

Taking  
**Leaders**  
to a **HIGHER**  
LEVEL



An Executive White Paper by  
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**S**itting governors take international adulterous jaunts. Executives direct massive Ponzi schemes. Prominent politicians avoid paying their taxes. Financial institutions guide under-qualified home buyers into questionable mortgages. Religious leaders sell human organs for profit. College basketball coaches in secret sex scandals.

Once prominent and highly praised “leaders” such as Ken Lay, Bernie Madoff, and dozens more now are household names associated with fallen companies, deceitful practices, and ruined lives. It would therefore be easy to be discouraged, disheartened, even disenchanting with the apparent state of leadership today and for those who are looked upon as leaders.

Today there is a palpable cry ringing throughout America and the world - from employees and customers to parishioners and pastors – to take leadership to a higher level. We now experience the emotional and economic pain of worshipping leaders motivated more by profit, power, and prestige than by than purpose, passion, and people.

It is time to transform the way we approach leadership. It is time to take leaders to a higher level.

## Built upon Character

The starting point is clear. Higher level leadership is first and foremost built upon character.

Aristotle said that “character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses and avoids.” The US Air Force Academy states that character is “the sum of those qualities of moral excellence that stimulates a person to do the right thing, which is manifested through right and proper actions despite internal or external pressure to the contrary.”

to witness how quickly a once mighty, profitable, and progressive organization can be brought to their knees by leaders of shallow character.

Ethics is not enough for a higher level leader.

To fully understand character, you must separate it from ethics. Character and ethics are not the same. Fundamentally, ethics asks the question, “Is it legal and is it fair?” Character asks the questions, “Is it moral and is it just?” Frankly, we have been too enamored with ethics training when we should be enamored with character development!

## Higher level leadership is first and foremost built upon character.

Character, therefore, is the depth of your moral convictions. It is not whether someone has character, for everyone has some character. It is much more a question how deeply ingrained the qualities of character are within the heart and soul of the leader. It is frightening

World-renowned management thinker Peter Drucker said, “You can forgive a person for bad decisions or poor execution, but you can not forgive them for a lack of character.” Further, General Norman Schwarzkopf believes that, “ninety-nine percent of leadership failures are failures of character.”

So what exactly constitutes character? The three essential elements of character are wisdom, integrity, and self discipline. Without wisdom, leaders can not make the right choices. Without integrity, leaders are inconsistent in their attitudes and their actions. Without self-discipline, leaders are incapable of doing what they need to do when they do not want to do it.

## Lived through Competence

The second virtue of a higher level leader is competence. Competence is defined as the strength of a leader's skills set.

Over the years, countless volumes and thousands of models have been offered on what constitutes the core competencies of great leaders. So often these lists are either esoteric ramblings that leave leaders befuddled and confused, or such expansive lists that leave leaders overwhelmed and discouraged.

**Higher level leaders have the ability to Engage a global, multi-generational and diverse workforce.**

Higher level leadership, in contrast, focuses on three core abilities.

First, higher level leaders possess the ability to Envision a powerful and transformational future for the organization. They are able to persuasively and confidently answer the simple yet profound question, "What's next?" Whether it is a five-year strategic plan, a radical organizational transformation, or a dynamic new venture, higher level leaders are able to envision a clear, concise, and compelling "next step" in the organization's journey.

Next, higher level leaders have the ability to Engage a global, multi-generational and diverse workforce. They are both willing and able to connect with and grow bonds

of mutual trust will all employees. From guiding cross-functional teams to mentoring high potential employees, higher level leaders effectively leverage their personal, positional, and relational power to dynamically move the company forward.

Finally, a higher level leader has the ability to Execute the strategy. Their key role is to guide, inspect, and redirect their teams' implementation of the plan. From coaching to leading change, higher level leaders know how to create systems of accountability and to drive initiatives to full completion.

## Tested through Courage

If character is the heart of a higher level leader, and competence is her hands, the third virtue of a higher level leader – courage - is the backbone! No one would ever doubt the courage of former POW and current Senator John McCain, who says "a leader without courage is not a leader."

Courage is defined as the willingness to act upon your convictions. Convictions, as defined by the leader's character, are the soul-deep belief and values upon which a leader will not bend or break; it is the leader's moral line-in-the-sand upon which she will not cross.

Higher level leaders realize that courage does not mean being without fear. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather, the realization that something the leader holds dear is more important than the potential consequences of not acting. As Hollywood legend John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death, but you saddle up anyway!"

**"Courage is being scared to death, but you saddle up anyway."  
John Wayne**

Courage is the leader's willingness to hold themselves and those around them accountable to a higher standard, to take charge while others take cover, and to do what is right even when facing adversity. It takes courage to take unpopular and potentially career-damaging stands. Yet this willingness to stand firm is exactly what so many well meaning managers so struggle with today. Ironically, this is also the very element of what millions of people are looking for in their leaders.

## Enron

The name alone sparks images of fraud, mismanagement, deception, and denial. A personal friend of mine is the only C-suite executive from Enron not indicted, jailed, or dead. Why was he the lone senior executive not criminally pursued? This higher level executive had the courage to act upon his convictions, not to cross the ethical, legal, and moral convictions upon which he stands.

A sad truth is that many leaders today possess the character and competence to make a positive impact, but lack the courage to step out and do what they know needs to be done. Higher level leaders embrace the approach of the great statesman, Winston Churchill, who said, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and talk. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

## Measured through Commitment

The fourth virtue of a higher level leader is commitment. Commitment is the dedication to a long-term course of action. Without such dedication, initiatives, actions, or activities become a one-time-event rather than an all-the-time-occurrence, an exception rather than a rule.

Be careful not to confuse motivation with commitment – they are not the same. Motivation is something that helps satisfy an external, short-term want (e.g. – monthly sales bonus, movie tickets, contests, etc.). Commitment, in contrast, helps satisfy a long-term internal need (e.g. – respect, security, partnership, learning, freedom, etc.).

Higher level leaders focus on three things to maintain their teams' commitment: purpose, passion, and payoff. They continually remind their teams of the reasons why they are doing what they do – their purpose. Purpose transcends values, mission, and vision. A purpose, in its essence, is the compelling reason an organization exists. Without a clear and compelling purpose, leaders miss the limitless enthusiasm lying dormant within the hearts and souls of their people to reach for something beyond themselves. Purpose therefore drives passion, which is essential to commitment.

Unleashing the passion of people is critically important to reaching significance. Higher level leaders encourage their teams to bring their natural passion into the work. They know that only through heart-felt passion will their teams reach new heights of productivity and performance.

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Additionally, higher level leaders focus on the payoff of successfully reaching the purpose. Remembering that the payoff is not just financial (as is the traditional view of employee motivation), higher level leaders consistently remind their team of both the personal and professional outcomes of their efforts.

Through a focus on purpose, passion, and payoff, higher level leaders and their teams are willing to endure hardships, roadblocks, and adversity on their journey from success to significance.

## The Journey to a Higher Level

The time is now to uncover, nurture, and grow higher level leaders, men and women with the four vital virtues of character, competence, courage, and commitment.

Our economic and business markets would embrace them.

Our employees would enthusiastically follow them.

Our communities would cherish them.

Our enemies would fear them.

**Join the journey!**

### About Dr. Jim Harris

Dr. Jim Harris is founder of The Jim Harris Group and Ta a Higher Level, LLC, international consulting, speaking, and coaching firms dedicated to guiding leaders and their teams to a higher level of success and significance.

An award winning author, professional speaker, and seasoned business executive, Dr. Jim is internationally renowned for his transformational approach to leadership, business, and people excellence. His clients include such world-class firms as Best Buy, Walmart, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, and State Farm, as well as hundreds of associations, healthcare, and services companies.



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