gathering of many people, usually at an appointed time (not unlike the contemporary workplace). So the proverbial message is that although an individual is adept at concealing his true persona initially, over time, and among many people, the truth about him will become evident. On the job, his character flaws will eventually be exposed to everyone.

For those who also like empirical evidence, there is a plethora of interview research, dating back over eight decades, bearing further witness to Proverbs’ advice that we exercise humility in interviewing. The central findings are that personal interviews tend to be only very rough measures of qualifications and character. Of course, we can improve our interview skills by reading up on the best practices and through more experience, but as a rule of thumb, using interviews as a predictor of character is not a wise move. There are good reasons to retain interviews as part of the selection process, and it is indeed a good idea to have multiple interviewers per applicant, but at the same time, any character data you gather from job interviews should be weighed lightly.

Consider an Employee Referral Program

Lastly, consider this enduring recruitment tool. “Referral programs” – rewarding current employees for finding high-quality new hires – tend to reduce the number of low character employees in your workforce. That’s because employees generally refer people whom they are proud to know and with whom they’d like to work, not just people who might be available.

The program works like this: after a successful referral and after the new hire has been on the job a certain period of time (usually 60 to 90 days), the employee who referred that new hire receives a reward – anything from cash (typically a few hundred dollars for non-exempt positions to more than $1000 for hard-to-fill jobs), to cell phones, to video equipment – whatever employees value in that particular organization.

It’s a real win-win. Beyond attracting more upstanding applicants, referral program keep your recruitment costs down and build employee morale at the same time.

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Ethics training was a booming business long before the business scandals of 2002. But the training often fails to produce the desired results because it merely treats external behaviors, rather than the root cause of inappropriate workplace behavior: poor character.

Hence, the rationale for the next generation of this initiative: character training. It too is quickly becoming a booming business. Currently, character education programs abound. Some are housed in universities, some in consulting firms, still others in churches. They vary in quality, of course, but most programs appear to be genuine attempts to promote good character and good citizenship.

In this executive interview, Christian businessman Tom Hill, one of the leaders in the character training movement and the founder of the widely used Character First! training program, explains the process of character training, as well as its potential ROI for your organization.

Character training, like most training programs, requires a significant investment of time and money. In a nutshell, what's the business case for making this investment?

Through building good character, a person can reach his or her full potential. Good character makes you a better spouse, parent, employee, neighbor, and citizen. So, by implementing character training in the workplace, organizations across the country and around the world are helping their employees reach their full potential and at the same time, reaping lasting benefits in enhanced morale, increased productivity, lower turnover, improved product or service quality, strengthened customer relationships, lower workers’ compensation costs, and ultimately, heightened profitability.

In that case, perhaps we should back up and ask what you mean by “character.” It's a pretty abstract term.

Character can be defined in a variety of ways. Probably the two best ways that I'm aware of are: “the inward motivation to do what is right” and “who you are, even when no one is watching.”

What does that mean in more concrete terms? Well, that's hard to summarize in a sound bite. There are dozens of traits that would qualify as “good character.” In our program, Character First, we teach 49 specific qualities that make up good character.

Through character training, organizations across the country are boosting productivity, morale, quality, and service.

Actually, they come from the Bible – qualities like patience, perseverance, self-control, diligence, humility, compassion, and so on. For many years I personally used Biblical character qualities as a basis for teaching Sunday school. But then I realized there was a need to teach character qualities in my own business organization, Kimray, Inc. Many of our business problems were caused by underlying character flaws and I was spending more time addressing personnel problems than producing valves.

Thus began a character initiative in which Kimray managers encouraged personal character development in the lives of their employees. Over the first two years of the program, Kimray saw a marked decline in workers’ compensation, a rise in productivity, and an increase in profits, despite a depressed market. People visiting Kimray often commented that our employees had very good
attitudes and that the work atmosphere seemed excellent. We attributed much of this success to our in-house character training, the program that has now evolved into Character First!

**Character First! has been used in over 1,500 businesses and 2,000 school districts**

So is this a religious training program?

No, Character First! is not “religious.” We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization that helps individuals and organizations with character development.

Our belief is that every one can have good character. I have traveled in Europe and in other parts of the world and I’ve found “good character” to be universally understood and recognized. It does not require a religious context, even though most major religions teach good character. So our approach is non-sectarian: the principles taught in Character First! apply to and can be adapted by any organization.

And how many organizations have done so?

Character First! has been used in over 1,500 businesses, 2,000 school districts, and 190 communities across 38 states and 17 foreign countries. This past year we sent out over 75,000 of our monthly “Character Bulletins” to employees of these client organizations. That’s double the number that were sent out the previous year.

That’s indicative of this rapidly growing market. There’s a lot of demand for character training and now, there are many character training organizations competing for this market. At present, Character First! has the broadest outreach, providing effective character training tools to businesses, schools, families and communities.

Can you describe succinctly how the training works?

We have over a hundred trainers nationwide who hold daylong character training workshops at business locations, and we’ve developed many booklets, videos, and other materials to be used in character training. However, our basic training strategy is this: we believe that good character is more “caught” than “taught.” So, Character First! focuses primarily on training leaders to have good character and encourages them to model it for their employees. Beyond modeling, we teach the leaders to motivate good character by praising good character. Get to know your employees and work closely with them so that you can truly observe their character. Then, positively and publicly reinforce your employees when they demonstrate good character. For example, you can do it at monthly employee meetings by presenting character certificates and other rewards.

Logistically, one way to do this is to recognize, during monthly meetings with employees, the character strengths and successes of those employees who are celebrating anniversaries with the organization that month. We’ve found that acknowledging employee anniversaries coupled with praising good character goes a long way to improving morale and further motivating good character.

What about lack of buy-in to the program? In other words, what if a leader with poor character resists the program. How do you overcome that resistance?

Sometimes we see some initial resistance based on a misunderstanding of the benefits of character training. A good presentation of those benefits often overcomes the resistance and skepticism.

But to answer your question more directly, we recommend that business leaders or supervisors with bad character be promptly and firmly counseled regarding the importance of good character and the consequences of their continued bad character, including, if necessary, termination. For our clients, we’ve developed training videos featuring real life
scenarios of how to counsel leaders who exhibit bad character.

Usually, though, over time even the dissenters come on board, recognizing that you need to use the right tools to be successful. You can’t use a hammer to fix a carburetor. Similarly, you can’t use basic ethics training to fix a deeper issue. Character training is the right tool for what ails many organizations today.

Where can someone go to get more information about your services?

The best place to start is probably our website: www.characterfirst.com. We’re also happy to provide an introductory packet of training materials for ten dollars if you email us at orders@characterfirst.com or call us at (405) 815-0001.

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You've seen the scene. Perhaps even experienced it first-hand. There you are, driving down the road, prudence personified behind the wheel. All of a sudden, some product of the “me-first” culture comes flying out of the gas station and cuts you off. You hit the brakes, but not the horn. Honking displeases God, you know. But then you notice something else displeasing: on the back of the minivan that just cut you off is a little fish, the universal symbol of a born-again on board. The outward sign of an inward reality: this driver's a Christian and he advertises that wherever he goes.

We see similar incongruities at ballgames. The fan wearing the church shirt is swearing at the umpire. We see it at the church picnic guys casually but noticeably check out each other's wives. We hear it in our phone conversations as two gossiping Christians bond at the expense of a third. So is it any wonder that researcher George Barna recently found that unbelievers see only two differences between themselves and Christians: “Christians go to church more than we do and they are more judgmental than we are,” report these folks.

Ouch. What ever happened to “they will know we are Christians by our love”? Now consider the workplace. Christians struggling with holiness off the job may struggle all the more with holiness on the job, given the significant pressures there. The manifestations are countless. An overly-critical reaction in a meeting. The quick rejection of a request for time off. A terse “hello” in the hallway because we're too busy to probe the consternation on the other person's face. For many of us, the salt shaker ran out of granules years ago.

If the New Testament is to be believed, other people’s very eternity may be affected by how we conduct our lives. Could there possibly be any more at stake?

And that's tragic. When we do something at work that our co-workers perceive to be unloving or ungodly, they feel the same way that you would feel when cut off by a little fish. “What a hypocrite!” they think. “Where's the care? Where's the patience? What's with the me-first attitude?” It's enough to make them want to lean on their horn.

It's been said quite correctly that “you'll meet more spiritually needy people than your pastor ever will” and that “your life is the only Bible many people will ever read.” Those aren't clichés, they're realities. Ours is an awesome, awesome responsibility. If the New Testament is to be believed, other people's very eternity may be affected by how we conduct ourselves in our daily lives! Could there possibly be any more at stake? Do we really need another reason to take seriously our roles as ambassadors of the faith?

So now we learn of another study showing that Christians do indeed have human failings after all (see “Got Grace?” on page 5). Not a revelation, of course, but it is an important reminder for us to re-commit to introspection and improvement. We must, as believers, make a habit of self-examination and remain continually vigilant about our character. Then we're to make progress, modeling Christ in all our interactions. The Great Commandment is just that – a commandment – not a suggestion.

Make the time to look within, because, whether you know it or not, people are watching you. Take inventory of yourself at strategic moments during each day, like after a tough conversation or after a request for your time or money. Examine yourself through the eyes of those around you and take action to grow toward the light.

And please, if you're going to drive like a maniac, take that little fish off the back of your car.

The views expressed here are not necessarily the views of the Regent University Board of Trustees.
Based on the experiences of more than 5,000 Christians around the world, and drawing from the finest thinking on the subject, Dr. Michael Zigarelli uncovers the secrets to cultivating Christian character and to living the best life possible. Join him as he reveals the character strengths and weaknesses of Christians, from teenagers to senior citizens. Learn where character bottoms out for most Christians and what they can do to bounce back. Learn the specific character development needs of men and women, of new Christians, and of veterans of the faith. And perhaps most importantly, discover the pathways to becoming the person God wants you to be, the person your family wants you to be, and the person who, deep down, you’ve always wanted to be.

Are you tired of struggling to grow? Frustrated with stagnation? Curious about how others have achieved lasting transformation? Cultivating Christian Character is a path-breaking resource that will challenge and empower you – and possibly even change your life!

Available at Christian bookstores, or by calling toll-free 1-866-909-BOOK