The **ESSENTIALS**™

Introduction

The **ESSENTIALS**™

- Leadership & Service
- High Standards & Improvement
- Innovation & Problem Solving
- Goal Achievement
- Life Purpose & Balance
- Communication & Collaboration
- Managing Priorities & Time
- Positive Relationships
- Overcoming Obstacles & Stress
- Integrity & Responsibility

Excellence with Integrity™ INSTITUTE

CHARACTER COUNTS!

Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

Excellence with Integrity™
I N S T I T U T E

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Designed and delivered in consortium with

CHARACTER COUNTS!

CHARACTER COUNTS!® is a registered trademark of the Josephson Institute.

About the Consortium

More than a decade ago the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University created a consortium partnership to advance our respective visions and missions. Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, employment and STEM readiness, athletics, education, and organizational development in community and workplace environments.

The Institute's main focus is on research and development of instructional resources, assessment solutions, and tools and strategies for organizational culture development. The Ray Center's main focus is on coaching, training, and expanding our collaborative implementation projects across Iowa and the nation.

Authors' Note

The ESSENTIALS series is the culmination of 25 years of applied research and development in various K-16 education settings, and diverse workplace and sport environments. The Excellence with Integrity Institute's R&D took its origins from the *Smart & Good High Schools* national study (2005), co-authored by Tom Lickona and Matt Davidson, and has since been dedicated to translating and evolving that original vision into research-based instructional deliverables.

One of the early manifestations of instructional materials, called *Power2Achieve® Foundations*, was developed through a collaborative partnership of the Institute's design team, which included Cathy Fisher, Margaret Seidel, and Kyle Baker. P2A Foundations incorporated input and feedback from many current and former educators, administrators, policy experts, researchers, parents, coaches, and students. This first series of curricular materials was supported, in part, by generous grants from the John Templeton Foundation and Sanford N. McDonnell Foundation.

In the subsequent years, we expanded our theoretical framework, designed and tested new assessment approaches, and received feedback from many more individuals and organizations who implemented our work. The ESSENTIALS series is a new distillation of our ever-growing knowledge and experience. We could not have produced this current iteration without the previous contributors. And we certainly could not have produced it without our current colleagues and partners.

We are particularly grateful to our talented partners at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University. To everyone at The Ray Center who has labored alongside us these many years we offer our thanks and gratitude to each of you for your unique contributions. A special thanks to Amy Smit for her input to help strengthen our communications and branding. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Scott Raecker who has contributed to our theory, practice, and assessment since the very first versions of our deliverables. Finally, we are especially grateful to Jeff Kluever, who not only wrote the alignment and extension sections but whose extraordinary talents and abilities have helped shape the current—and we believe our best—version as a whole.

A famous quote says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Thank you to everyone for helping us make steady progress and see expanding impact.

Matt Davidson and Vlad Khmelkov

Contents

Introduction

Congratulations on your selection of *The ESSENTIALS*!

The modules in this series draw upon 25 years of applied research and development in various K-16 education settings, the workplace, and diverse sport performance environments. The theory, practice and research have their foundations in the *Smart & Good High Schools* national study, which I co-authored with my colleague Tom Lickona (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). The study put forth a blueprint of research-based best practices for developing the moral and performance character needed for success in school, work, and beyond.

In 2006 I began work with my colleagues at the nonprofit Excellence with Integrity Institute to translate the recommendations from the Smart & Good Schools report into a replicable research-based curriculum. The resulting program, called Power2Achieve®, was designed with and for educators and students. When implemented with fidelity, the Power2Achieve curriculum demonstrated a significant impact on student achievement and behavior and became an approved Safe Supportive Schools Curriculum.

For example, a multi-year experimental research study in over 50 Kansas high schools showed the following results between 2008 and 2010:

- math achievement increased 5 percentage points in the impact schools compared to 2 percentage points in the control schools;
- reading achievement gap between the impact and control schools narrowed from 6% to 3%;
- suspensions and expulsions in the impact schools declined significantly, compared to the control schools.

These results were achieved by educators who had received training, coaching, and assessment. In the ideal, we'd like every educator to receive training, coaching, and assessment services. However, we also understand that this is not always feasible. The ESSENTIALS modules have been designed to provide rigorous, research-based, field-tested materials that are cost-effective and can be flexibly delivered. Since 2010 our applied work with the curricular materials has been enhanced in a special way through our consortium partnership with The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, home of CHARACTER COUNTS!. This work has focused on distilling the more extensive commitments to our original programming—and common to many programs on the market today—into stand-alone, topic-specific instructional guides for developing the intentional culture and essential competencies of excellence with integrity.

We don't care what you call them—character skills, SEL skills, positive psychology strengths, employability skills, 21st century skills, or even "soft skills". At the

simplest level, in every school, extra-curricular, athletics, and workplace setting in which we work, those we serve are striving to achieve excellence with integrity and they know these foundational skills to be *essential*. And to develop these essential skills, teachers, coaches, managers, and leaders in every walk of life need research-based knowledge, tools, and strategies from which to create flexible but powerful learning experiences.

The *Excellence with Integrity TOOLS* featured in The ESSENTIALS series have been used in diverse settings that include K-12 schools across the country and around the world. They have been used in workplace and workforce development settings. They have been used in prestigious colleges and universities and with highly successful coaches and trainers in Division I, II, and III college athletics settings. We know the ESSENTIALS modules work for creating powerful learning experiences, because we've been working on and with them for 25 years, in collaboration with those we serve.

My deepest hope is that the knowledge and TOOLS underlying the materials in this series will provide you and those you serve with the foundation needed for helping them to achieve excellence with integrity. Please contact us with questions or suggestions.

Thank you for your commitment to pursuing excellence with integrity!

Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D.
President,
Excellence with Integrity Institute

Excellence with Integrity™
I N S T I T U T E

Dear Educator –

Greetings from The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University where our inspiration is to transform lives and strengthen communities. The Ray Center is proud to be the global provider of CHARACTER COUNTS! with outreach to over 8 million youth world-wide.

Through a collaboration between The Ray Center and the Excellence with Integrity Institute, we are proud to offer The ESSENTIALS to schools and youth-serving organizations.

The ESSENTIALS are focused on developing the habits for excellence necessary for success in school, athletics and activities, employment, and in life. The curriculum aligns with major education initiatives, like social and emotional learning (SEL), develops competencies for deeper learning and positive behavior, and shapes an intentional culture of connection and engagement.

At The Ray Center, we have seen powerful adaptations of these researched-based tools in individual classrooms, school-wide youth leadership development initiatives, community college career development and internship courses, and on-going professional development at major organizations.

As an educator, you play a vital role in the development of character-based life skills that will allow our youth to be ready for their future.

I am hopeful that you will find this resource a useful tool to bring your passion to life as you continue to inspire the lives of the youth you educate.

Thank you for your commitment to make a difference in the lives of others.

Scott

J. Scott Raecker
Executive Director
The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center
Drake University

CHARACTER COUNTS!

Current Modules

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Shaping Group Norms: The Compact for Excellence
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Preparing to Communicate
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Mastering Care-Frontation
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Developing the Growth Mindset to Overcome Adversity and Manage Stress
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Building the Habits for Excellence
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Mastering Goal Achievement
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Attitude + Effort = Improvement
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Putting Integrity into Action
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
PROBLEM SOLVING ESSENTIALS: Brainstorming Creative Solutions
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
PROBLEM SOLVING ESSENTIALS: Stimulating Innovation
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Core Leadership Practices
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

The **ESSENTIALS** FACILITATOR GUIDE
Leveraging Strengths and Opportunities: The Character SWOT
Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

Excellence with Integrity Theoretical Framework

The Vision of Excellence with Integrity

Performance excellence matters. But it does not need to be achieved at the expense of one's integrity, or in a way that does damage to oneself or others. The vision of *Excellence with Integrity* is both a means and an end-goal. It speaks to what we desire to avoid: lying, cheating, stealing, unethical, illegal, or unhealthy behaviors. It also speaks of what we want to achieve: growth, improvement, success, achievement, balance, joy, and harmony.

The ancient Greeks used the term arête to describe excellence of any kind—the excellence of a work of art, a machine, or a person. Arête also referred to the excellence found in the act of living up to one's full potential.[1] Scholars argue that the person of arête is a person of the highest effectiveness, someone who combines their talents and abilities with strengths of character like courage, perseverance, resilience, wit, and ingenuity to achieve real results.[2] In other words, excellence means the highest effectiveness in achieving real results by a person, team, or organization. Highest effectiveness is not defined by one standard or one pathway. However, highest effectiveness, no matter the goal or circumstances, is that which is achieved with integrity.

Integrity can be defined as "the quality or state of being complete or undivided and having strong moral principles".[3] Integrity means not lying, cheating, stealing, or engaging in unethical, illegal, or unhealthy behaviors when pursuing a goal. This definition of integrity speaks of the negative breaches of integrity that should be avoided. Thus, it can be argued that the highest effectiveness is that which also does not violate the law, the rules of participation, or moral principles of justice and fairness. But integrity is also defined as "being whole and undivided." This definition speaks to the desirable aspects of integrity to be pursued, things like growth, improvement, balance, and joy. Thus, integrity is not limited to not breaking the rules or the law. Integrity requires commitment to pursuing actions that are beneficial to oneself and others beyond the demands of a current objective or goal.

Some might argue that it is in fact the relentless pursuit of excellence itself that leads to feelings of burnout, fatigue, and may be characterized as "lacking integrity." In other words, the pursuit of excellence, critics would assert, is at odds with or in conflict with the pursuit of integrity. However, we are reminded of the senti-

ments of Abraham Maslow: "If you plan on being anything less than you are capable of being, you will probably be unhappy all the days of your life." [4]

The answer to achieving excellence with peace, joy, harmony, and happiness is not simply to be content with good enough, but to pursue excellence in a particular way. In our own experience, individuals and organizations seek out *Excellence with Integrity* products and services for lots of reasons: because they are underperforming; because they are experiencing culture and character problems; because the press for greatness has left them burned out, stressed out, or maxed out; or, because they are good, but desire to be great.

The real world is messy, unpredictable, and still dependent largely on human beings, who bring a host of INTRA- and INTER-personal challenges. The evolution of our assessment and development theory and practice has been advanced through the exploration of the most common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that manifest themselves during the pursuit of excellence with integrity and optimal performance by individuals, teams, and organizations.

The Theory and Practice of Excellence with Integrity

Excellence with integrity is the synergy found at the intersection of performance character and moral character.[5] We define performance character as the values in action that enable us to achieve our performance goals—like perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, grit, and toughness. We define moral character as the values in action needed for successful relationships and ethical behavior—like integrity, trust, respect, and responsibility. Performance character competencies— like perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, initiative, creativity—are those habits that enable us to achieve our goals. Moral character competencies—like caring, courage, respect, responsibility—are those habits that ensure that we achieve our goals in ethical, fair, and harmonious ways. Moral character habits help protect, grow, and balance our inner-selves and our relationships with others.

BOTH moral and performance character are needed for optimal performance. Optimal performance is found at the intersection of moral and performance character, or what we call ***excellence with integrity***. This means that we don't lie, cheat, steal, harm ourselves or others in the pursuit of our goals. It also means that we strive for the right relationship between achievement and goal-driven outcomes AND our need for relationships, service to other, and psychological unity within ourselves.

Excellence with integrity is about working hard and smart, effectively managing emotions and energy, and maintaining the right perspective. It is about pushing ourselves but doing so in a centered, healthy, sustainable way. It is about harmony between our drive for achievement and our need for relationships. It is the synergy between our fundamental need for both doing and being. It is about the joyful, fearless pursuit of excellence in a peaceful and centered way. In essence, Excellence with integrity is all about finding optimal synergy between our moral and performance character as we live it out amid the challenges of the real world.
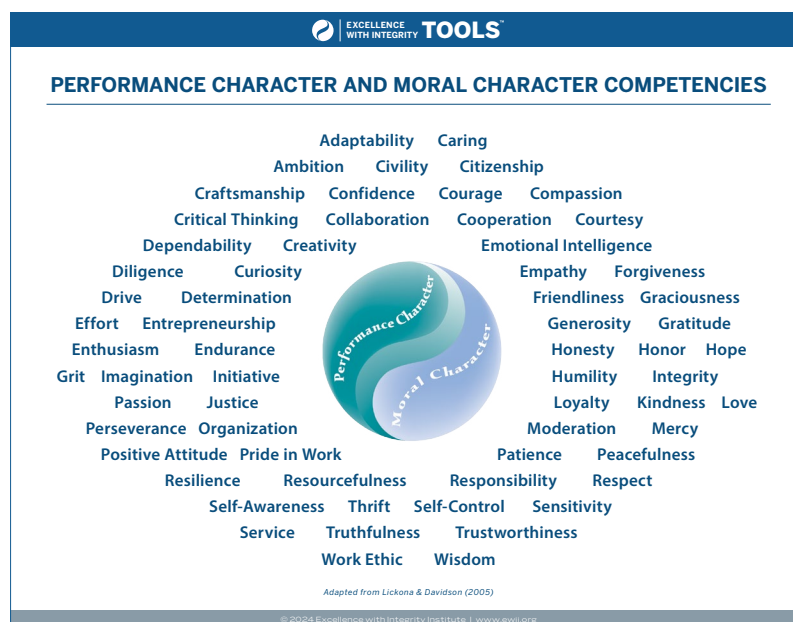
Performance character and moral character are in certain ways interdependent. For example, we need perseverance to ensure our integrity, we need curiosity to experience empathy, we need critical thinking to apply fairness, we need honesty to underlie our enthusiasm, we need patience to manage our drive, we need loyalty to direct our effort, we need diligence to sustain citizenship, we need resilience to maintain civility, and so on.

The fundamental quest to achieve excellence with integrity involves navigating the balance, synergy, and/or harmony between moral and performance character. Excellence with integrity is achieved by working hard and smart, by effectively managing emotions and energy, and by maintaining the right perspective. It is achieved by pushing oneself but doing so in a healthy and sustainable way. It is achieved through harmony between our drive for achievement and our need for relationships. In organizations, it is achieved by pursuing team goals while seeking

harmony and balance between the intrapersonal dynamics within oneself and the interpersonal dynamics between and amongst team members.

Performance character, moral character, INTRA-personal, INTER-personal—for short excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-mastery—these four domains represent the foundations of a dynamic process for achieving excellence with integrity, which is represented in our "pinwheel graphic."
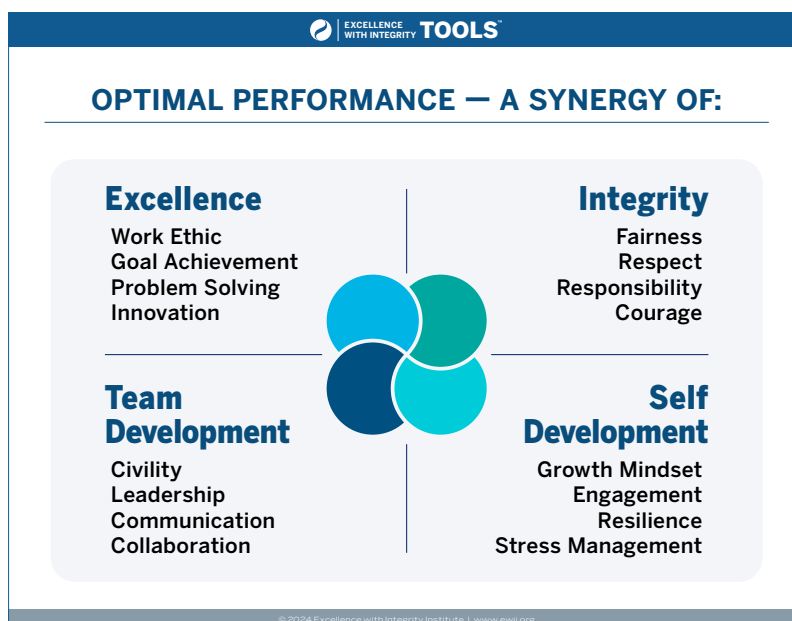
Thriving requires strength within each domain (independent of the other three) and interdependent balance (between all of the four domains). Mastery of this set of relationships is complex and dynamic, and thus achieving excellence with integrity does not look identical for everyone, everywhere, and at all times. So, where we might conceive of excellence with integrity as a single standard, it is actually a singular vision with a multitude of pathways and end-points. Even a quick glimpse at these and one is struck by the obvious challenge of mastering any one of these, let alone the challenge of mastering the harmony between all four. And yet, in every individual and organization with which we work the pathway to optimal performance is achieved through intentional development that pursues a synergy of these interpersonal and intrapersonal domains.

One metaphor for understanding these is to envision a wind turbine, in which wind turns propeller-like blades to spin a generator and thereby creates electrical power. The blades of a wind turbine must be individually strong and collectively balanced, or in alignment with one another. If any single blade is weak it would

break off from the force of the wind. Equally important is the balance among and between the blades, especially as the wind force increases and puts more stress on the blades.

Similarly, in a team or organization, when working together in harmony, these four 'blades'—excellence, integrity, teamwork, and self-work—generate power for achieving the performance goals of a team or organization. It is when these four domains are individually strong and collectively balanced that efficiency and longevity are produced for use in the service of the mission performance goals. However, if these become individually weakened or if one becomes bigger or more rigid or in any way strengthened to a point of being out of balance, this creates an imbalance that produces less power or possibly even breaks down altogether as the blades get more and more out of alignment.

Over time we have broken these four domains down further into ten focus areas. These represent some of the most common competencies that individuals, teams, and organizations focus on in their quest to reach their performance goals. These are the main factors that contribute to individual and team success (or detract from it when missing or underdeveloped).

These ten focus areas are the research-based competencies (The ESSENTIALS), represented in the table in the next section. They are drawn from our own field research, cross-referencing with diverse standards and competencies (SEL standards, 21st century skills, CHARACTER COUNTS! Pillars and Model Standards, and others) and are aligned with existing social science research about the character and culture competencies that contribute to (or detract from in their absence) optimal performance.

Forget Perfect. Find Optimal: The Pathway to Achieving Excellence with Integrity

Thousands of years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that "virtue is the mean between excess and deficiency." This age-old wisdom matters today because when it comes to pursuing excellence with integrity, the goal is to continuously seek out the most favorable outcomes while utilizing the most favorable and sustainable processes and practices.

INADEQUATE
Too little or too much
Detracts from/prevents growth

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
Needs increased focus and attention

OPTIMAL
Just right for desired goals, person, & circumstances
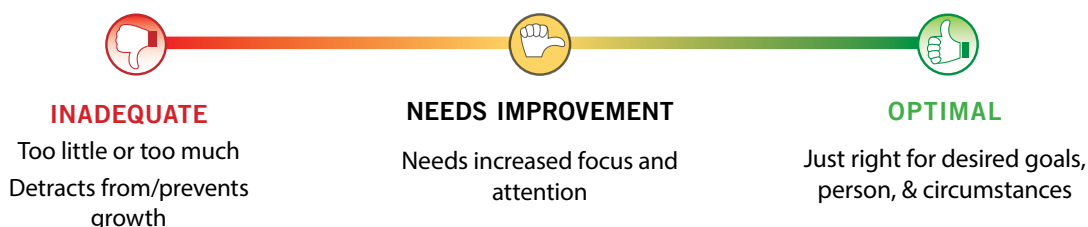
Achieving excellence with integrity is about (a) the right degree of performance effort for the circumstances and the expectations; (b) the right relationship—with ourselves, with our colleagues or teammates, and with our circumstances; and (c) choosing right from wrong, and good over bad. However, the more difficult challenge of achieving excellence with integrity is about choosing the better:

1. Choosing between two good things;

2. Choosing that which leads to positive outcomes in both the short- and long-term; or

3. Choosing that which is good for the individual and for the team or organization.

Choosing the better involves a discernment process, not simply the willpower to memorize and act upon the right choice. In the real world, optimal performance defies any one perfect standard response. What is the right amount or type of communication, honesty, courage, toughness? The answer, of course, is that it depends.

Finding optimal is all about the process of establishing high expectations and choosing the best response, the response that considers the circumstances as well as differences in knowledge, ability, and sensibility. That is why we argue, "Forget perfect, and find optimal." For most people driven by the pursuit of excellence, it is not easy to make peace with the "forget perfect, and find optimal" mantra and

mindset. It seems that somehow this approach lowers the bar and calls for not striving for perfection.

However, others have affirmed the challenges to perfectionism in pursuit of excellence and integrity.[6][7] The notion of optimal performance has a more nuanced understanding. Some things to consider:

1. By definition, perfect is the ideal, meaning beyond theoretical or practical improvement. It is known theoretically that there may exist some perfect response. However, when factoring in constraints of time, human and material resources, and varying capabilities and sensibilities, the "perfect response"—that which is beyond improvement— can be hard to uncover.

2. It is usually pretty clear what failure or an unacceptable solution looks like. The optimal response is that which is best suited to the performance goals, the situation or circumstance, the people involved, and the standards of excellence and integrity.

3. Optimal is the best possible response for a given set of circumstances. In other words, optimal performance is the highest effectiveness that can be achieved with integrity.

Thus, in its simplest form, **optimal performance is excellence with integrity**. Optimal performance means meeting the highest standard of excellence without violating integrity. Stated differently, it implies that the "ends don't justify the means." Many high performing teams and organizations sense that the means, journey, or process to achieving their goals seems to lack integrity.

Even if they are getting the results without violating ethical norms, the cost to themselves and to the team may not be right or fair and does a disservice to the spirit. Fatigue, burnout, low morale, lack of civility, respect, and collegiality, lack of happiness, joy, and a lack of life balance—these are the types of symptoms that people note when they are describing the opposite of optimal performance.

Excellence with Integrity Optimal Performance Behavior, Practices and Tools

In the book *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*, one of the main arguments of the authors, Chip and Dan Heath, is that "what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity about what to do better or do differently." [8] Too often we simply assume that people are resistant, unwilling, or unable to make changes in their behaviors. When in fact change is more likely to occur when there is clarity about what to do differently or better. What individuals need is clarity regarding the what and the how: WHAT should I do differently or better? HOW do I learn to implement this habit or skill in an optimal way amid the real-world challenges and circumstances I face?

This is where optimal performance behavior indicators come in. *Optimal Performance Behaviors* provide clarity regarding what the vision and values look, sound, and feel like in action, about what to do better or differently. They represent an individual's or group's core values broken down, refined, and contextualized for particular circumstances and individual capabilities and sensibilities. *Optimal Performance Practices* define optimal expectations for leaders, mentors, or coaches. Many of the most common Optimal Performance Behaviors and Practices have been developed into standard guides for implementation, what we call Excellence with Integrity Tools (a "tool" being something that contributes to a more efficient and consistent way to do a job).

In any and every situation achieving excellence with integrity requires developing the habit of finding optimal. This isn't easy because finding optimal is often not simply choosing between good and bad options, but rather choosing the better course between two good things. For example, working hard, but to the right degree for the circumstances; communicating the truth, but doing so in a way that is right for circumstances and persons involved. Thus, achieving optimal is an imperfect art and a never-ending process.

In the pursuit of excellence with integrity, awareness and the development of conscience alone is insufficient. Conscience—a sense of right from wrong—also requires competence—a sense of practical know-how; competence that some practitioners have referred to as "post-decision making" when we have figured out what we ought to do, but need to figure out how to make it happen within the challenges of the real world pressures and stresses.[9]

This is why in the *Excellence with Integrity* framework complex and multifaceted moral and performance character values are broken into the more specific com-

petencies that underlie them. An operational definition of character is "values in action." We put our values into action through a set of specific character competencies. Competent means "able to"; incompetent means "unable to". To achieve excellence with integrity we must develop "individuals who are able to … ", for example, give and receive constructive criticism, manage priorities and reduce stress, be fair to all involved, continue trying in the face of difficulty, and so on.

More specifically, competencies are process skills that connect awareness and sensitivity first to reasoning and judgment, and then to behavior. The development of competencies requires action and reflection, practice with feedback, and real-world simulations that target practice of essential skills in settings that are similar to the real challenges one would face, while being safe enough to allow the development of mastery. When skills for each of these processes are fully developed and become automatic, cognition and action become intertwined and an individual consistently engages in positive behavior.[10]

The focus on the development of competencies has meant the ability for us to teach general skills that are universal to all settings, while also targeting skills that are specific to particular settings—be they in school, sport, or work. A contextualized view allows us to approach each situation as having its own challenges and requisite skills, and look for simulations of the most common situations one will face in this specific context. The process of training on and about excellence and integrity is too general and simply doesn't translate into real-world habits. In other words, knowledge about these ideas conceptually is very different from applied experience of these ideas in real-world contexts with feedback and mentoring.

Excellence with Integrity materials utilize research-based tools that distill theory and research into replicable guides for thinking and behavior. These expectations and models represent what some refer to as "scripts" that guide implementation, thereby ensuring a consistent standard of output. Clear and concise (i.e., simple, concrete, memorable, action-oriented) tools become models to guide behavior across or throughout a team, group, or organization. Consistent and pervasive use of the tools over time leads to individual and organizational habits.

For example, consider the **Excellence with Integrity Attitude + Effort = Improvement Rubric**.

Developed in alignment with the research base on achievement motivation and talent development[11], this tool provides what is simple (improvement in attitude + improvement in effort = improvement towards your desired goal) and memorable (defining the attitude and effort anchors in concrete, observable terms). It is sim-

ple, but not simplistic—and certainly not easy. Faithful use of this tool over time is required for it to become an operational cultural norm within a team, classroom, or organization. When these norms are deeply rooted in a group or team (i.e., the culture) then that culture acts to shape and form the competencies in its group members. How long it takes for changes in character and culture obviously depends on the frequency, pervasiveness, and overall quality of the implementation practices. *Excellence with Integrity TOOLS* provide implementation standards, intentional norms guiding action and reflection; consistent and pervasive operation according to these norms defines "the way" (i.e., culture) of a team, group, classroom, family, or organization, which in turn shapes the character of those operating according to that way.
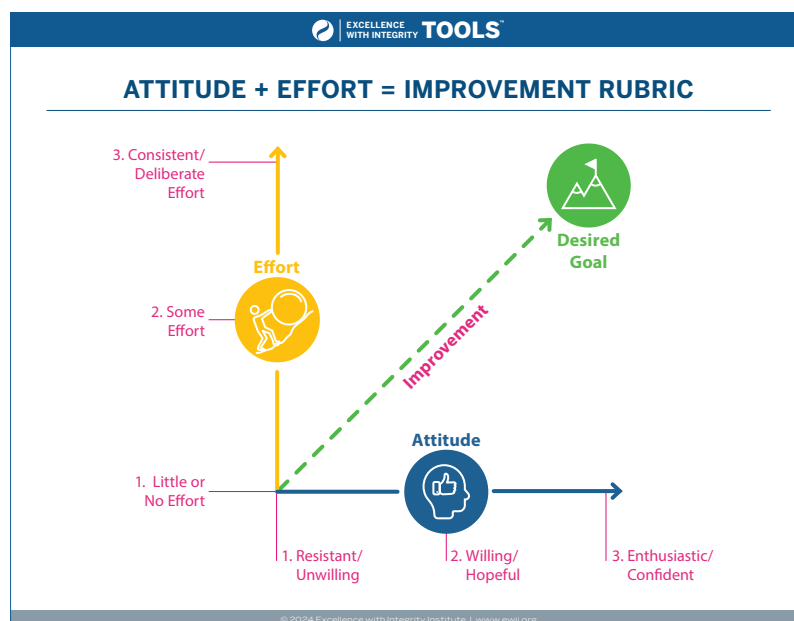
The **Excellence with Integrity Integrity-in-Action Checklist Tool** is a second example demonstrating another strategy for the intentional shaping of culture and character, this time focusing on ethical decision making—an important topic given the prevalence of cheating and the pernicious way that cheating undermines excellence and integrity.[12] The Integrity-in-Action Checklist features nine dichotomous tests that provide a template for putting integrity in action.

This tool, or rubric, is another example of a heuristic (i.e., a mental model or practical guide for thinking and behavior), which allows for consistent and pervasive implementation of complex ideas. When these tools become the collective practice of a team or group it forms "the way" or culture of a team, group, or organization, which powerfully shapes individual habits and behavior. So, while tools can

certainly be used as a self-help guide for individuals, the transformation power is greatest when they shape the collective expectations, habits, and mindset of a group. As such, "our way" in time becomes "my way."

EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY TOOLS™

INTEGRITY-IN-ACTION CHECKLIST

Would my decision pass each of these tests?

Golden Rule Test: If the situation was reversed, is this how I would want to be treated? ✓☐ ✗☐

Fairness Test: Is this fair to everybody involved in and affected by my actions? ✓☐ ✗☐

Truth Test: Does this represent the whole truth — no distortions, omissions, or spin? ✓☐ ✗☐

Conscience Test: Would I feel good about this afterward — no regrets, no guilt? ✓☐ ✗☐

Role Model/Mentor Test: Would the people whose integrity I respect most be proud of this? ✓☐ ✗☐

Front-Page Test: Would I want this reported on the front page of the newspaper? ✓☐ ✗☐

Consequences Test: Would this lead to positive consequences and avoid negative consequences now and in the future? ✓☐ ✗☐

What-If-Everybody-Did-This Test: Would I want to live in a world where everybody did this? ✓☐ ✗☐

Guiding Beliefs Test: Would this be supported by the philosophical, religious, political, and/or ideological worldviews guiding my life? ✓☐ ✗☐

What if it's still not clear what to do?
1. Stop!
2. Think it over some more.
3. Seek additional insight from individuals whose integrity you respect.

Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005)

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The impact and value of *Excellence with Integrity TOOLS* has increased in school, sport, family, government, and workplace settings as we have begun to translate conscience (a belief that I ought to) into competence (a belief that I am able to) through the use of research-based tools.

These are just two of the many *Excellence with Integrity TOOLS* for building **essential** culture and character competencies. Excellence with Integrity research-based tools and strategies are simple and memorable. They are also flexible and versatile, meaning they can be taught in a stand-alone lesson or experience (which is what happens in The ESSENTIALS), and/or integrated throughout the culture. EWI Tools can be introduced as part of The ESSENTIALS materials. But they can then be used in any number of situations or contexts—literally, whenever a situation or "job" calls for it.

Excellence with Integrity TOOLS can be (and have been) integrated into other character, SEL/positive psychology, bully prevention programs. For example, over the past decade, *Excellence with Integrity TOOLS* have been integrated into the CHARACTER COUNTS! school, community, and parent deliverables and in the *Pursuing Victory With Honor* athletics and extra-curricular deliverables. They have also been integrated into diverse workplace and athletic settings.[13]

CONCLUSION

No individual performer or group in any environment we have worked with has *ever* gotten so good at pursuing excellence with integrity that they no longer miss the mark or fall short. Total mastery simply doesn't happen. It's possible to master the mindset, process, or approach for finding optimal, but no person or group we've ever worked with has perfectly mastered the skill of things like time management, communication, stress and energy management, self-awareness, work ethic, life balance, etc. These are not things that are mastered once and then never addressed again. The real world implementation of these skills defies mastery.

Pursuing excellence with integrity is like pursuing personal health in one's mind, body, and spirit. The process is ongoing and ever-changing as it responds to changes within us and around us in the circumstances and situations we face. And, thus, our mantra: *forget perfect, find optimal*. The "fruits" of excellence with integrity that we desire in our lives are built upon the "roots" of intentional action and reflection.

The ESSENTIALS provide a type of "strength and conditioning" for character and culture. The activities are simple, engaging, and impactful—because they are informed by applied research and tested in the real world. Those who embark upon the quest for excellence with integrity commit to a lofty end goal through a process that is its own reward.

Endnotes

1.   Liddell, H. G., & Scott, R. (1940). Greek–English Lexicon: With a revised supplement (9th ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2.   Hooker, R. (2011). Arete. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20110104052613/http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GLOSSARY/ARETE.HTM

3.   Integrity. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved June 1, 2019 from https://www.merri-am-webster.com/dictionary/integrity

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5.   Early work lead by Institute founder Matt Davidson named the two components of character to include performance character and moral character (c.f., Davidson and Moran-Miller, 2006), which was developed further by Davidson and Lickona in the Smart and Good Schools work (c.f., Lickona and Davidson, 2005). The idea of performance character and moral character has been drawn upon by others including Paul Tough (*How Children Succeed*), Jim Loehr (*The Only Way to Win*), Brett Ledbetter (*Champion's Mind*).

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11.   Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
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12. Compare for example: Ariely, D., (2012). *The honest truth about dishonesty: How we lie to everyone—especially ourselves*. NewYork: Harper Collins.
     Callahan, D. (2004). *The cheating culture: Why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead*. New York: Harcourt.
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13. For more examples of Excellence with Integrity impact and integrations go to: https://ewii.org/impact/.

Excellence with Integrity Competencies

Excellence

Committing to high standards and continuous improvement through work ethic and self-management

• Adhere to strong internal standards of excellence.
• Exhibit the positive attitude and persistent effort needed to continuously improve.
• Seek external support and incorporate feedback effectively.

Committing to goal achievement

• Develop, pursue, monitor, and modify goal achievement action steps.

Exhibiting critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and innovation

• Maximize the potential of available resources.
• Consider different perspectives, approaches, and possibilities when solving problems.
• Leverage individual and collective strengths to overcome performance challenges.
• Utilize effective decision-making across diverse social and professional contexts and situations.

Integrity

Demonstrating emotional intelligence, integrity, and responsibility

• Demonstrate ethical conscience and competence.
• Exhibit personal accountability for responsibilities and obligations.
• Act with integrity according to a well-formed ethical code of conduct.
• Hold self and others accountable.

Leading and serving others

• Use one's talents and skills to serve the good of the group/team.
• Use interpersonal and group management skills to lead others effectively.
• Motivate and empower others.
• Commit to shared goals and the collective good.
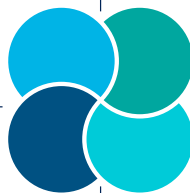
Team Development

Communicating and collaborating with efficiency and effectiveness

• Clarify and verify understanding.
• Express views and ideas effectively.
• Use effective communication strategies in diverse contexts, settings, and situations.
• Recognize and respond to the feelings and perspectives of others.

Developing teamwork through positive and productive relationships

• Adapt to new roles and changing strategy in pursuit of a team goal.
• Exercise flexibility and willingness to make necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.
• Recognize and balance diverse beliefs and perspectives to reach effective solutions.
• Work efficiently and effectively with others.

Self Development

Managing priorities and time

• Identify factors that contribute to (drivers) or detract from (preventers) effective time management.
• Organize, prioritize, plan, and execute tasks effectively.

Overcoming obstacles, focusing on growth, and reducing stress

• Implement productive strategies for reducing stress.
• Use failures, disappointments, and setbacks as opportunities to learn and improve.
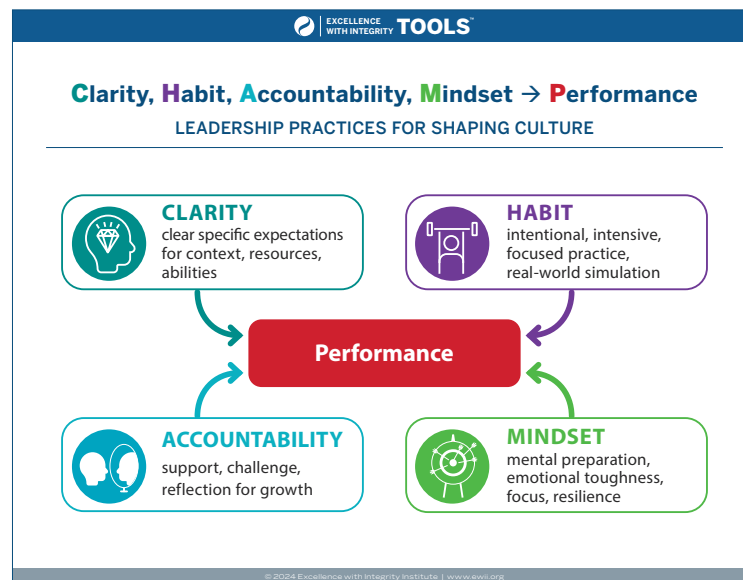
Living a purposeful, balanced, and healthy life

• Pursue multidimensional life-goals, interests, and aspirations.
• Work to develop personal strengths and overcome personal challenges.
• Live a safe, balanced, and healthy life.

The CHAMP Approach

The "CHAMP" approach is a shorthand acronym describing four essential instructional processes in the Excellence with Integrity approach for shaping character and culture. It is the strategic and intentional practice of **C**larity, **H**abit, **A**ccountability, and **M**indset that leads to Optimal Performance. Drawn from our 25 years of applied research synthesizing theoretical and real-world applications, these master practices unlock transformational growth experiences.

EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY TOOLS™

Clarity, **H**abit, **A**ccountability, **M**indset → **P**erformance
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR SHAPING CULTURE

CLARITY
clear specific expectations for context, resources, abilities

HABIT
intentional, intensive, focused practice, real-world simulation

Performance

ACCOUNTABILITY
support, challenge, reflection for growth

MINDSET
mental preparation, emotional toughness, focus, resilience

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CLARITY of Expectations and Communication

A famous quote says, "Communication works for those who work at it." Shaping character and culture competencies for excellence with integrity, first of all, requires setting, communicating, and reinforcing clear optimal performance expectations. And this is a never-ending process. Ensuring Clarity of expectations and communication for optimal performance includes the following elements:

    1) **Identifying the needed value, skill, or competency.** Whatever your core mission and goal, there are essential values, skills, or competencies NEEDED FOR optimal performance. The first step is identifying the essential one(s) that are missing altogether or need to be developed to a higher degree to achieve core mission and objectives.

    2) **Setting clear optimal performance expectations.** Translate the targeted goal or value into concise, clear, concrete *do this, not that*-type

action statements that make it clear what the expected behavior looks, sounds, and feels like.

3) **Contextualizing expectations for the specific situation, event, or circumstances**: clarify the behavior indicators for the current or upcoming circumstances.

4) **Clarifying expectations for particular roles.** It's essential to clarify the above behavior indicators for the particular individuals on your team, based on their current role within the team and their particular capabilities/sensibilities.

5) **Continuously clarifying, contextualizing, reiterating, and adjusting expectations as needed.** These steps must be engaged in continuously, not simply at the outset or conclusion of a year, or a project, or some other long-term cycle.

Whatever value, skill, or practice you have identified as essential—confidence, integrity, etc.—development begins with establishing shared expectations *for the group* and *for each individual* (for a new team member, a veteran team member, the team leader, etc.). This means being specific and concrete when clarifying expectations around *the most common circumstances currently faced by the group* (not in general, but for *this* time period, for *this* group, for *this* setting or situation, etc.).

If, for example, a core value of your team/organization is honesty, identifying it as such is a good starting point. But it's not enough. This value must always be contextualized within your current circumstances and performance expectations. Honesty, for example, isn't one set of expectations; it's actually many different applications. Optimal performance requires clearly setting and communicating important big picture expectations (overall for the organization or team, for this year, etc). It also requires setting and communicating urgent, mission-critical expectations (for today, for this project, for this situation).

Contextualizing for the circumstances is essential because what honesty (or any other value) looks like when we are under the pressure of the current situation is likely different than how we might define what it looks, sounds, and feels like in a big picture view of it. Contextualizing in terms of the most current understanding of our current and desired state is the core of setting and communicating clear expectations.

HABIT Development Through Targeted Practice

Habit is formed not so much by knowledge about a skill, as it is by an experience of a targeted skill. Habit is achieved through targeted practice, or what the expertise literature refers to as "deliberate" practice.

Habits are formed from the creation of intense and intentional real-world practice simulations. These simulations begin, as we have argued previously, with clarity of expectations—crystal clear models of what the skills and values look like optimally implemented for the current circumstances and expectations. Deliberate practice is often accompanied by mental training and preparation, the mindset development that visualizes what one can expect, and a plan for response. But then one must engage in practice simulations that are equal to, or greater than what one is likely to face in the real world. This practice must be monitored and mentees must be given timely, growth-focused feedback that includes praise and polish (e.g., "this was good because…; this could be better by doing… or not doing…").

The development of habit through targeted practice comes from concentrating on growth and improvement of our existing skills, but also by focusing on adding new skills and developing deficient ones. It comes from practicing not only the things we like but also the things that don't come easily and that we are not good at. Habits are formed through intense and intentional practice that is more challenging than the "real" challenge. This requires that we deliberately design and monitor the quality of our practice. Habits are formed through consistent and persistent practice done over time.

To summarize, the formation of HABIT includes the following:

1) **Engaging in deliberate practice of essential skills.** Whatever those skills might be (e.g., honesty, toughness, giving and receiving feedback, stress management, etc.), knowledge about them isn't enough. It takes deliberate practice.

2) **Intentionally creating real-world practice simulations.** For a habit to be formed, the practice of the skills must be as close as possible to what will be faced in reality.

3) **Increasing intensity of deliberate practice.** Keeping score, keeping time, tracking progress—monitoring growth throughout the practice is essential.

ACCOUNTABILITY Through Support and Challenge

Expectations have been set. Conditions for deliberate practice simulations have been established. Accountability is then added to provide the support and challenge needed to ensure that expectations are met—and course correction when they are not. Accountability through support and challenge is one of the hallmarks of effective development. Clearly, great performers in every walk of life hold themselves accountable for meeting their standards and goals. But at some point, all great performers seek the support and challenge of others—especially around those areas where they struggle.

Accountability isn't simply someone making sure you do what you said you would, but in the ideal it also involves teaching, correcting, and inspiring. Accountability mentors balance honesty and respect in a way that pushes individuals towards personal best and leaves no question about where they stand, but without embarrassing, insulting, or demotivating. Accountability through support and challenge not only points out what you've done wrong, but provides the "do better-do differently" feedback that is specific, tactical, and replicable.

Accountability through a 180/360 feedback process promotes honest self-reflection and ensures that the individual leaves with a sense of what to do better or differently to more optimally meet the standards. The danger of isolated self-evaluation can be overestimating our strengths; however, it can also be underestimating our strengths and over-playing our weaknesses. Goal partners, accountability pairs, small groups, and the like are needed to create a culture of trust and truth where self-evaluation is healthy and constructive.

Optimal performance requires clarity about what to do, how to do it, along with chances to practice doing it—and a deep understanding of WHY the new and different way is the better way. Why? Why should I do it that way? When I know what to do, I have practiced how to do it, and I understand why to do it, then I can instinctively react when faced with a similar situation. Accountability requires both challenge ("that's not good enough") and support ("here's what you need to do better or differently").

To summarize, utilizing ACCOUNTABILITY to shape character and culture includes the following:

1) **Providing support and challenge on the development of essential skills.**

2) **Providing constructive criticism and "do better-do differently" feedback that is specific, tactical, and replicable.** Accountability

isn't simply punishment. Creating a culture of continuous improvement through constructive criticism and intentional coaching is all about the feedback for growth needed to improve.

3) **Using performance data for accountability, teaching, correcting, and inspiring growth.** Real performance data is essential. It provides the path to growth and improvement towards individual and collective potential.

Mental Preparation and MINDSET Formation

Mindset is all about the mental preparation practices designed to develop focused, tough-minded individuals who understand and accept that reaching their goals will not be a straight line. Mental preparation practices are designed to emotionally visualize likely situations, to frame and reframe mistakes and missteps, and to focus on controlling what's controllable—and letting go of what's not within our control.

In her book *Mindset*, Carol Dweck presents the research on the importance of having a "growth mindset" for thriving in every aspect of human development and performance. A growth mindset is a way of viewing new challenges, seeing them as opportunities to learn, grow, and improve. If we have a growth mindset we believe that in and through any new, different, or difficult situation, we can learn, grow, and improve in a way that leaves us with new skills and strength of character, stronger and wiser than we would ever have developed without the experience.

Dweck shows in her research how the "growth mindset" differs from a "fixed mindset." It's the fixed mindset that causes most of our fear and anxiety. A fixed mindset is one where you tell yourself that you can't do it because you don't have what it takes. With a fixed mindset, you tell yourself: "Some people are born with the ability to do this, but not me." With a fixed mindset, you come to think that your potential for learning and improvement is fixed, set, and therefore you are not able to grow, change, and improve.

Mindset for growth is essential because nobody is going to achieve perfect mastery. In essence, human and team development is about growing, learning, improving, failing faster, and making adjustments in pursuit of optimal. Expectations may have been set for the circumstances, for the goals, and for the various roles of team members. But only rarely in the real world do things go as planned. Thus, the mindset for growth is one of visualizing prior to entering the situation, and preparing mentally to make the adjustment, to grow and let go, focusing on what's in one's control.

A growth mindset approach is also strengthened and enhanced by emotional toughness. Author Jim Loehr describes the importance of emotional toughness competencies like *emotional flexibility*, *emotional responsiveness*, *emotional resiliency*, and *emotional strength*, which contribute to the overall mindset needed for growth. These emotional toughness skills include being aware of our emotions and choosing positive responses, being able to take a punch emotionally and bounce back quickly, and using past experiences to develop high tolerance for future hard times, tough situations, and difficult odds.

The culture and character development goal should always be to use the experiences and challenges of everyday life to stretch and strengthen the muscles needed for the challenges faced, and as preparation for the ones we face in the future. The goal is to stretch and push just enough: too much and you get injury, too little and you get weakness. Our job as parents, coaches, teachers, or leaders is to act like a strength coach, using every single experience of life to develop inner strength and capacity they need to survive and thrive.

To summarize, shaping MINDSET includes the following:

1) **Developing a *forget perfect-find optimal*, *grow-and-let-go* growth mindset.** Optimal performance is all about growth, improvement, and the pursuit of our goals and expectations.

2) **Visualizing situation response scenarios.** Mentors prepare mentees mentally on what they will face and how they should respond, to visualize success and response to failure or setback.

3) **Continuously refocusing on controllables, reframing challenges, and emphasizing quick recovery.** Mindset development continuously focuses and refocuses, seeking to efficiently manage emotions, energy, and failure.

Conclusion

Whether you are a coach, an educator, a parent, a supervisor or a CEO, shaping character and culture is essential to success. Research-based best practice shows that real-world performance comes from Clear Expectations, Mental Preparation, Deliberate Practice, and Support and Challenge—*Clarity*, *Mindset*, *Habit*, and *Accountability*.

The ESSENTIALS™

are designed and delivered by

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ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

Almost two decades ago, the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, created a consortium partnership to advance our respective visions and missions. Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, employment and STEM readiness, athletics, education, and organizational development in community and workplace environments.

The Institute's main focus is on research and development of tools and assessments that help leaders shape culture, build character, and achieve optimal performance.

The Ray Center's main focus is on coaching, training, and expanding our collaborative implementation projects across Iowa and the nation.