

## Character and Authentic Transformational Leadership



### In a Nutshell

**Doing the right thing is its own reward**, but being a person of high ethics and strong character also helps you lead others. While many pseudo-transformational leaders are able to exert control over their followers, their lack of character and ethical behavior ultimately bring harm to their followers and/or others. Authentic transformational leaders, by acting on a core set of benevolent values, bring out the best in their followers and do great things for society. That's why I believe any discussion of effective leadership should start with character!

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### Transformational Leadership

The most challenging times for leaders are when they are leading a group "into the unknown." When leaders communicate a vision and give direction to their followers that involve pushing them out of their comfort zones and taking risks, it's natural for the followers to resist the change. Managers find that it's far more difficult to lead change than it is to continue business as usual. Nonetheless, managers are increasingly responsible for leading change. With the rapid pace of innovation and growth of international competition, managers who simply maintain the status quo are an endangered species.

Transformational leaders are able to persuade their followers to step out of their comfort zones, take a leap of faith and follow their leaders into the unknown. In other words, transformational leaders build trust. Trust is a willingness to take a risk and make oneself vulnerable. *We are more inclined to trust people when we understand their values and observe that their actions are congruent with those values because we can reliably predict how they will act.* Leaders of high character instill trust.

Not all charismatic leadership is authentic transformational leadership. Pseudo-transformational leaders are also persuasive. Leaders such as Adolph Hitler and Osama bin Laden have been able to inspire their followers. However, they violate trust and ultimately bring harm to their followers. They lack character and act immorally. While not morally equivalent to bin Laden, the business leaders who are responsible for the collapse of investors' confidence are commonly identified as charismatic or visionary, but their lack of morality has led to destruction of wealth and harm to their employees' careers.

### Moral Analysis of Leaders, Their Actions and Their Values

Moral analysis can be applied to leaders, to their actions and to their values. A leader is praiseworthy as a moral agent if he or she possesses a developed conscience and acts in ways that are kind, charitable and altruistic rather than selfish or maleficent. Pseudo-transformational leaders often show that they do not have a well-developed conscience and take actions with self-serving or destructive intentions.

Similarly, leaders' actions are judged in terms of their ends sought, means used and consequences achieved. Moral actions have purposes that are aligned with core values, employ moral methods to achieve those ends, and result in fair treatment of affected parties.

To a great degree, values are culturally relative. However, there are some values that transcend cultures. Values that reflect an intention to maintain and even enhance the well being of society are held in esteem in any culture. The core values of authentic transformational leaders respect other's rights and dignity, and demonstrate a genuine concern for others. For business managers, core values that show concern for all organizational stakeholders are respected by society.

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### The Behavior of Authentic Transformational Leaders

It should also be noted that not all good, moral people are transformational leaders. Transformational leaders engage in idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration as they lead their followers.

- **Idealized influence:** Serving as an example of excellence and character; Creating a climate of high standards for task performance and ethical choices
- **Inspirational motivation:** Developing and communicating an ambitious, exciting and morally good vision for the group to achieve; Involving followers, empowering them, and encouraging their development toward that end
- **Intellectual stimulation:** Fostering open discussion of the vision and its implementation
- **Individualized consideration:** Demonstrating genuine concern for followers' development; Providing coaching and mentoring

By demonstrating ethical behavior and personal character while performing these four types of leadership behaviors, authentic transformational leaders accomplish the most impressive of leadership challenges. They lead their followers through risk taking, personal development and organizational change.

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### Source

Bass, B. M. & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2): 181-217.

### About the Newsletter and Subscriptions

*LeaderLetter* is written by Dr. Scott Williams, Department of Management, [Raj Sooin College of Business](#), Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. It is a supplement to my MBA 751 - Managing People in Organizations class. It is intended to reinforce the course concepts and maintain communication among my former MBA 751 students, but anyone is welcome to subscribe. In addition, subscribers are welcome to forward this newsletter to anyone who they believe would have an interest in it. To [subscribe](#), simply send an e-mail message to me requesting subscription. Of course, subscriptions to the newsletter are free. To [unsubscribe](#), e-mail a reply indicating that you would like to unsubscribe.

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### E-mail Your Comments

Whether you are one of my former students or not, I invite you to share any insights or concerns you have regarding the topic of this newsletter or any other topic relating to management skills. Please [e-mail](#) them to me. Our interactions have been invaluable. **I learn a lot from *LeaderLetter* subscribers!** Let's keep the conversation going.

### Good, Clean Joke

## King George III's Response to the Declaration of Independence

The Court of King George III London, England

July 10, 1776

Mr. Thomas Jefferson  
c/o The Continental Congress Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Jefferson,

We have read your "Declaration of Independence" with great interest. Certainly, it represents a considerable undertaking, and many of your statements do merit serious consideration. Unfortunately, the Declaration as a whole fails to meet recently adopted specifications for proposals to the Crown, so we must return the document to you for further refinement. The questions which follow might assist you in your process of revision:

1. In your opening paragraph you use the phrase the "Laws of Nature and Nature's God." What are these laws? In what way are they the criteria on which you base your central arguments? Please document with citations from the recent literature.
2. In the same paragraph you refer to the "opinions of mankind." Whose polling data are you using? Without specific evidence, it seems to us the "opinions of mankind" are a matter of opinion.
3. You hold truths to be "self-evident." Could you please elaborate. If they are as evident as you claim then it should not be difficult for you to locate the appropriate supporting statistics.
4. "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" seem to be the goals of your proposal. These are not measurable goals. If you were to say that among these is the ability to sustain an average life expectancy in six of the 13 colonies of at least 55 years, and to enable newspapers in the colonies to print news without outside interference, and to raise the average income of the colonists by 10 percent in the next 10 years, these could be measurable goals. Please clarify.
5. You state that "Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government...." Have you weighed this assertion against all the alternatives? What are the trade-off considerations?
6. Your description of the existing situation is quite extensive. Such a long list of grievances should precede the statement of goals, not follow it. Your problem statement needs improvement.
7. Your strategy for achieving your goal is not developed at all. You state that the colonies ought to be Free and Independent States, and that they are "Absolved from All Allegiance to the British Crown." Who or what must change to achieve this objective? In what way must they change? What specific steps will you take to overcome the resistance? How long will it take? We have found that a little foresight in these areas helps to prevent careless errors later on. How cost-effective are your strategies?
8. Who among the list of signatories will be responsible for implementing your strategy? Who conceived it? Who provided the theoretical research? Who will constitute the advisory committee? Please submit an organization chart and vitas of the principal investigators.
9. You must include an evaluation design. We have been requiring this since Queen Anne's War.
10. What impact will your problem have? Your failure to include any assessment of this inspires little confidence in the long-range prospects of your undertaking.
11. Please submit a PERT diagram, an activity chart, itemized budget, and manpower utilization matrix.

We hope that these comments prove useful in revising your "Declaration of Independence." We welcome the submission of your revised proposal. Our due date for unsolicited proposals is July 31, 1776. Ten copies with original signatures will be required.

Sincerely,  
Management Analyst to the British Crown

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