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## Moral Excellence: A Study of How Business Leaders Stay True to Themselves

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## Moral Excellence: A Study of How Business Leaders Stay True to Themselves

### Abstract

The everyday tensions of a person's professional life present an array of conflicts of interest, which make it difficult for leaders to uphold their own moral values. Many argue that culture shapes behavior. But what aspects of human volition keep people morally straight? To answer this question, interviews with twenty business professionals who met a set of criteria that qualified them as moral exemplars were analyzed. The finding showed that when moral exemplars face a conflict of interest, they seek affirmation and clarity from relationships with people who share their values. In fact, these trusted relationships act as a "reinforcing mechanism," reminding exemplars of their moral values when confronted with a difficult choice. Excellence is considered in the Aristotelian sense of developing a human's best qualities to take action that serves the right ends. Additional findings indicate promising lines of future research.

### Keywords

business ethics, virtue ethics, moral identity, moral exemplars, moral salience, moral values, moral courage, virtuous relationships

### Comments

This study was originally completed in August, 2019 and uploaded to Scholarly Commons in March, 2022.

Moral Excellence: A Study of How Business Leaders Stay True to Themselves

Kellie Cummings

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Andrew Soren

August 1, 2019

Edited March 1, 2022

Moral Excellence: A Study of How Business Leaders Stay True to Themselves  
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Capstone Project  
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Abstract

The everyday tensions of a person's professional life present an array of conflicts of interest, which make it difficult for leaders to uphold their own moral values. Many argue that culture shapes behavior. But what aspects of human volition keep people morally straight? To answer this question, interviews with twenty business professionals who met a set of criteria that qualified them as moral exemplars were analyzed. The finding showed that when moral exemplars face a conflict of interest, they seek affirmation and clarity from relationships with people who share their values. In fact, these trusted relationships act as a "reinforcing mechanism," reminding exemplars of their moral values when confronted with a difficult choice. Excellence is considered in the Aristotelian sense of developing a human's best qualities to take action that serves the right ends. Additional findings indicate promising lines of future research.

*Keywords:* Business Ethics, Virtue Ethics, Moral Identity, Moral Exemplars, Positive Deviance, Moral Salience, Moral Awareness, Moral Values, Moral Courage

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## Introduction

“To enjoy the things we ought and to hate the things we ought has the greatest bearing on excellence of character.”

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

In September 2008, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy and sent the global financial system into a tailspin. Within a month, \$700 billion in retirement plans and investments vanished, and some 25,000 Lehman employees were out of work (Egan, M., 2018). Prior to its collapse, Lehman’s routine level of risk-taking had become reckless.

The firm was leveraged 44 to 1, which meant that for every dollar of equity the company had on hand, it borrowed \$44.00 to cover its bets. Such an excessive debt ratio also meant that should the value of Lehman’s investments fall by as little as one percent, half of the company’s equity would be wiped out. For example, when Lehman used \$1.00 of its own equity to invest \$45.00, it borrowed \$44.00. If the value of that investment faltered by just 1%, Lehman would have a mere \$0.55 in equity remaining and its leverage would leap to 80:1, or \$44 borrowed against \$0.55 (Kaul, V., 2018).

A 44-1 debt ratio reflects a type of greed that doesn’t fear consequences, a sort of “too smart to fail” way of thinking. But hubris wasn’t the only transgression pushing Wall Street to the brink: a more nefarious form of greed openly acknowledged that someone else would pay the price. “I knew that the risk was being shunted off. I knew that we could be writing crap. But in the end, it was like a game of musical chairs. Volume might go down, but we were not going to be hurt,” said Christopher Cruise, a Maryland-based corporate educator who trained loan officers for many of the largest mortgage lenders (The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, 2011).

This type of selfishness is encapsulated in a phrase that had become commonplace among Wall Street investors and traders. That phrase, *IBG, YBG*, stands for “I’ll be gone, you’ll be gone” meaning that when the dust settles, you and I will be gone and someone else will suffer the consequences of our actions (The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, 2011).

When people stop caring about the ramifications of their actions, they’ve lost track of their own moral values, which is the question that motivated this study. Specifically, how do *prosocial* people, those who characteristically seek to better society, commit ethical transgressions that harm others?

To better understand how people lose track of their own values, this study takes an unusual approach. Rather than analyzing wrongdoing, this study examines moral excellence through the choices and decision frames of business leaders who have consistently avoided the missteps described above. These people who have continuously hewed to their own values despite external pressures are referred to as *moral exemplars*.

An exemplar study aims to provide descriptive insight about the ways in which people on the leading edge of a domain behave (Bronk, 2012). In this way, moral exemplars’ habits, life experiences, and even their way of interpreting their choices can inform how others can and should nurture their own moral compass to stay true to themselves. Another way of thinking about an exemplar study is in the framework of *positive deviance*, which asks a very basic but immensely valuable question: “What went right?” (Lavine, 2012). This question is particularly useful when the actions of the majority are not ideal and yet the actions of a deviant few are remarkably positive.

Instead of trying to adjudicate which values are right and wrong, the aim of this study is to understand how people stay true to themselves. However, a condition for participation in the

study required that all moral exemplars had previously risked either personal or organizational gains to uphold their values. Being other-oriented, which leads a person to sacrifice personal gain for the well-being of others, is a moral principal that is embedded in this study.

Preparation for these interviews begins with a literature review exploring moral identity, moral formation, and moral hazards. To skip this section and read about the actual study, turn to the section titled: “Key Research Question.”

### **Moral Identity Theory**

Several theories contribute to our understanding of how people perceive themselves as moral agents and how that perception motivates their behavior. Identity is at the core of a person’s being and it governs how people behave (Erickson, 1964). Moral identity expresses the extent to which moral concerns are integrated with a person’s overall identity and therefore, affect the emotional and motivational forces that govern behavior (Blasi, 1995).

Augusto Blasi introduced the Self Model of moral identity in 1983, which social scientists still refer to as “arguably the most developed mode of moral identity” (Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008, p. 514). The Self Model is composed of three components. First, when people make moral judgments about right and wrong, they simultaneously also decide whether they have a responsibility to take action. Accordingly, a person’s judgment of right and wrong is separate from how they feel about their responsibility to act (Blasi, 1983).

Second, the criteria people use to shape their moral judgments stem from the degree to which moral traits are central to their self-concept, which reflects a person’s understanding of their moral identity (Blasi, 1995). Essentially, people differ in the extent to which they hold strong moral values, which reflects the extent to which those moral values are united with their identity. Last, people desire to act in accordance with their self-concept to maintain self-

consistency (Shao et al., 2008). This desire to maintain self-consistency through actions is a foundational motivating force for moral action (Hardy & Carlo, 2005).

### ***Identity as a Force for Motivating Action***

Additional theories of moral identity describe how this mechanism operates as an intrinsic reward, motivating people to behave in a manner that reflects their own self-image or self-concept (Aronson, 1969; Baumeister, 1998; Bem, 1972). This reward mechanism drives people to care about their own moral and ethical choices, because behavior that aligns with their moral identity reinforces a positive self-image. And when their actions deviate from their own moral truths, they experience *ethical dissonance* (Barkan, Ayal, Gino, & Ariely, 2012). Ethical dissonance creates a psychological tension, which is upsetting and therefore, acts as a “moral gatekeeper” helping people maintain their own moral standards (Barkan, Ayal, & Ariely, 2015, p. 159).

Moral identity exerts a uniquely powerful influence over behavior, because it acts as a self-regulatory mechanism (Blasi, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1992; Erickson, 1964; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998). When a person’s moral identity is central to their self-concept, that sense of identity galvanizes action through a desire to maintain their self-consistency and through a motivating sense of responsibility (Stets & Carter, 2011). Damon and Hart (1992) posit that the desire to maintain self-consistency is the single biggest determinant of the alignment between moral values and moral conduct. They go on to say that “people whose self-concept is organized around their moral beliefs are highly likely to translate those beliefs into action consistently throughout their lives” (p. 455). When moral identity is core to a person’s self-concept, it is more accessible throughout a person’s lifetime (Aquino et al., 2009).

### **Moral Formation**

The development of moral identity begins in early childhood and is strengthened in adolescence (Bergman, 2004). As a child's moral development proceeds into adolescence, the child's self-concept becomes fused with moral identity (Damon, 1984). During adolescence, moral beliefs form the essential components of a young adult's self-concept (Shao et al., 2008).

Certain factors in adolescence are believed to contribute to moral identity formation, such as interactions with parents and peers (Shao et al., 2008). Involvement in community service also stands out as influential (Hart et al., 1998; Damon & Gregory, 1997; Colby & Damon, 1992). A longitudinal analysis of high school students revealed that youth participation in community service organizations predicted future self-assessments of moral identity (Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Alisat, 2003). However, much of the research around the link between youth moral activities and later moral development is correlational (Shao et al., 2008).

In adulthood, the connection seems to be predictive in that if adults report having volunteered in a civic organization within the preceding two years, their self-importance of moral identity was greater than those who did not (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity exerts a particularly strong influence over behavior when it is reinforced by experience, making it more accessible in memory (Shao et al., 2008). Therefore, participation in outreach programs may increase the salience of a person's moral values and could act as a protective factor against ethical fading.

### ***Adolescent Exemplars***

According to Colby and Damon (1992), an individual's self-concept reflects a unity of self and morality in people who have demonstrated a high level of commitment to moral ideals. Matsuba and Walker (2004) found that adolescent exemplars stood out against a comparison group as being more advanced in moral reasoning, maturity, and connection to their faith.

Additionally, this group was more inclined to enter into close relationships than the comparison group. Interviews also revealed an overlap between exemplars' expression of their identity and their expression of their moral beliefs (Hardy, 2006). In separate studies with adolescent moral exemplars, interviews showed that these adolescents used moral terminology to describe their personality, goals, and identity (Hart & Fegley, 1995; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004).

Additionally, teens who used moral terminology to describe themselves were also identified by their teachers as having highly moral traits (Arnold, 1993). Adolescent moral exemplars also demonstrated the tendency to identify helpers and they reflected a redemptive view of life and a strong sense of both agency and communion (Walker & Frimer, 2007).

### ***How Moral Identity affects Ethical Behavior***

Ethical conduct in the workplace is another domain in which the self-importance of moral identity affects behavior. People whose level of moral identity was higher lied less frequently in negotiations than people whose moral identity was lower (Aquino et al., 2009). High levels of moral identity, according to Aquino and Reed's (2002) self-assessment, have been related to high levels of ethical leadership according to reports from followers (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2008). Additionally, these same people, who believed their leaders were ethical, displayed low levels of unethical behavior and social conflict (Mayer et al., 2012).

### **Moral Malleability**

One of the more perplexing discoveries about ethical transgressions is the dynamic and malleable aspects of a person's morality (Monin & Jordan, 2009). The fact that a person's actions can diverge from their moral self-image has puzzled psychologists for decades (Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011). A theory that tries to explain the vagaries of moral decision-making claims that moral disengagement occurs when a person's moral *self-regulation* stops functioning

correctly, which therefore, makes them vulnerable to unethical choices (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1990). According to this theory, known as *ego depletion*, a person's capacity for moral self-regulation can be depleted by exercising self-control in any number of ways, such as sustaining their attention on a fixed object or intentionally avoiding indulgent food. However, many social scientists now contest the theory of ego depletion, claiming that the effect has been overstated and cannot be replicated (Inzlicht & Friese, 2019).

### ***Ethical Fading and Ethical Blindness***

Psychologists are discovering that the difference between making choices that reflect a person's own moral standards and making choices that simply comply with a set of rules can depend on a person's *decision frame*. Decision frames refer to the ways in which human choice is influenced by the way information is presented (De Martino, Kumaran, Seymour, & Dolan, 2006). People make sense of information within the scope of their decision frame, which can have *ethical blind spots* (Palazzo, Krings, & Hoffrage, 2012). As decision frames become more narrow and rigid, they limit a person's ability to notice the ethical implications of their choices. The process by which moral decisions become crowded out by another set of choices is known as *ethical fading*. Ethical fading occurs when a person no longer notices the moral implications of their decisions (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). However, this experience is temporary and wears off when a person's decision frame expands. For example, in the well-known 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, student actors playing the role of guards treated other student actors in the role of prisoners with both violence and demeaning abuse. The student actors who were guards in the experiment, claimed that they didn't feel any regret or remorse for their actions until after the experiment had concluded and they reflected on their actions (Zimbardo, 2007).

Another example of confusion and regret when recalling previous actions comes from the Holocaust. A former German police officer stationed in Poland and Russia who took part in Hitler's mass slaughter of Jews expressed conflicting moral assessments of his actions during two different time periods. During the war, he claimed that he and the other police did not consider their actions to be inappropriate. Years later, however, he became fully conscious of what he had done and how wrong his actions were (Browning, 2001).

Andy Fastow, former chief financial officer of energy giant ENRON who masterminded the company's elaborate fraud explained: "You can follow all the rules and still commit fraud at the same time. That's what I did at Enron in a nutshell. I didn't set out to commit fraud. I didn't set out to hurt anybody" (Coonan, 2016, para. 9).

Ethical fading and ethical blindness fall into a larger category called *bounded ethicality*, which occurs when people commit unethical acts without consciously realizing they are doing so (Gino, 2015). The other type of ethical transgression is intentional and occurs when someone is fully conscious of the implications of their actions (Gino, 2015). In this case, the factors that influence a moral person to act unethically are frequently attributed to social forces and their environment (Gino, 2015; Bazerman & Gino, 2012).

Many social scientists believe that the best way to address workplace transgressions lies in shaping an environment to bring out the best in people. Substantial empirical studies demonstrate how aspects of a person's environment influence their malleable moral compass (Bazerman & Gino, 2012). The insights gained through this field of inquiry, known as behavioral ethics, have advanced our understanding of human decision making and shifted how organizations shape ethical cultures to foster ethical behavior (Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). However, because the field has produced meaningful contributions to our understanding

of ethical decision-making, the question of how people strengthen their own moral compass has received less attention.

### **Key Research Question**

The everyday tensions of a person's professional life present an array of conflicts of interest. On any given day, business leaders must balance expectations from authority figures and peers, rules and precedents, competitive pressures, and their own personal values.

**A key question that rises to the surface concerns agency. Specifically, which aspects of human volition can safeguard a person's moral compass against temptations and pressures inherent in professional life? How can a person enhance the salience of their own values across the lifespan?**

By examining the outlook and choices of moral exemplars, this study aims to identify unique characteristics and behaviors that exemplars rely on to uphold their core values despite temptations to do otherwise. Are exemplars uniquely able to navigate the competing pressures that are often an unavoidable aspect of leadership? If so, what do they do differently and how can we learn from them? Ideally, these codified behaviors can serve as an informative and instructive resource for other leaders who wish to strengthen their own moral compass.

This study does not aim to define which moral values are desirable nor does it explore the role of social deviance and other mental illnesses in workplace transgressions. The objective is to understand how people can increase the salience of their own moral values in the context of their professional lives so that their thoughts and actions remain aligned.

### **Methodology**

To better understand how business leaders can uphold their values across time, structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with twenty experienced professionals

who qualified as moral exemplars. The process for selecting interviewees followed the exemplar methodology, which posits that studying exemplary outliers in a specific domain yields insights about the most advanced aspects of development. These insights may not be evident in a population-wide sample (Bronk, 2012).

Exemplar research has grown significantly due to the influence of the field of positive psychology (Bronk, 2012). For decades, psychological researchers aimed to understand the aspects of human functioning associated with illness and depression. However, positive psychology explores what goes right with people to better understand the human experience.

The findings in an exemplar study are designed to provide descriptive value regarding the construct of interest and often generate results that are instructive for people who wish to adopt the behaviors exhibited by exemplars (Bronk, 2012). The intent in using this method of examination was to find commonalities across most participants that reveal exemplars' unique choices or their way of interpreting events.

### **Nomination Criteria**

Following this methodology, study participants are selected based on their ability to meet a pre-determined set of nomination criteria. To establish nomination criteria and develop the structured interview questions for the study, seven preliminary interviews were conducted with experts in psychology, values-based leadership, management and leadership, ethical workplace behavior, and exemplar study design. See Appendix B for a list of preliminary interviewees. The final nomination criteria were composed of three yes/no questions, which participants completed in an online survey prior to their interview.

To qualify as a moral exemplar, each participant had to answer “yes” to all three questions. However, because the nomination questions were contained in a pre-interview online

survey, candidates were unaware of the gravity of the first three question when they answered them.

**Question #1: Can you easily articulate your own beliefs and values to someone else?**

This question explores the importance of moral identity among potential study participants. The theory of moral identity centers on the self-regulatory aspects of a person's sense of self. People with a strong moral identity will strive for consistency between moral thoughts and actions across a range of situations (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984; Hart et al., 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1997). In the study, the capacity to easily communicate one's values serves as an indicator that the individual's moral identity is internalized and fused with their self-concept, one of the key components of an exemplar. Learning how this select group of people nurture their values can serve as a guide for others.

**Question #2: Have you ever served in a leadership role with decision-making power that could affect the well-being of at least 20 others (either inside or outside the organization)?**

This question examines a person's experience with both authority and responsibility for the welfare of others in a professional setting. Because the objective of this study is to better understand how business leaders stay true to themselves, leadership experience is an integral component of an exemplar. By definition, leaders face unique pressures and temptations, their span of control is wider, and their choices have broader ramifications than is evident to the individual contributors they oversee. Balancing competing priorities and managing pressures are part of the leadership experience. Therefore, this type of experience is an essential nomination criterion for this study.

**Question #3: Have you ever demonstrated a willingness to adhere to your values even if that decision put personal or organizational gains at risk?**

This question gets to the heart of the tradeoffs people make when adhering to their values. If remaining morally coherent were easy, there would be no reason for this study. A moral exemplar, someone whose choices others can learn from, has confronted difficult decisions and lived with the consequences of those decisions. The consequences of upholding one's values was explored in detail in the open-ended interview questions and triggered powerful memories from many exemplars. Adhering to their values came at a cost to their relationships, their status, their opportunity for promotion, and their job security. All exemplars shared difficult stories rooted in the choices they made to stay true to their values, and some were overcome with a need to tell their stories, to have this crucible moment in their lives seen, heard, and understood. However, their experience of standing up for their values and then living with the consequences give these exemplars a valuable perspective that future leaders can learn from.

The nomination criteria served the dual purpose of qualifying candidates for the study, while also priming them for their interviews. Business leaders manage their commitments carefully; therefore, anyone who didn't view this type exploration as worthwhile could have opted out of the study at this point; though no one did opt out.

To identify twenty moral exemplars for this study, I drew from my network and the networks of my classmates at the University of Pennsylvania's Master of Applied Positive Psychology program. A few months before the study, Wharton professor Adam Grant led our class in a Reciprocity Circle in which each of us wrote a personal goal on a blank sheet of paper and then we signed up to support any classmate whose goal we had the resources or ability to support. During the Reciprocity Circle, seven classmates volunteered to help with the study,

some had suggestions and others connected me with people in their own professional networks who they believed to be moral exemplars. Additionally, a friend of mine connected me with qualified exemplars in his own professional network in the field of ethics and compliance. See Appendix A for a full list of exemplars.

### **Study Design**

This study encompassed several stages of inquiry, including: preliminary interviews with experts in the social sciences and ethical leadership; a literature review; an online Participation Survey, which included nomination questions and additional investigative questions; and the structured interviews lasting approximately 30-45 minutes.

#### ***Preliminary Interviews***

To design the study and to compose the nomination and interview questions, I met with seven experts in fields as diverse as psychology, values-based leadership, compliance, and ethical workplace behavior. These conversations complemented my literature review with real-world perspectives on ethical conduct and modern methods of designing workplace interventions that reduce transgressions. These preliminary discussions provided important insights into moral psychology and the real-world implications of moral transgressions. Appendix B contains a list of the preliminary interviewees, their respective areas of expertise, and a brief description of their contributions to this study.

#### ***Literature Review***

The literature review focused on preparations for conducting an exemplar study. Areas of interest included: moral identity, moral formation, moral agency, behavioral ethics, and the exemplar methodology.

### *Participation Survey*

Each exemplar candidate received an email formally inviting them to participate in the study, which contained a link to the online Participation Survey. The Survey was hosted by Poll Everywhere, which has an elegant survey interface and seamlessly exports responses to an Excel spreadsheet. In this Participation Survey, prospective exemplars first answered the three nomination questions described above and then answered an additional eight questions framed in one of the following methods: Likert scale, yes/no, drop-down menu, and an open entry box for further explanation.

These eight questions expanded the topics covered in the structured interview questions. A few of these questions turned out to be significant, such as #12: “Do you have personal moral lessons that you hope to transfer to other professionals?” On this question, 18 of the 20 exemplar candidates said “yes,” which indicated that it was a topic worth integrating into the structured interviews when time allowed. See Appendix C for the full list of questions contained in the Participation Survey.

The final question in the Participant Survey read: “Do you agree to the consent form that is attached to this email?” The University of Pennsylvania provided the template for this consent form, which was modified for the study. Consent was required for participation, therefore, candidates had to choose “yes” on this question. Importantly, the consent form explained: “It’s important to note that we will collect personal information based on your answers to our questions. This information will be published as a research paper, and it will be publicly available. Your answers will be associated with your name.” See Appendix E to read the full Consent Form.

### *Structured Interviews*

Exemplars agreed to interviews lasting at least 30 minutes, however, many remained engaged for 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom and simultaneously recorded with an iPhone transcription application called, “Voice Recorder.” All audio, video, and transcription files are stored on an encrypted drive.

Interview questions were intentionally open-ended to create as much latitude as possible for learning from exemplars. These interviews were truly exploratory, seeking nuanced information from exemplars’ childhood, insights about how they lived their lives and how they navigated conflicts of interest at work.

There were seven consistent questions with several follow-up questions for each and many more unplanned questions added to each interview. Question #1 provoked an exploration of each person’s values, their awareness of those values, and how they would describe them to someone they cared about. Questions 2 and 3 explored moral formation, influential life events, and the emergence of their own moral awareness. Question 4 explored the experience of feeling separate or different from others, because they held values that others did not share to the same degree. Question 5 explored exemplars’ experiences as a working professional when they had to make a difficult choice to uphold their values that came with either a personal or an organizational cost. Of all the preparation that went into this study, this one question, and its follow-up questions, were the most labored. Question 6 examined moral awareness by asking exemplars how they keep their values top of mind, and it contained what came to be an important follow-up question: “Do you have a community or specific person with whom you discuss your choices and the choices of others?” Finally, Question 7 invited exemplars to share any information about their values or moral choices that hadn’t been expressly asked.

This is how the study was designed. Because the questions were open-ended, the results span topics that are more expansive than these seven questions.

### **Description of Sample**

Twenty exemplars completed both the pre-participation survey and the structured interview. Twelve were men and eight were women. Three non-Caucasian business leaders participated in the study. There was no formal effort to diversify the study, which is a limitation that should be addressed in future studies.

Many exemplars had decades of professional experience, some were at or near the zenith of their careers and others were in retirement reflecting on the choices they made while working. There were no participants with less than ten years of professional experience, which is likely attributable to nomination criterion #2, which required participants to have served in a leadership role with decision-making power that could affect the well-being of at least 20 people.

Two exemplars emphasized the fact that they came from large families, and one exemplar made a point of explaining how her close relationship with her twin sister fortified her sense of self from a very young age. Many exemplars described strong, values-based relationships with their spouse and a strong sense of alignment with their parents' values. While none of these characteristics drove recruitment for this study, their presence influenced the finding.

It's also worth noting that each exemplars' willingness to participate in this study is telling about their own priorities. Busy executives do not spend their time carelessly. Possibly more reflective of their character is their willingness to participate in an interview about moral decision-making without the condition of anonymity. Their names, roles, and professional experience lend credibility to the study's results.

## **Procedure**

Candidates for the study were contacted by phone and email. Once they confirmed their willingness to participate, they received the Participation Survey containing the nomination criteria and a Calendly link to schedule their 30-minute interview. The brevity of these interviews was challenging at times. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, a lengthier discussion might have yielded additional descriptive insights. In my experience, interviewing is often circular in that asking the same question in different ways can yield nuanced information. There's also a warm-up phase in interviews to establish rapport, making sure people feel seen and heard, which enhances their willingness to share personal truths.

The interview questions asked exemplars to recall moments of choice in their lives and how they interpreted the choices before them, which is a way of understanding their decision frame (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Values are expressed through the choices people make; they are the criteria people use for evaluating decisions (Williams, 1951). Values are also a mechanism for expressing identity; through our values, we tell the world who we are (Peterson, 2006). Therefore, these interviews asked people to share sacred information about themselves and candid moments when they recognized that their values were not held by others to the same extent.

These conversations were at times intimate. Exemplars shared stories of difficult moments in their lives when their own values were violated to such an extent that they willingly risked their own career opportunities and even job security to stand up for their beliefs. Exemplars' moments of courage often came at a cost; and therefore, conducting these interviews required a balance of empathy and objectivity.

## Results and Analysis

### Moral Formation

Moral identity is a uniquely powerful form of self-regulation that activates moral action (Blasi, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1992). While moral identity can evolve across the lifespan, the adolescent phase in which the self is fused with morality is uniquely influential in shaping moral identity (Colby & Damon, 1992). Once these two aspects of identity are unified, “judgment and conduct are directly and predictably linked and choices are made with great certainty (Colby & Damon, 1993, p. 150). Therefore, it was important to explore these early years of identity formation to look for influential people or events that shaped their self-concept.

### *Origins of Moral Values*

Many exemplars point to a parent, both parents, or a combination of a single parent and grandparents as having the earliest and most significant influence on their moral identity. Exemplars often shared powerful memories of explicit values instruction they received from their parents or grandparents.

“Dad was in politics from the time I was 5. He served in government but also was very involved in Cincinnati in the early civil rights movement, in the anti-war movement, he was really kind of walking the walk. Very much with the support of my mother. And very unlike their friends.” K.S.

“You were to live your life as an example to yourself and to others—whether it was in the workplace or in the family setting. This was articulated. You were to be a responsible individual according to core principles.” T.C.

“My grandfather was . . . my hero because he had the courage to do the right thing under extreme circumstances. . . my grandfather had the courage to leave his wife and his baby and come to the United States. . . He bought his home and he sent back for passage and brought his

wife and daughter over. To me, that just exhibited not only doing the right thing, but courage. Yeah, a lot of courage. This incident that occurred, which was instrumental, I consider it the keystone of my values.” G.W.

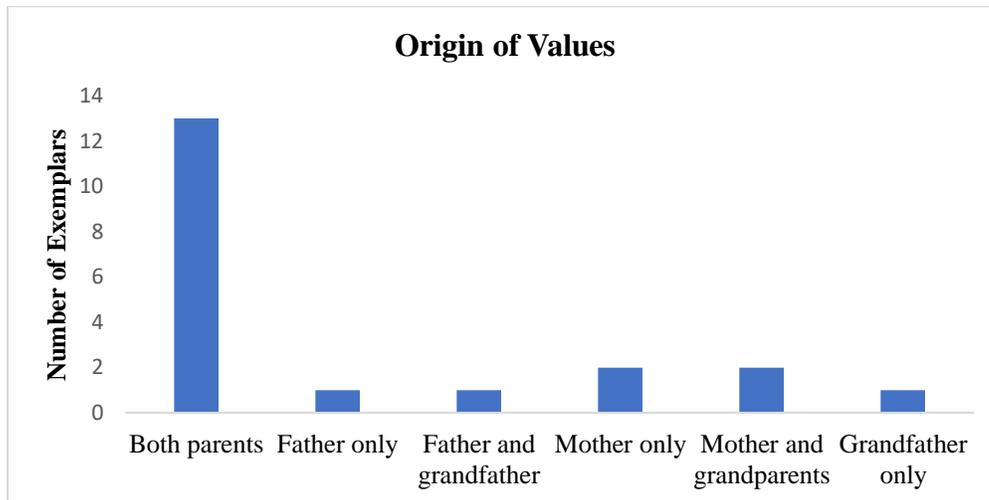
“We were all taught that we had virtue.” W.H.M.

“When I grew up, we didn’t grow up rich, but there was always somebody that had less than you and you know, you should have compassion for those people.” L.R.

“My parents, my grandparents, and I had a special circle of great aunts. . .They didn’t sit down and teach me, but they were the role models in my life. . .There was a sense of history. Three generations gave you a feeling that you were not first at this. Instead, you were part of a cultural legacy to always treasure, even without saying it.” C.F.

“Growing up on the on the high plains of Texas where. . .people are shaped by the land, by hard work, and by community. . .That’s probably what started my value path, being from the buckle of the bible belt in Amarillo Texas. . .Community. . .standing for something. . .and good people.” J.J.

The chart below illustrates the family members who most influenced each exemplars' moral formation. Each exemplar is represented only once in this chart.



*Figure 1*

### ***Values Coherence***

All exemplars reported having a sense of coherence with the values they absorbed from their parents and grandparents, except for one powerful issue: racial justice. More than a few exemplars came of age in the 1960's and 1970's in the U.S. Some of these exemplars formed views regarding racial justice that significantly deviated from those of their parents. These exemplars reported a lack of values coherence with their parents regarding racial discrimination and this gap created a painful rift between them and their parents that remains potent in their memories.

However, when we temporarily removed this issue of racial bias and discrimination from consideration, these exemplars focused on values of honesty, hard work, and integrity, which reflected an alignment between themselves and their parents.

### ***Formation of Moral Values***

During childhood and early adolescence, sports teams, religious institutions, and social groups played a strong role in shaping exemplars' moral identity. Ten exemplars felt that their family's strong involvement in the church played an important role in their values formation.

"We were expected to reflect the virtues in the way we lived. The nuns reinforced what the parents taught us and vice versa. That consistency forms an individual sense of conscience and moral backbone that carries you through no matter what the crowd is telling you to do." P.M.

"My faith is a big part of where my values come from and service and seeing your work as defined by helping." M. C.

Three others cited influential activities with the Boy Scouts or a community youth group.

"Earning the Boy Scouts' God and Country merit badge required us to spend a lot of time in the church observing how actively the church helped those in need, providing counseling and trying to improve the lives for people with problems. That helped me put my values into focus."

W.H.M.

"I got recruited by a young adult who was the leader of this Youth Council Program for the municipality, and I got thrown into a leadership role of a very early age of 14. . . I learned a lot of leadership skills through that process got to hire people [who] were really good leaders."

D.R.

"I remember a coach Stevens [who was] one of the few people that would actually model what he was asking and it created a team. . .and unity instead of dissention." J.J.

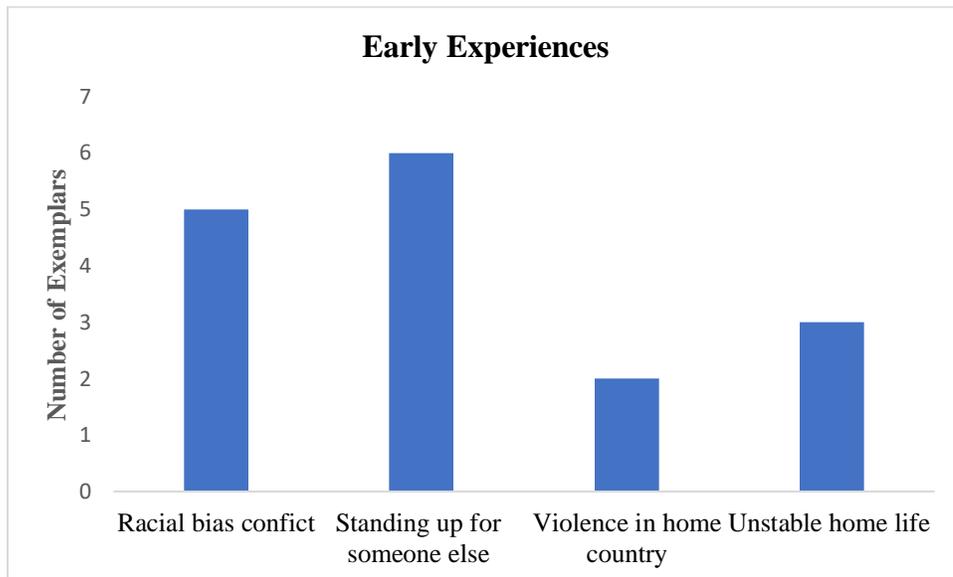
### ***Early Experiences***

Exemplars often reported a keen awareness during adolescence that their values were different from many of their peers. Although identity formation may have its roots in infancy,

adolescence is a pivotal time when children realize their identity as separate from their peers (Grotevant, 1987). Accordingly, many exemplars reported their first instances of moral awareness and specifically of feeling different from their peers and others in society during adolescence. Adhering to their values seemed more important to them than it did to other people.

Many exemplars reported powerful experiences of observing a moral incongruence, a situation in which the actions of their peers or adults in their community were incongruent with their own sense of fairness and appropriate action. Most of these instances occurred at some point in adolescence and many stood up to defend what they felt was right.

The chart below reflects a single event for each exemplar to show a representative view, although some experienced multiple forms of conflict, as described below the chart. Four exemplars did not report any unsettling events during adolescence.



*Figure 2*

**Racial Bias Conflict.** Six exemplars reported personal experiences with racial conflict either in school, in their community, or at home. Some exemplars' parents were active in civil

rights protests and political campaigns. In other cases, exemplars found themselves at odds with their parents' racial beliefs.

**Standing Up for Someone Else.** Five exemplars recalled memories of either protecting a peer who was being bullied or speaking out in support of someone else. Exemplars also took action to help others through passive activities like letter-writing for Amnesty International or by actively protesting the Vietnam War.

**Violence in Home Country.** Two exemplars experienced life-changing events during adolescence.

"I was a child when a war was going on in my country [Bosnia] that caused us to flee as refugees. Everywhere I went I was either learning a new language or learning a new culture and attempting to fit in as a kid. I think those events affected my core values. I think it's important to not be a bully or a jerk, and I think that's where those values come from." M.Z.

**Unstable Home Life.** Different types of conditions created an unsettled home life for three exemplars.

"My grandfather died on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986 and that was the last day that I remember milking the cows because as soon as he passed away, all the neighbors would send a hired hand to do chores for me. I had to sell the farm, find a house for my grandma to live in, and finish my senior year of high school." B.C.

**Community Service.** Involvement in community service is highly correlated to youth moral development (Hart et al., 1998). Seventeen exemplars reported either being directly involved in community service during adolescence or witnessing their parents' community service activities. Unfortunately, this question was not asked directly and for the most part, exemplars who referenced community service were unprompted. Because community service

fosters an orientation centered on others, it may be an important ingredient in the formation of moral awareness.

**Additional Early Experiences.** Many exemplars started standing up for right and wrong at some point in their adolescence and may have been labeled as sensitive in their youth.

“I can remember one quite vividly, grade 8, a young woman named Patsy Dawson was being verbally abused by a teacher in the classroom. And I don't know what happened. But I just stood up and very sternly told the teacher that he had to stop abusing her and that what he was doing wasn't right. I was shaking as I was doing it, because I've never done anything like that my life and the teacher started (it was a male male teacher) started to cry and apologize to her and apologize to the class. [It was a] real pivotal moment for me and since then I've never hesitated to speak up when I felt I needed.” D.R.

“In junior high school I remember instances of seeing a classmate being ill-treated by others and then telling my friends to cut it out.” T.C.

“I competed in skiing and figure skating. . . But it was a very competitive environment, people stabbing each other in the back.” C. F.

“I grew up on a farm in Wisconsin and had what my wife will describe as not the greatest childhood. I got a chance to work 365 days a year. You know, I never had a 6-day cow or a 5-day cow. I learned if you don't get up, you don't eat.” B.C.

“My entire life nothing has ever been easy. Nothing has ever been given away for free. . . You always have to work for it. Once you achieve it, I guess it kind of makes it sweeter that it wasn't just handed to you.” M.Z.

“Our family made our own values. . . Sometimes I just felt like such an outsider. . . I remember going to a film that wasn't appropriate and I left. . . I got invited to go to Great

America (an amusement park) on a double date on a Sunday and I didn't go, because we don't do that on a Sunday." W.J.

Others had nurturing social support during these difficult times.

"It was easier for me to withstand social pressures in high school, because I had a group of friends from Scouts who shared my values." B.H.

### **Moral Importance**

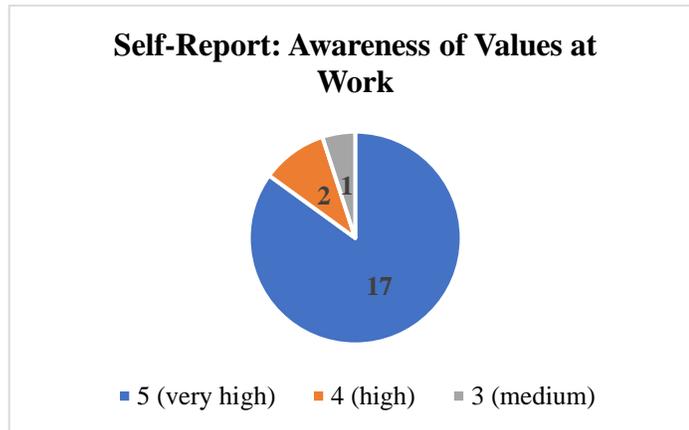
According to Damon and Hart (1992), "People whose self-concept is organized around their moral beliefs are highly likely to translate those beliefs into action consistently throughout their lives" (p. 455). Moral identity reflects a person's concept of who they are rooted in a set of moral traits. Aquino and Reed (2002) show a relationship between a person's self-importance of moral identity, moral cognition, and moral action. While this study did not employ Aquino and Reed's self-importance of moral identity assessment, exemplars demonstrated a high degree of self-importance of moral identity during their interviews.

Exemplars have thought about their values for a long time, and they pause to reflect on the moral consequences of their past choices. Some expressed regret for not acting on their values in certain situations, which remain powerful in their memories. Others expressed regret for potentially over-reacting at times. This section examines the importance of moral choices across exemplars' lives.

### ***Exemplars Report High Levels of Moral Awareness***

The Participation Survey and structured interviews explored exemplars' values and moral awareness at work.

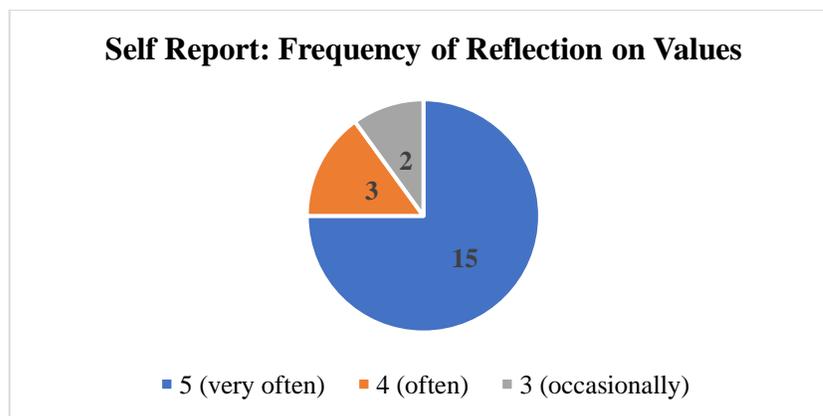
Survey question: What is your level of awareness of your own moral values in your everyday professional decisions? (1 = very low and 5 = very high). Nineteen exemplars responded “high” or “very high.”



*Figure 3*

“My faith is a huge part of how I think about my role as a leader, and my job as a leader is to serve the people that work at the organization that I’m the head of.” M.C.

Survey question: How frequently do you reflect on your personal life and your choices? (1 = not often and 5 = very often). Eighteen exemplars responded “often” or “very often.”



*Figure 4*

### ***Exemplars Rate the Importance of Moral Values Very Highly***

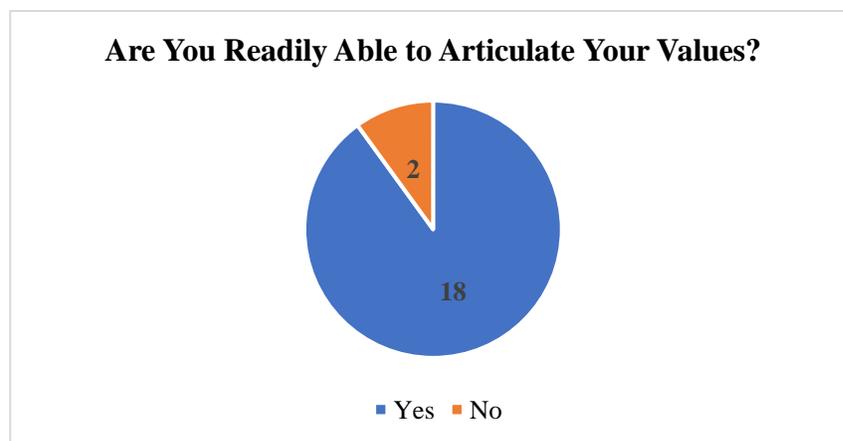
Many exemplars expressed their moral values emphatically. Some of these answers were prompted and others were not.

“I believe very strongly that everybody basically is created equal and that everybody has some good in them. And I feel very strongly that everybody should be treated equally whether it’s the totally impoverished or the totally rich.” W.H.M.

“People need to have a moral framework. A framework of values is essential for making decisions and not enough people have a well-formed framework.” P.M.

“The biggest thing [for me]. . .is just being true to myself. . .I don’t want to be in a situation where I feel like I am out of alignment with my beliefs and who I am as a person, because it creates friction and anxiety.” L.P.

Survey question: Could you easily articulate your own beliefs and values to someone else? (yes/no).



*Figure 5*

**Interview Follow-up Question.** The two survey respondents who said “No,” on the survey question above changed their answer during the interview. This question was one of the

nominating criteria that determined candidates' eligibility to participate in the study. Although all interviewees were asked to articulate their values, for these two participants, their responses also confirmed their eligibility.

A full list of exemplars' values is contained in Appendix G. One exemplar expressed an uncommon perspective.

“You're either a fountain or a drain in life. There's only one choice. You cannot be both. That's a conscious choice. Everyday we're faced with hundreds of choices. And we if we look through the lens that asks: am I gaining energy and infusing energy or am I sucking energy? Then we see things differently. There's only a finite amount of energy and what we do with energy matters.” J.J.

### *Exemplars Seek Ways to Transfer Their Values*

Survey question: Do you have personal moral lessons that you hope to transfer to other professionals?



*Figure 6*

**Interview Follow-up Questions.** During the interview, the two exemplars who had responded “no” to the survey question responded differently. This suggests that sometimes questions are interpreted differently in writing then when asked as part of a thematic interview.

The two exemplars who changed their answers are both retired; however, they both put a high priority on transferring their values to their own children and grandchildren.

Several exemplars also expressed the importance of transmitting their values to their children.

“The one thing that I’m probably most proud of is my three children have the same values that Kity and myself have. They’ve lived them and abided by them. That’s what I’m most proud of. Our children learned by example, not necessarily by preaching.” W.H.M.

“When talking to my kids, I tell them to pick your friends, pick your peers, like you pick your fruit.” J.J.

During the structured interviews, exemplars were asked if they believed they had transferred their values to others. Without exception, they all said, “yes,” and then described how they imparted moral lessons to others. Some held leadership positions, which provided opportunities to impart moral lessons, others were either currently mentoring people within their workplace or had previously mentored others and saw those discussions as opportunities to transmit their values and moral lessons. Some exemplars who were not directly involved in mentoring or leading a team at the time of the interview, created their own opportunities to transmit their values through writing and public speaking.

“If I don’t have them [opportunities to share moral lessons], I make them. When I was at the Agency, we designed courses and offered them as part of a curriculum.” P.H.

Exemplars believe that fostering moral growth in others is the right thing to do.

“One of the wonderful things about teaching both a clinic and a classroom [is the opportunity it provides to share my values.]” P.C.

“I’ve learned from my dad. . .that if people understand what you’re doing and why you’re doing it, it makes it a little easier. In those complicated decisions, in an office when you need to decide between a right or wrong, knowing that there are going to be ramifications one way or the other, making it clear to others that I get this and it’s on me and I’m going to move ahead and do XYZ, because I know this is what I believe, I think can be a valuable lesson for somebody else. It’s a little dose of moral courage and that’s something that I am comfortable talking about.” K.S.

“My biggest value for Marines is: ‘You’re family. You got to take care of each other as family members.’ And every time I talk to them. I repeat that. It’s even in my formal guidance that I give out. ‘You’re all a family and sometimes you’re going to fight. Sometimes you’re going to be mad at each other sometimes, you know, it doesn’t matter but at the end of the day, you take care of your family because that’s what you have.’” M.Z.

The table below illustrates different ways in which exemplars transfer their values. Some exemplars reported multiple methods, therefore the total number of responses illustrated in the table is greater than the number of interviewees. In this case, *relationships* refer to friendships; *professional writing* comprises blogs, emails, and books; and *staff* refers to all opportunities to transfer decision-making lessons to other colleagues.

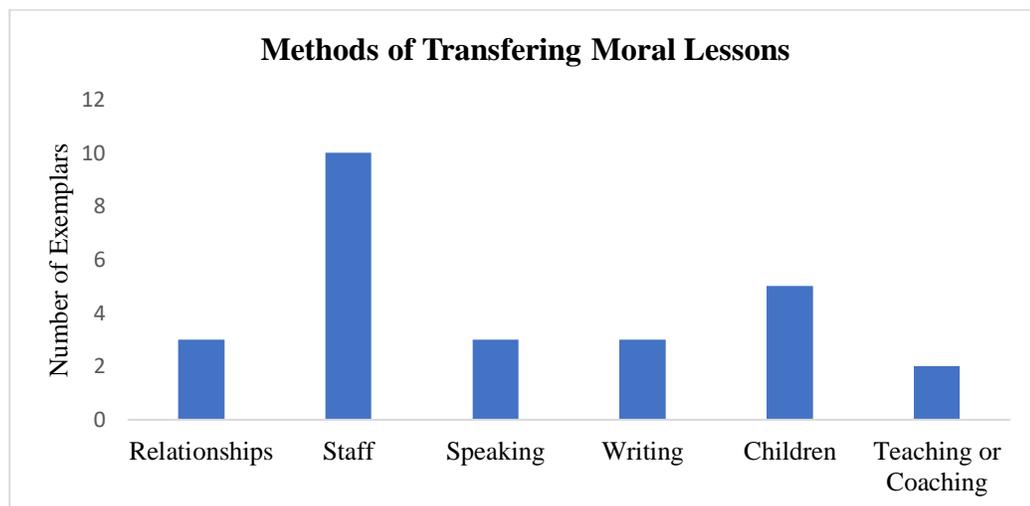


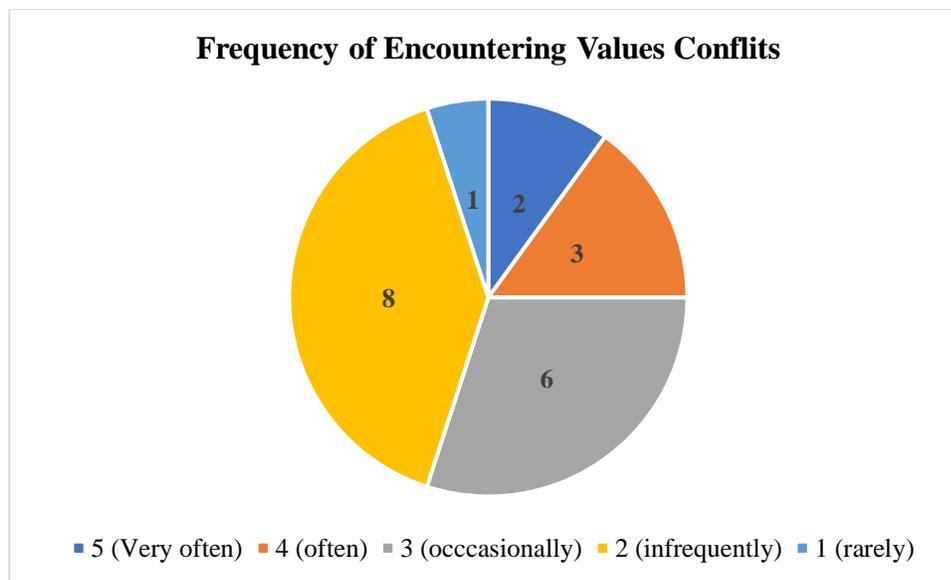
Figure 7

***Not All Exemplars Report Values Conflicts at Work.***

Although all exemplars in this study have a high level of moral awareness, they haven't necessarily faced an excessive amount of values-based conflict in their professional lives. Some reported only one or two notable conflicts that were so significant they had to speak out, however, these instances were powerful and often affected the welfare or job security of others. Other exemplars reported having worked in environments that were more prone to internal competition or they held roles that required them to make unpopular decisions.

“Fortunately for all my adult career I’ve been in a regulatory and law enforcement environment. . .I’ve had rewards for having done the right thing.” C.C.

Survey question: How often have you encountered conflicts that challenged your ability to uphold your values in your professional life? (1= rarely and 5 = very often) Each exemplar is represented only once in the chart below.



*Figure 8*

### **Moral Inspiration and Affirmation**

A prominent line of investigation in this study pertains to how moral exemplars keep their own values prominent in their lives. Do moral exemplars have distinct and teachable methods for nurturing their values? The answer to this question is yes, they do.

So how do exemplars seek moral inspiration and affirmation? By far, the most common answer to this question is: other people. Exemplars nurture their values through their relationships with friends, colleagues, and loved ones who share their values. These relationships act as a sounding board for processing events that question their values and choosing a course of action. Exemplars also discuss current events to make sense of what they see in the world. Several exemplars reported family relationships as their source of values-based support and moral fortitude. Others rely on relationships with a sibling or a spouse. Those who reported that their marriage fortified their moral strength also reported fluid and regular discussions with their spouse about values and decisions.

During the interviews, this question was posed in an open-ended manner, along the lines of: “How do you keep your values top of mind?” In most instances, the first response from an exemplar to this question was their spouse or a select group of friends. In a few cases, especially with people who had served in the military or U.S. Department of Defense, their first answer was an honor code or set of ascribed values from that institution. When this occurred, a follow-up question inquired whether there was a person in their life with whom they discussed values-based decisions, to which they almost unanimously affirmed that there was. Moreover, in the case of one exemplar who did not report a values-based relationship in their life, the interview had run over time and that specific follow-up question was not asked.

The other categories of moral affirmation and support, such as a code of ethics or an honor code, were not directly probed in the interview process. This was largely due to time limitations during the interview process and the open-ended nature of questions concerning how people nurture their values. Therefore, there was no checklist of each possible answer. If an exemplar didn't volunteer a specific source of support beyond a relationship, it wasn't captured.

### *Sources of Support for Moral Inspiration and Affirmation*

The diffuse nature of exemplars' sources of moral affirmation indicates the importance of nurturing their values and the level of initiative they take to devise custom methods. Because many exemplars mentioned multiple sources of support, the sum of these categories in the chart below is greater than the number of interviewees.

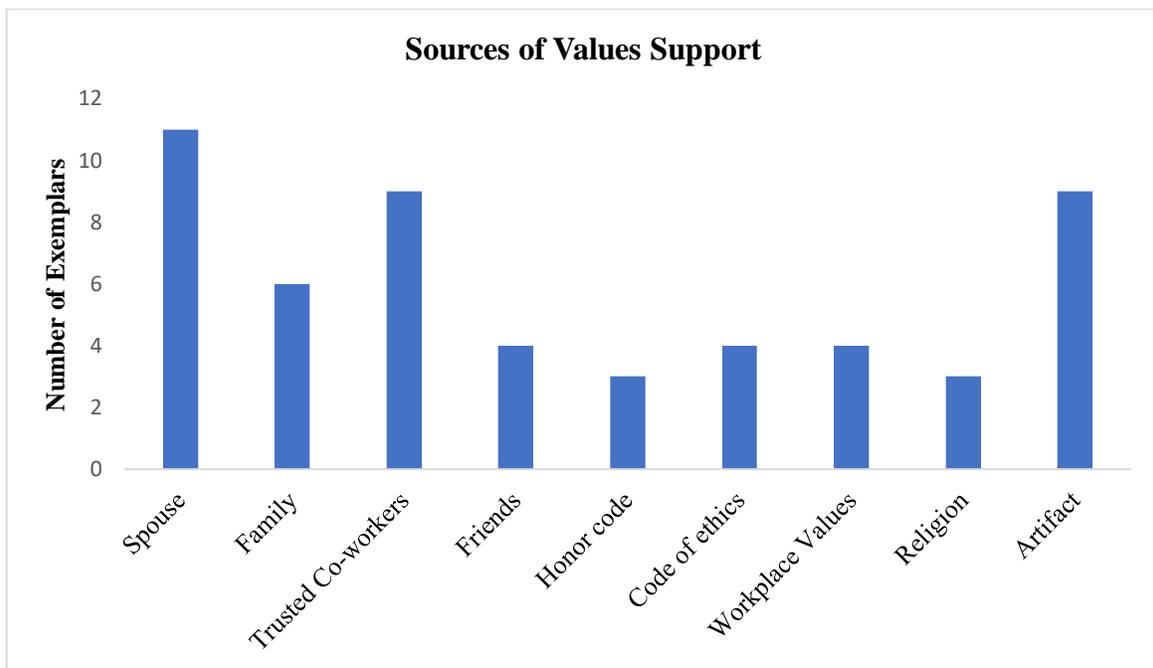


Figure 9

**Category 1: Relationship support.** The combined categories of spouse, sibling(s), trusted co-workers, and friend(s), account for the most common type of moral support. Each of these categories has distinct attributes that merit consideration. Exemplars referred to these

relationships as a sort of everyday wellspring for discussing the day's events, considering their own choices, and contemplating how they should handle their most delicate and difficult choices. One exemplar used the term: "reinforcing mechanism" to describe how his thoughts about his siblings and their implicitly shared values helped him stay on track throughout his life. Another exemplar referred to her friends as a reinforcing element in her life. Others described how their relationships with family, friends, and trusted co-workers served as a sort of accountability contract between exemplars and their trusted partners. This sense of accountability was particularly evident in relationships with spouses and siblings.

**Spouse.** When exemplars mentioned their spouse as their primary source of values affirmation, this person's influence was often framed as a source of moral inspiration that spurs them to grow toward their best self.

"The most important influence has been other people, especially my husband. He's a good, kind person and I think he's made me want to be a better person." L.R.

"We've been married for almost 45 years. Definitely, we have a shared value structure. That has never been a debatable issue." K.S.

"My wife is the most principled person I've ever met. . .She has no prejudice and she instilled in me the fact that if you believe in something, you have to follow through. . . I met my wife when we were 16 and she is the most value-oriented person I've ever known. She taught me to love everybody, and I do." W.H.M.

**Family/Siblings.** The role of family as a source of support for upholding and nurturing one's values during adulthood was common, moreover, this same source of moral support also plays a formative role during early childhood. One exemplar who came from a large family believed that his parents instilled strong values and his siblings kept those values alive.

“[My] parents. . .grew up in the depression. They were very values and principles based. So that was something reinforced from childhood and something I accepted as an adult. . .My older brothers and sisters reinforced values. . . We’re still a very close family. So that’s a reinforcing mechanism.” T.C.

One exemplar had an identical twin who was by her side as she formed her identity during adolescence and with whom she continues to talk or email every day as an adult. It was clear from the interview that she derived a uniquely powerful sense of clarity about who she was in the world through this relationship and believed that her identity formation was facilitated by and fortified by this relationship.

“I don't know how single people make it through. I had a twin sister, and we were incredibly close. The bond that twins have is different from the bonds that you have with everybody else and it is absolutely unconditional. I think that was probably a big advantage in my life.” L.R.

She went on to explain that within this relationship, she and her sister created a zone of connection and support that enabled them to manifest their very best selves.

***Friends.*** The type of friend that became a source of moral support and inspiration was often a friend from childhood or college who had a strong sense of the exemplars’ identity.

“Anthony Allen was the tight end for the football team and the biggest dude and probably the biggest personality. . .That relationship I had was reassuring. . .I felt like I had his support and trust and encouragement.” M.C.

“My friends are [my go-to] when I’m dealing with something at work. . .and I’m trying to manage the situation. It’s just really good to get a different perspective and kind of help you talk and think through what’s the right thing for you to do so that you are true to yourself.” L.P.

These friends also reflected a shared sense of moral definition:

“I have found like-minded spirits in friends, and that certainly is a nurturing and reinforcing element. . . Friends who I was very close to at Trinity [University] and are still among my closest friends, they are definitely in that core group. And I have a very close friend here [in Kansas], who has a very similar value frame to mine and I talk a lot and share a lot with her. So I would say there are 3-4 women who are very much aligned - and also that I feel I can share anything with, bounce things off of, figure things out, because their moral code is similar to mine.” K.S.

“I have lots of friends that I see on occasion and so if I’m in town and I’m catching up with a friend that I’ve known for a long time, we’ll have these really deep, in-depth discussions about what we’re thinking, about our faith, etc. But on an ongoing basis, my go-to is definitely my husband.” W.J.

Friends also seem to complement other sources of moral support or fill a void after a divorce or in the absence of a strong sibling relationship. Like family relationships, friends reinforce identity while providing a safe and loving space for moral questioning and moral affirmation.

***Co-workers.*** Exemplars reported a range of reasons and goals for cultivating workplace relationships centered on shared values. In some cases, they referred to the nature of their profession being one that attracts people with shared principles. This was the case for people who worked in the military, a department of defense organization, or at a regulatory agency. Within the commercial and nonprofit sectors, exemplars described an intentional process of identifying like-minded co-workers.

“When I work with someone new, I pay attention to how ethically they respond and follow through on a handshake, things like that.” B.H.

Trusted co-workers was one of the most frequently referenced sources of moral affirmation in the interviews. Research on employee engagement also identifies the role of having a “best friend” at work as a signal of employee well-being (Riordan, 2013). According to Gallup, having a close friend at work increases employee engagement by 50%.

### ***The Role of Other People in Nurturing Moral Values***

Several aspects of this study’s results dovetail with the tenets of positive psychology, and the role of relationships as a source or nurturing moral values is particularly noteworthy. A fundamental pillar of positive psychology is the great importance of other people to a person’s own well-being. Christopher Peterson, one of the founders of the field of positive psychology, believed that relationships were the cornerstone of well-being. He offered a three-word summary of the study of human flourishing: *Other people matter* (Peterson, 2006).

Research stemming from the Grant Study, which is one of the oldest longitudinal studies, having begun in 1938, confirms Peterson’s view about the central role of other people in well-being. “The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,” explained Robert Waldinger, a psychiatrist and professor at Harvard Medical School (Mineo, 2017).

Other research confirms the findings of the Grant Study, showing that strong relationships extend life, bolster the immune system, and lower the risk of anxiety and depression (Haidt, 2006). Additionally, Huta (2015) asserts that well-being depends on authentic relationships in which people assert their real selves. These relationships must be congruent with a person’s moral identity.

Therefore, the findings from this study, which highlight the importance of relationships as a source of nurturing and strengthening the salience of a person's own moral identity throughout their life contributes to existing knowledge of the role of relationships in well-being.

Relationships that not only reflect a person's moral values but also reinforce them and enable people to grow while upholding their personal moral framework, can serve as uniquely vital sources of well-being. Organizations that seek to bolster employees' ethical and moral decision-making, should consider the complementary benefits of fostering positive relationships, which strengthen well-being in tandem with fortifying moral decision-making.

**Category 2: A Written Representation of Values.** Eleven exemplars also rely on a written expression of their values. Some of these values stem from honor codes that were instilled at school, most notably at the Naval Academy, others take the form of their company's values, and still others come from written codes of ethics. Each of these categories has distinct influence and purpose for exemplars.

***Honor Codes.*** Three exemplars referenced an honor code during their interview. Two were directly referencing the honor code that was instilled in them at the Naval Academy, while one other person referenced a code of honor from the Central Intelligence Agency. These honor codes had a powerful and lasting effect on exemplars' decision-making and in all cases, exemplars derived a sense of pride in being connected to the institution and being endowed with this prescribed method for living their lives.

“At the Naval Academy, there's an honor code as well as a conduct code. And those are two different things. You can get in a lot of trouble at military institutions, but if you lie, you're out.” B.H.

“The Marine Corps philosophy of honor, courage, commitment, that's kind of driven into us and we're able to learn it through stories of valor, through stories of failure, so many different stories to show you why being ethical is important. M.Z.

“I've always carried this card [of leadership principles] with me. It's worn out now because it was in my wallet for years and years and it's fraying at the edges.” P.H.

***Codes of Ethics.*** Not surprisingly, exemplars reported turning to codes of ethics when trying to make a decision or when contemplating the ethical aspects of a recent event.

“If you're asked to do something or you're having a conversation with someone and they use certain phrasing that makes you think, hmm that sounds a little 'iffy.' Then the [code of ethics] handbook can come in handy.” S.R.

One exemplar also reported routinely reading “The Ethicist,” which is a column in the New York Times that examines a nuanced ethical issue submitted by a reader and then gives a verdict on how that issue should be handled. These stories of ethical conflicts of interest acted as a sort of mental gym for her to practice seeing issues from multiple sides.

***Workplace values.*** Four exemplars referenced workplace values as a source of moral support. In three of these instances, that exemplar was an owner or a part-owner of the organization and had helped shape and define the values. The fourth instance was a Marine who referenced Marine Corps values. For the three business owners, their authorship role in creating values within a workplace setting had a lasting influence. However, because no one else referenced their workplace values in a discussion centered on values, it's reasonable to question the influence of workplace values for someone who didn't author them.

***Religion/scripture.*** While twelve exemplars identified religion as a meaningful influence in the formation of their values during childhood and adolescence, only four identified religion

as an ongoing source of nurturing their values. Three exemplars specifically noted that religious scripture was meaningful, including a weekly sermon or homily.

“I study every morning, the gospel.” W.J.

The fourth referred to connection with a religious community as a support for their moral framework.

**Category 3: Physical Artifact.** The question of whether an exemplar had an artifact that reminded them of their values was included in the initial survey and eight people responded affirmatively. For the most part, these artifacts served as reminders of poignant moments in their life when the actions of someone else affected them profoundly in either a positive or a negative way. One particularly interesting artifact was a hand-carved wooden slingshot given to this exemplar when he was nine years old by a boy who was poor and going through a difficult time. The two boys were parting and would likely never see each other again and for him, this artifact serves as an abiding reminder of human kindness.

The other notable artifact was a brick, which this exemplar keeps in a drawer in his office. It serves as a reminder of a very difficult situation caused by a person who refused to act ethically. Today this artifact reminds him of overcoming difficult challenges, even if the process for doing so is long and unpleasant.

### **Moral Courage**

The courage to act on our values is essential to a just society, and it is also a necessary ingredient in a workplace environment in which everyone has an opportunity to flourish. The remarkable power of moral courage, which enables people to risk friendships, promotions, and even job security is a vital force that arises from a desire to create moral coherence between a person’s inner world and the environment around them (Damon & Hart, 1992).

One of the three criteria for participating in this study was a prior experience of having risked personal or organizational gains to act in accordance with their values. Exemplars report that expressing moral courage is both difficult and reassuring.

“When you make the right decision, it’s rewarding. That doesn’t mean it’s comfortable, but it is comforting. The lack of comfort you feel before taking action is what drives you to make the right decision.” B.H.

“I ultimately had to make decisions that you can’t find in an MBA textbook.” H.R.

“For me, you’re really applying facts to principles to come up with a reasonable conclusion. And once you’ve gone through that process, there’s a comfort in knowing that you’ve made the right decision. And if you’ve made the right decision, you stick with it. From my perspective, it’s the fear of not doing the right thing and possibly having guilt of buckling under that keeps me focused.” T.C.

During the interviews, exemplars described their experiences of moral courage, which led to moral action, as feelings or impulses that arose suddenly and powerfully urging them to act.

“I had to make a decision, you know, ‘We’re going to get this straight. You’re going to stop cheating on your wife. You’re going to come back and start working in the business.’ We did the forgiving things, but he refused to change his behavior. . .He decided he would like to go somewhere else.” B.C.

“I was told straight up that I had to fire someone because she was obese. But this woman was really hard working, she was polished, presentable. . .And I did actually go to HR and I was like, ok so this is what happened, and I’m not lodging a complaint. I’m just telling you that I’m not going to do this. And they [said] no, you don’t need to do this. Then I turned around and went back to my job and forgot all about it. It never came up again.” L.R.

“Whenever I sense something as being unjust or someone crossing over boundaries, it’s not like there’s a set of rules, it’s just something that is felt inside, there’s a sense that that isn’t right.” H.R.

One exemplar shared a story from when she was a teen-ager and encountered an adult female who was clearly in danger.

“I tried to help her, because I had seen a look like that on a woman’s face who was about to get beat up or battered. I’d seen that before and I was afraid of getting in trouble, but I decided to try to help her.” M.Z.

### **How Moral Exemplars Assess Risks**

Within the workplace, exemplars are aware that their choices can affect their financial security, their prestige, and their opportunities for career advancement. Many suffered consequences for their courageous actions, such as having their role demoted within the organization, losing a promotion that they had been groomed for, losing their job, losing friends, and losing votes in the next political race.

**Reasons for Taking a Risk.** On multiple occasions, exemplars risked their job security to hire or promote a person of a minority race or a female, or both. Exemplars also risked their jobs to prevent minorities or disabled people from being unjustly dismissed from their jobs.

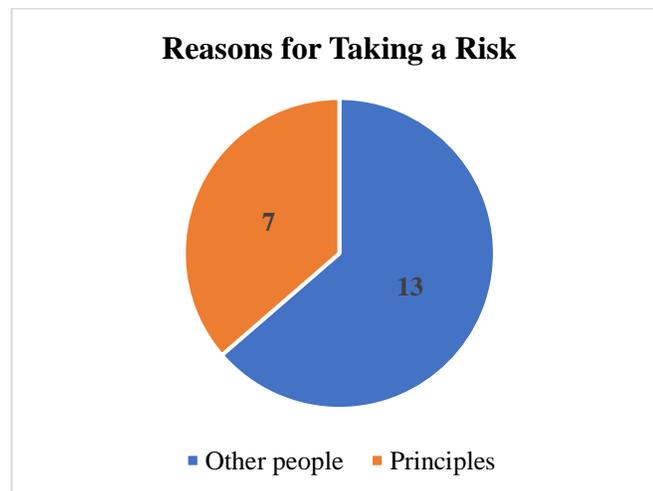
“As I looked through the list, I realized that the top 10 people on the list were all people that had various types of mental health or learning disability issues and I’m sitting in the room with my boss, my peers. The human resources people are looking. . . I realized I can’t sit back and let this happen. I have to speak up. . . I explained my concerns about putting these people on the list and it seemed clear to me that they were identified because of various mental health or learning issues. . . The human resources person was wise enough to realize that there was a

potential legal human rights issue at play and she stopped the session said look, this is inappropriate.” D.R.

“I saw myself as advocating for the people in a position who couldn’t speak for themselves.” P.C.

“While I was perfectly willing to follow the Church belief and my belief on abortion for myself, I was never willing to impose [it on others when I served in government.] And I was told that that was not an allowable value differentiation by the Bishop and by others. . . That was enormously painful. My high school, the school I attended for 12 years, invited me to be a graduation speaker and then I was disinvited by the Bishop.” K.S.

Exemplars also shared stories of taking risks to uphold their principles, which included honesty and integrity; however, these were less common than the stories of protecting and advocating for other people. Their reasons for taking a risk are reflected in the chart below, which is based on the first anecdote each exemplar shared. In this chart, each exemplar is represented once.



*Figure 10*

### **Maintaining Perspective**

Some exemplars expressed either regret or frustration over their experiences speaking up. Three noted that as they aged, they had become more adept at seeing other perspectives and anticipating outcomes before acting. Other exemplars understood the peril of acting with too little information.

“Personally, I don’t react emotionally immediately, because that’s always a recipe for disaster. I try to take a step back and say: ‘if I were in that person’s shoes, how would I take that?’ I try to use that approach to guide how I interact with other people and conduct myself.”  
L.P.

Some exemplars referred to balancing moral awareness with perspective as “harnessing” their desire to act. In this sense, controlling the urge to act may be a form of *self-regulation*, which is a process people use to exert control over their desires and impulses (Baumeister, Gaillot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006).

Another aspect of character that moderates moral action is *intellectual humility*, which resembles open-mindedness and enables people to discern factual evidence from information that feels correct (Leary et al., 2017). Some scientists classify intellectual humility as a personality trait, while others see it as a virtue or character strength that can be taught.

Many exemplars expressed a strong awareness of and respect for others’ views. Some specifically described a willingness to be wrong, and other exemplars emphasized self-discipline.

“My position is not absolute. When I find out I’m wrong, I’m the first one to step up and acknowledge it. And that willingness to be wrong has served me well by helping me build trust. As a result, people often call me for advice.” C.C.

“There are many sides to a contentious issue, and everybody can be right and still disagree.” P.H.

“Listening is a very important element of my interactions.” G.W.

“I think it’s always easier to convince people to do something if there are laws and regulations in place that govern whatever that behavior is. To be able to draw on those laws is very helpful.” D.R.

“Sometimes to get justice served, you have to be smart about finding a way through the trauma. You can’t just be stubborn for its own sake. You have to really think through what the implications are of any given action.” P.M.

Many exemplars recounted difficult decisions that required hours if not days of contemplation before acting.

“Not too long ago I had a tobacco company come to me and say, ‘We want to hire you to do a bunch of work for us,’ probably \$30 or \$40,000. . . I was trying to say ‘yes’ to wanting to work with him and ‘yes’ to them trying to get better but also ‘yes’ to my value of not wanting to work with a tobacco or an alcohol company. I spent several hours perseverating. . . [then] I went back to him, and I said: ‘Here’s the deal. . . I will put together a mini course for you...[and] I will donate it to you, which allows me to say yes to you and also say yes to my values’. . . [This decision] increased my awareness of my values, and it also strengthened my relationship with that person.” W.J.

“I took a day. I came home that evening after the group had met. I said either I can let it go for another year or I can take a stand. So, I made an appointment with H.R. and I presented the case, knowing that this could be detrimental for me. . . Within six months there was a

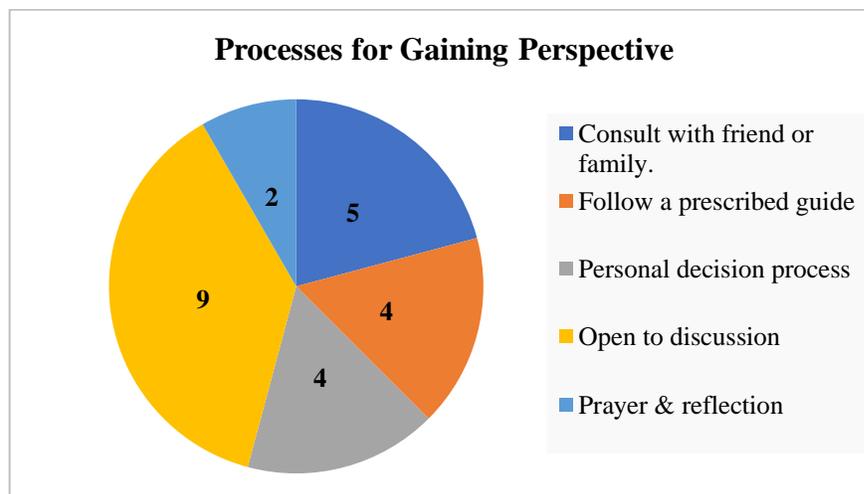
reorganization. . .I was demoted in the sense that I no longer reported to that Vice President directly. I was moved to report to another person.” S.R.

“I think if I hadn’t spent the time on the front line and not understanding the hardship of the people working in very difficult circumstances I might not have respected their perspective. . .There were conflicting values there, one of which was respecting people and what really makes them tick and then respecting life in all its forms. We all spray mosquitos without a second thought, where is the line there?” H.R.

### *How Exemplars Gain Perspective*

Like the diffuse methods exemplars use to nurture their values, their methods of obtaining perspective are custom developed by each exemplar to suit their personality. Consistent with other questions, these were open-ended so exemplars answers are not responding to a list of choices.

This question of perspective-taking was only posed to the last eleven exemplars. The chart below reflects multiple answers from some exemplars so the total is greater than eleven.



*Figure 11*

**Consult with a Friend or Family Member.** Five exemplars in this sub-group explained that they commonly consult with a trusted friend or family member before making a values-based decision that could negatively affect their career and relationships.

**Follow a Prescribed Guide.** In this case, a prescribed guide refers to either a code of ethics, an honor code, or other values-based decision tool. Four exemplars stated that they have consulted these guides, either by directly reading them or by reflecting on them.

**Personal Decision Process.** Four exemplars have developed their own process for evaluating the merits of their position.

“My view was that if I couldn’t explain why I was doing something, then maybe I wasn’t right. The ability to rationally explain a position was a type of justification and judgment. The real issue I considered was whether my position was factually and intellectually a sound position.” T.C.

**Open to Discussion.** Nine exemplars in this sub-group explained that they are always open to discussing their perspective and listening to another person’s point of view.

**Prayer and Reflection.** Two members of this sub-group use prayer as a self-reflective process to consider the most prudent course of action. These exemplars both explained that their aim was to uphold their values without making another person feel judged.

### **Summary of Findings**

1. **Relationships with people who share their values are exemplars’ primary method of nurturing, updating, and affirming their moral values.** To remain attuned to their values, 19 out of 20 exemplars reported that they rely on key relationships with people they trust. These relationships are where exemplars turn to contemplate values-based decisions, especially when their values are challenged by external factors or when they

need to weigh the consequences of one action against another. In this type of exchange, key relationships support exemplars' efforts to interpret events in their lives, sift through the array of choices available to them, and find clarity about which choice is right for them. Exemplars don't label these conversations as a "values discussion." However, they believe that their intentions and desires are well understood by the person helping them.

Additionally, exemplars turn to these key relationships when trying to make sense of the world around them, especially when an event in society or politics violates their values. Here too, exemplars seek out key relationships to interpret their observations, to process their frustrations or disappointments, and to affirm their values-based position.

Another method in which relationships shape moral choice occurs implicitly through a shared desire to maintain the bonds of a relationship. In this sense, just thinking about the other person acts as a "reinforcing mechanism" in the words of one exemplar, that guides behavior to align with the expected norms established in the relationship. The exemplar T.C. further explained the mediating effects a *reinforcing mechanism* in his description of how anticipating family get-togethers influences his moral choices. To be fully embraced and respected by his siblings, who were raised "to be a responsible individual according to core principles," he must adhere to those principles when he is apart from them.

According to Aristotle, this type of relationship is what he referred to as a *friendship of virtue*, because each person wants to see the other flourish and to live a moral life in which they are their very best self. He believed virtuous friends are the optimal form of relationship and he distinguished them from two other types of relationships: utilitarian or transactional friends who help the other achieve a goal; and pleasure-seeking friends who

associate almost purely for their own enjoyment (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1994).

Aristotle claimed that *eudaimonia*, loosely translated as human flourishing, is best experienced through virtuous friendships, and the desire to sustain these virtuous relationships is the chief reason why people act ethically (Jacquette, 2001).

Relationships exert influence on us. For the moral exemplars in this study, their virtuous relationships act as a reinforcing mechanism, influencing their choices and behavior even when miles apart. Merely thinking about another person and our desire for them to hold us in high regard can shape our behavior. Moreover, the risk of eroding that special relationship, through which we feel that we are our very best, constrains our behavior and limits the choices we believe are available to us in any given moment.

2. **Moral exemplars rely on a broad and diverse set of sources for moral affirmation and inspiration.** The exemplars in this study identified a total of nine different types of moral support, including sources as diverse and possibly complementary as a strong relationship with a sibling or spouse in addition to a code of ethics or personally relevant artifact. To keep themselves morally straight regardless of what challenges life throws at them, exemplars cultivate a variety of influences to fortify their own moral resolve. It's possible that moral exemplars' keen sensitivity to the vicissitudes of human decision-making makes them more aware of ever-present risks such as ethical fading and ethical blindness. This acute awareness might inform their decision to actively cultivate and even diversify their sources of moral inspiration and affirmation.
3. **The well-being of others is a catalyst for moral courage.** Moral exemplars in this study described their values in a variety of different ways, which are all listed in Appendix G. Among those descriptions of their own values, the well-being of other people factored

prominently. Additionally, when exemplars described their stories of moral courage, their reasons for speaking out often centered on their desire to protect others. Most exemplars cited the welfare and fair treatment of other people as their primary reason for risking their own relationships, career prospects, and even job security.

- 4. Individual authorship in company values may be essential for employees to feel these values are their own.** This study's results indicate that for a person to claim ownership of a company's values, they must take part in creating them. In the Participation Survey, exemplars were asked how they remain mindful of their values. There were three options for this question: 1) They are written down; 2) They are prominent in my memory; and 3) Other. Five participants responded that their values are written down. Follow-up questions revealed that in three of these instances, these written values were company values. However, each exemplar who adhered to their company values had helped author those values. A fourth was referring to her family's values, which are in a frame that hangs in the house. And the fifth exemplar was referring to her code of conduct as a Marine. Importantly, except for the Marine, no exemplar referenced their workplace values unless they had a hand in writing those values. This finding indicates that values may only resonate deeply when a person has taken an active role in their creation.

### **Limitations**

The most notable limitation in this study was time, which constrained the study design and curtailed hopes of including additional exemplar analysis such as character strengths. Additionally, finding exemplars who fit the nomination criteria was a time-consuming effort, which compromised other aspects of the study design and analysis.

The validity of the data would have benefitted from additional raters and a coding process that de-personalized the data before examining it. Because the study was designed, conducted, and analyzed by only one person, the transcripts were not de-personalized prior to analysis.

Additionally, the exemplar methodology (Bronk, 2012) recommends including a small comparison group to confirm which descriptive qualities of exemplars are unique compared to a general population, which this study lacked.

The small sample size presents several concerns for generalizing the study's findings. This is especially true of details such as the prevalence of conflict within exemplars early lives.

Last, the study sample reflected some gender and racial diversity but would've benefitted from an intentional effort to diversify exemplars.

### **Future Directions**

This study's results indicate several lines of promising research, particularly regarding the role of relationships in nurturing values and the role of authorship in crafting values that resonate meaningfully with people. Future research should explore these and other insights from this study with larger samples of moral exemplars along with a comparison sample to know which attributes are unique to those for whom moral values are uniquely salient.

### ***Additional Questions to Examine***

- How do our thoughts about our virtuous relationships affect our moral behavior? Can this line of inquiry be examined through fMRI research and other modes of investigation? If merely thinking about a relationship in which we feel that we are at our best can positively influence our behavior, then ethical culture and behavior leaders within organizations can integrate this insight into their programs.

- Are moral exemplars, those who take psychological risks, the same as brave exemplars, who risked their lives to save Holocaust victims? Putnam (1997) distinguished between physical, moral, and psychological courage. In his view, moral courage enables people to take risks to uphold their values. Psychological courage enables people to face their deepest fears and confront an illness or disability. Physical courage, however, is required to overcome the fear of bodily injury or death to protect oneself or others. Research should examine whether the courage required to take ethical action in the workplace stems from the same root as the courage required to risk one's life to save another's.
- To what extent does the interview process itself serve as a positive intervention for raising the salience of a person's moral identity? And why did exemplars want to participate in the study? Many exemplars enjoyed the experience and found it "refreshing." Others said the questions made them think about things they hadn't considered in a long time. Is simply talking about your moral values to an interested listener an ethical intervention?
- Targeted research should be conducted to further explore the many ways in which people nurture their values. This study only scratched the surface of this topic. For example, do people seek legitimacy from a code of ethics and self-assurance through dialog with a trusted friend? To what extent are they nurturing the moral aspects of their own identity through these conversations?
- Regarding artifacts, what type of moral cues do artifacts provide? Do they activate a person's morals or their moral identity?

### Appendix A: Study Participants

List of study participants in order of participation.

Participant Name and Professional Title	Initials
Matt Candler Founder, 4.0 Schools	M.C.
Brian Chalsma President & Owner, The Roofing Company	B.C.
Prentiss Cox Professor of Law, University of Minnesota Former Manager of the Consumer Enforcement Division of the Minnesota Attorney General's Office	P.C.
Chuck Cross SVP Consumer Protection and Non-Depository Supervision Section, Conference of State Bank Supervisors (CSBS) U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Implementation Team 2010 - 2011	C.C.
Thomas J. Curry Partner, Nutter, McClennen, & Fish Law Firm U.S. Comptroller of the Currency 2012 – 2017 FDIC Board of Directors, 2003 - 2009	T.C.
Christine S. Fahlund, Ph.D. Former Senior Financial Planner and Vice President T. Rowe Price Group	C.F.
Paul Hollingsworth Eurasia Intelligence Advisor, BP Central Intelligence Agency, Operations and Analysis, 1987-2014 National Security Council, 2012-2014	P.H.

<p>Bryan E. Hurd  Vice President, Aon Cyber Solutions  Former Intel Director Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit  Founder NCIS Cyber Program, U.S. Department of Defense</p>	<p>B.H.</p>
<p>Whitney Johnson  CEO of Disruption Advisors and Executive coach  Best-selling author and Harvard Business Review contributor  Named one of the ten leading business thinkers globally by Thinkers50</p>	<p>W.J.</p>
<p>Jason Joplin  Director of Customer Learning, GAF</p>	<p>J.J.</p>
<p>Patricia McGuire  President  Trinity Washington University</p>	<p>P.M.</p>
<p>William H. Moeller  Former Senior VP Investments and Portfolio Manager  Raymond James</p>	<p>W.H.M.</p>
<p>Lynn Pina  Chief Marketing Officer  GeoBlue</p>	<p>L.P.</p>
<p>Selena Ramkeesoon  Senior Advisor  Emergent</p>	<p>S.R.</p>
<p>Don Richardson, Ph.D.  Managing Partner  Shared Value Solutions</p>	<p>D.R.</p>
<p>Henry Ritchie  Former Partner  McKinsey and Company</p>	<p>H.R.</p>

Lorraine Ross Executive Director, Institutional Giving NPR	L.R.
Kathleen Sebelius CEO of Sebelius Resources U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services 2009-2014 Governor of Kansas, 2003 – 2009	K.S.
Gary Wilmore Former Executive Vice President, Conestoga Wireless Company Manager, Investor Relations, Bell Atlantic Product Manager, Voice Storage Services, Bell of Pennsylvania	G.W.
Maida K. Zheng Captain United States Marine Corps	M.Z.

### Appendix B: Preliminary Interviews

Seven preliminary interviews with experts informed the design of the study, the Participation Survey, and structured questions used in the interviews. Those interviewees are listed here.

Name and Title	Topic Discussed
Julia Pool Assistant Instructor, University of Pennsylvania Master of Applied Positive Psychology Founder, Burn-In Mindset	Exemplar methodology, qualitative study design
Andrew Soren Assistant Instructor, University of Pennsylvania Master of Applied Positive Psychology Founder, Eudaimonic by Design	Values-based leadership, ethical leadership training
Arlen Solodkin President, Institute of Well-Being, Mexico	Moral formation, adolescent moral awareness
Jeremy Clifton, Ph.D. Senior Research Scientist, University of Pennsylvania	Values, beliefs, and schemas
Chuck Cross SVP , Conference of State Bank Supervisors	Ethics and compliance
Jean Hollingsworth C.I.A.	Organizational design, ethical behavior
Mary Crossan, Ph.D. Professor of Strategic Management, Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario	Leadership, character, and the financial crisis of 2008

## Appendix C: Participation Survey

### Participation Survey

The survey was delivered through Poll Everywhere and was required for all participants.

Questions designed to confirm participation. These are all [Yes/No] questions.

1. Could you easily articulate your own beliefs and values to someone else?
2. Have you ever served in a leadership role with decision-making power that could affect the well-being of at least 20 others (either inside or outside the organization)?
3. Have you ever demonstrated a willingness to adhere to your values even if that decision put personal or organizational gains at risk?

Additional questions to support the interviews:

4. How do you remain mindful of your values in your professional life? [Drop-Down Menu]
  1. Option 1: They are written down
  2. Option 2: They are prominent in my memories
  3. Option 3: Other
5. If you chose “Other” to question #4, please elaborate.
6. Was there a specific event in your life that increased your attention to your own moral values at work? [Yes/No]
7. If you chose “Yes” to answer number 6, please elaborate.
8. Do you have any artifact that represents or reminds you of your values [Yes/No]
9. What is your level of awareness of your own moral values in your everyday professional decisions? (1 = very low and 5 = very high)
10. How frequently do you reflect on your personal life and your choices? (1 = not often and 5 = very often).
11. How often have you encountered conflicts that challenged your ability to uphold your values in your professional life (1=rarely and 5 = very often)?
12. Do you have personal moral lessons that you hope to transfer to other professionals? [Yes/No]
13. Do you agree to the consent form that is attached to this email?

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

### List of interview questions

The following list provided only a framework to guide the conversation. It was emailed in advance to all participants except for those who were interviewed first.

1. Can you tell me more about your values? How would you describe them to a friend or to your son/daughter?
2. Let's talk about the origin of your values. Which people, events, or organizations influenced the formation of your values?
3. At what age do you recall first understanding the meaning of the word, "virtue?" Are there any images, feelings, or events that come to mind when you consider that question?
4. When is your first memory of realizing that you hold values that are distinct from others' values? Please describe the event or images that come to mind when you recall this memory.
5. Moving forward into your professional life: Tell me about a time when you had to make a choice at either a personal or an organizational cost in order to uphold your values.
  1. How clear was this choice for you? How much time did you spend weighing your choices?
  2. Once you made your choice, how certain were you of your decision?
  3. How did you respond when others disagreed with you?
  4. Did this event increase your awareness of your values? How?
6. How do you keep your values top of mind?
  1. Do you reflect on your own choices in the context of your work life?
  2. Do you have an artifact that reminds you of your values? Please describe?
  3. Do you have a community or a specific person with whom you discuss your choices and the choices of others?
7. What other aspect of your moral beliefs and values in the context of your professional life have we not discussed?

## Appendix E: Consent

Consent Form, Approved by the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board



### CONSENT FORM

Leadership Credo, Exemplar Interview

Research conducted in conjunction with the Master of Applied Positive Psychology Program

#### **The Present Study**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. You can decide if you want to participate or not. Before you decide, read the information below. If you have any questions, please contact: [kc@kelliecummings.com](mailto:kc@kelliecummings.com).

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to answer questions about your personal beliefs and how those beliefs have shaped your choices. You do not have to answer any question you don't want to.

#### **What happens if I don't want to participate?**

You can choose whether you want to be in the study or not. You can quit the study at any point.

#### **What are the risks?**

This study should not present risk for you. It's important to note that we will collect personal information based on your answers to our questions. This information will be published as a research paper and it will be publicly available. Your answers will be associated with your name.

#### **What happens to the recording of my interview?**

Your interview will remain with Kellie Cummings. She will store the audio, video, and written data on an encrypted storage device called SpiderOak.

#### **Will I be paid for participating in this study?**

You are not paid or otherwise compensated for your participation.

#### **What do I do if I have questions about the study?**

Please contact Kellie Cummings at: [kc@kelliecummings.com](mailto:kc@kelliecummings.com) with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in the research study, please contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania at: 215-898-2614.

#### **Participation Agreement**

By answering "Yes, I consent," to Question #13 in the participation survey, you agree to participate in this interview and understand that your information will be used in a research project that aims to better understand how beliefs and values affect behaviors. You have read this form and had your questions answered. You understand it is your choice to participate and you can stop at any time.

### Additional Information Concerning Consent

Because these interviews were not anonymous, it was important that participants be fully aware of their lack of anonymity and to feel confident that their information would be handled respectfully. Therefore, participants were informed about the attribution aspects of the study first in the invitation email, second in the email that invited them to complete the survey, and a third time with their list of interview questions.

#### **First, in the initial invitation email:**

##### Confidentiality Disclosure

This interview will be recorded, and I will use your answers, along with your name and title in my research. Data collected from the survey and character questionnaire will be used in aggregate only. Also, if requested, I will email you any direct quotations from your interview and allow you at least 72 hours for approval. The intent of this research is purely to capture insights that meaningfully advance the scientific understanding of moral motivations. Every effort will be made to ensure your comfort with the manner in which I contextualize your information.

#### **Second, in the interview scheduling email:**

1. Please complete **this short Participation Survey**. (There is no need to register with Poll Everywhere.)
  - o Question #13 in the Survey confirms your consent to participate. Please review **this consent document**, which is based on a prescribed format from the University of Pennsylvania, then click "Yes, I consent" on question #13.
2. Pick a time **on this calendar between** June 14 - 19 for your 30 minute interview. I'll send you a Zoom meeting invite for the date and time of your preference.

#### **Third, in the interview confirmation email:**

Reminder about your information: Please know that this information is being collected for academic research. This interview is not akin to investigative journalism and there is no intent to record or share specific information about people, places, or organizations you worked for. At this point, much of the data is being captured and assessed in aggregate. You have the right to request a 72-hour review of any direct quotations that are used for the purposes of illustration. Bottom line: your confidence in how this information is used is very important to me. Please feel free to inquire for more detail at any time.

## Appendix F: Participation Survey Results

Below are the cumulative answers to the Participation Survey that was emailed to all exemplars prior to their interviews. [Questions 1-3 formed the nomination criteria.]

1. Could you easily articulate your own beliefs and values to someone else?

Yes= 18 / No = 2

Note: The two people who answered “no” were able to easily articulate their moral values during the interview. Questions 1-3 qualified people as exemplars, therefore only people who were able to answer “yes” to all three questions participated in the study.

2. Have you ever served in a leadership role with decision-making power that could affect the well-being of at least 20 others (either inside or outside the organization)?

Yes = 20 / No = 0

3. Have you ever demonstrated a willingness to adhere to your values even if that decision put personal or organizational gains at risk?

Yes = 20 / No = 0

4. How do you remain mindful of your values in your professional life?

They are written down = 5

They are prominent in my memory = 11

Other = 4

5. If you chose "Other" to question #4, please elaborate.

C.F.: They are in my DNA. I raised two sons to do and believe the same. Always stand up for what you believe is right. Love and care for others. Protect our planet.

J.J.: Gut and Spirit

H.R.: They are more of a felt sense and a clear line around fairness

C.C.: I know innately what guides me, but I would not say that it is memory based. For me, if you have to "remember" ethics, morals or values then the risk is high that you may "forget" or lapse in the application. If they are part of your core, you simply do what is right without thinking it through and over time you can see a pattern of consistent action.

6. Was there a specific event in your life that increased your attention to your own moral values at work?

Yes = 12 / No = 8

**Appendix F: Participation Survey Results (Continued)**

7. If you answered "Yes" to question #6, please elaborate.

M.C.: Multiple. Tiny camp presentation - value: transparency, co-own, Glenn and Cam sign hanging moment, yes, and/hospitality.

T.C: Most of my career was spent in public service as a financial regulator. As an public official during the New England and Global Financial Crisis my personal values were my compass.

C.F.: Not directly related to work, but publicly protesting the Vietnam War and racial inequality when I was in graduate school solidified my determination to speak out against actions and events at all levels (political and personal) that I believed to be ill-conceived or simply immoral. I became committed to standing up for the rights of others, regardless of the consequences to me personally.

W.H.M.: Early in my career, and many times afterwards, my decisions or actions had life or death consequences for those I knew or those I would never meet in person. One event in which I did not speak up enough to avoid an incident where lives of others were drastically impacted still sits in my mind today. Many were involved, many were informed, but it still haunts me. I needed just a small additional amount of confidence in my values way back then and it could have been a different and much better outcome. I do not wish to add to that list, and strive to make sure I never will.

W.J.: After working as a Wall Street analyst at Merrill Lynch, and in the aftermath of the bubble bursting and people losing a lot of money, and seeing equity analysts be sued for putting ratings on stocks that were neutrals, when that was really code, for sell, made me take a hard look at the ratings that I placed on stocks. I consider myself to be an honest person—but it did cause introspection. Had I put a neutral on a stock when I really meant sell? Telling myself that this was acceptable because all of our investors were institutions and they knew the game that was being played. That was a wake-up call for me. A reminder that frequently our morality is a function of context. That being the case, how do I put myself situations where I will act according to my core values.

P.M.: Having to deal with extremely nasty criticism of decisions to admit many low income students of color from the city made it necessary for me to clarify my own values and commitment to action for social justice

D.R.: Family-related human rights issue

H.R.: Yes my moral values at work and outside work develop over time in response to events. The most dramatic was in relation to integrity in Bolivia when I was General Manager for a subsidiary there.

### Appendix F: Participation Survey Results (Continued)

S.R.: While working at a global organization, barriers were repeatedly erected as I attempted to have minority, female managers promoted. This was the case although I submitted robust documentation showing how each nominee met and exceeded the promotion criteria set by the firm.

8. Do you possess any artifact that represents or reminds you of your values?  
Yes = 8 / No = 12
  9. What is your level of awareness of your own moral values in your everyday professional decisions? (1 = very low and 5 = very high)  
1 = 0 / 2 = 0 / 3 = 1 / 4 = 2 / 5 = 17
  10. How frequently do you reflect on your values and your professional choices? (1 = not often and 5 = very often).  
1 = 0 / 2 = 0 / 3 = 2 / 4 = 3 / 5 = 15
  11. How frequently have you encountered conflicts that challenged your ability to uphold your values throughout your professional life (1=rarely and 5 = very often)?  
1 = 1 / 2 = 8 / 3 = 6 / 4 = 3 / 5 = 2
  12. Do you have personal moral lessons that you hope to transfer to other professionals?  
Yes = 18 / No = 2
- Note: While the answer to this question had no bearing on participation, it was part of the interview and both exemplars who had answered “no” to this question were retired and didn’t feel they were currently in a capacity to professionally mentor others. Although, they both made an effort to mentor others and transfer their moral lessons and values in the process.
13. Do you agree to the consent form that was attached to the email?  
Yes - 20 / No = 0

## Appendix G: Full List of Exemplars' Moral Values

### In Their Own Words

Following are the articulated values of each moral exemplar who participated in this study.

M.C.: My personal values are: humility, understanding, and discipline. My family values are: love God, serve others, and be thankful.

B.C.: So one of the things is: actions speak louder than words. Building excellence is a thing that we've used for a long time in business, but I've also tried to apply it to my personal life and my family where you know, we read a bunch of books. We had a book club with Dad as my girls are growing up, we would get up early in the morning and we'd read a bunch of different books.

P.C.: I see the world as highly unfair. That is the difference between my values and others' values. So I guess a lot of my values are just around fairness and openness.

C.C.: Do the right thing for the right reason, whether someone is looking or not. If your first impulse is to do the right thing, you don't need to question your choices. Making honest choices without any intention of harming or misleading others.

T.C.: What's your measure of success? I think it's tied to living by your principles as opposed to how many dollars you've saved or made. Those are the more important measures of success in life.

C.F.: First, to care for other people and provide love, understanding, emotional support. Second, do what you know is right and listen to what your conscience tells you. Don't be afraid to speak out against wrongs and injustice. Third, to love nature and savor it in all its forms.

P.H.: All my values were inculcated to me by my parents: selflessness, integrity, honesty, and fairness. Also, I learned very early in life that there are many sides to every contentious issue and that everybody can be right and still disagree.

B.H.: In terms of work, I believe in focusing much more on mission than personal enrichment. Almost my entire career has been mission-driven, which for me means finding an organization that aligns with a sense of purpose that is larger than just the self.

W.J.: I can't separate my values from my religious beliefs. My religious beliefs inform my values. Second, one of my biggest values is connection, both connection to God and to the people around me. And third, I absolutely believe that my purpose is to do good.

J.J.: You're either a fountain or drain in life. There's only one choice. You cannot be both. That's a conscious choice. Everyday were faced with hundreds of choices. And we if we look through the lens that asks: am I gaining energy and infusing energy or am I sucking energy? Then we see things differently. There's only a finite amount of energy and what we do with energy matters.

P.M.: The values I was raised with are still my values today: serving others, telling the truth, and not being afraid to stand up for what's right.

W.H.M.: I feel very strongly that everybody should be treated equally whether it's the totally impoverished or the totally rich.

L.P.: I personally have a hard time being in any kind of environment in which I cannot be authentic. Also just being able to speak my mind, that's very much coming from my mother.

S.R.: My values really focus on people and relationships and how we treat each other. My values encapsulate fairness and social justice. My guiding light or my north star is treating everyone equally and really trying to be fair as I go about my day.

D.R.: Integrity, trust, and listening. I think that integrity means being honest to yourself, and being honest to the people you're working with. I think trust means creating reciprocal relationships of understanding.

H.R.: First is the important and difficult notion of fairness, which is that people should act in a way that is empathetic and to make the right decision even if it's not in your interest. Second is to be humble and caring. Caring is really important, and it can be challenging in a corporate situation. Third is to treat people like you want to be treated, to treat everyone as an equally beautiful soul.

L.R.: Primarily, I believe that people should treat others the way that they want to be treated. Essentially, it's a lot about fairness or equality and the Golden Rule.

K.S. Avoiding harm to people is a principled right and wrong line, not hurting other people is a very bright line for me. And, then guided by the social justice mission of the New Testament in terms of conducting a daily routine in a way that values and respects other people, respects views, and looks out for the least of us.

G.W.: At the core, it's that all people are created equal. The Golden Rule. The second piece is the Serenity Prayer. And the significance of the Serenity Prayer is to keep yourself from pursuing things that you can't do anything about and that cause enormous frustration.

M.Z: First, don't be a jerk. Second, do the right thing, because that's sometimes the harder thing to do. And the Marine Corps values of honor, courage, and commitment, so integrity and honesty are core.

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