

# WHY VIRTUE MATTERS

We all love predictability. An organization's products and services are reliable because its people and culture are reliable. In contrast, unpredictable organizations are built on cultures that justify why expectations weren't met and change their explanations as soon as they are scrutinized. In fact, both reliable and unreliable behaviors can be found even in the same organization.

The virtues of trust, compassion, courage, justice, wisdom, temperance, and hope are the bedrock of reliable performance. This becomes clear once we understand that the word virtue means excellence, which is why these principles have been universally admired in all countries for centuries. Virtue is the foundation of an inclusive culture where people feel they belong, matter, and make a difference. It's virtue that makes engagement, teamwork, and collaboration possible during uncertain conditions.

Virtue isn't just nice to have. Virtue is a must-have, since it packs more performance punch than factors

such as IQ. While IQ is relatively fixed after a certain age, people can develop virtue at any age. Like any skill, virtue can be strengthened with practice. The virtues are most needed during conditions of adversity, pressure and uncertainty, and this is when they are most difficult to practice. This is why the presence of virtue during difficult periods is so admired.

Even though virtue is a powerful performance amplifier, often virtues are hidden in plain sight. The learning modules detailed in [excelwitharete.com](http://excelwitharete.com) help you name and amplify when leaders and teams practiced virtue well. These modules are evidence-based, backed up by academic and field research with businesses and organizations such as the military, professional and college sports, NASA, health care, and the academy. This research reveals that leaders defined by high competence and low character cannot deliver sustainable results. They might deliver results when the market is in their favor, but it won't be lasting, and the reputational risk to the

organization isn't worth it. Leaders with high character and low competence cannot deliver sustainable results either. The well-intentioned incompetent can do plenty of damage. However, part of being a person of character is not being satisfied until some degree of competence is achieved. Here are two questions to pressure test what an organization stands for: Does the person of high competence and low char-



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acter get a pass? Does the person of high character with threshold competence get a chance?

Despite the evidence that character increases performance, most leadership models focus only on competence, ignoring character or limiting its impact to signage on the hallway walls. In contrast, leadership models at organizations like the United States service academies view virtue as the key to developing the competence and commitment necessary to build and lead resilient teams that can succeed under any conditions. The research on reliable, elite performance means that people get better at who they are (embrace the virtues) to get better at what we do (competence).

Virtue isn’t a personal growth plan. It is a way to live.

Virtue is also aspirational since there is no such thing as a completely virtuous person or culture, nor are people or cultures completely absent virtue. We all flunk practicing virtue perfectly, which is why we are wise to practice virtue with humility. An unpretentious approach enables us to create a culture where we learn from mistakes rather than gain skill at assigning blame.

Character-based leaders want to win, just not at all costs. They protect their organization’s reputation and financial strength by bringing value to the people they serve. They learn to view pressure as a privilege, an opportunity to make life better for others.

Better humans. Better performance.