

Character: Your Life Depends on It

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In mafia movies, most everyone who associates with sordid people end up dead or in jail. Even in more normal daily life, people who hang out with the dastardly rarely get to enjoy a peaceful retirement. They end up hurt, bankrupt, or worse off in some way. So it seems obvious that associating with people of dishonorable character is a bad idea. Yet everyday people join forces with terrorist groups. People enlist with others who intentionally cause harm. There is no shortage of people willing to associate with the

dishonorable if not the deplorable. People are apparently easily enticed into becoming scoundrels and members of the dark side.

You may be thinking how glad you are to not be part of the mafia or a terrorist group. You might be exhaling a sigh of relief that you don't associate with murderers, robbers, or rapists. You don't have to worry, right? Not so fast. There are less draconian associations you might be closer to than you think. There are many people who mistreat others in less obvious, yet extremely painful ways. There is no shortage of selfish, egotistical, unethical, dishonest, jealous, angry, mean, and revengeful people in the world. There are dishonorable people in neighborhoods, workplaces, families, governments, and even places of worship who intentionally cause others significant anguish. There are people at work who blame others for their mistakes and take credit for other's work. There are business associates under the guise of partners who take their partners for everything they have. Studies find that up to 10 percent of the executive ranks are occupied by psychopaths. There are also "friends" who take advantage of the vulnerability that comes with friendships. Even worse, there are family members who use their relationships to take advantage of their relatives.

If you've not been intentionally hurt by someone else, you are the exception. Be glad, but careful. Depending on who you associate with, you may not be safe for long. As with the mafia, if you associate with people who intentionally hurt other people, they will someday hurt you. If you associate with people who regularly talk bad about other people, they will someday talk bad about you. If you spend time with people who don't take ownership for their mistakes, they will someday blame you. If you associate with people who overcharge or steal from others, they will someday steal from you. If someone gets angry at another driver on the road for making a simple mistake, they will get angry at you for making a mistake. People who waste their money will waste yours. Rude people will someday be rude to you. There are many people in the world who will readily take your money, take your belongings, blame you, ruin your reputation, or harm you physically for their selfish gain. They will do whatever it takes to make them feel better, make them look better, get ahead, be better off, or redirect attention away from their own dysfunctions.

So how important is the character of the people you spend time with? The character of the people you work with? The character of the people you live with? It is perhaps the most important attribute you could ever think about. Your money, possessions, reputation, family, and perhaps life depend on it.

If you are unclear on what to look for when assessing someone's character, here are a few traits to consider:

- **Sense of Responsibility:** Are they conscientious and genuinely concerned about caring for others?
- **Respect for Others:** Do they show respect for others as much as or more than themselves?
- **Humility:** Are they secure and self-assured enough that they don't have to boast or promote themselves, especially at someone else's expense?
- **Ethical Values:** Do they stand up for and live by high moral standards?
- **Organizational Values:** Do they embrace and reinforce the organization's values?
- **Authenticity:** Are they transparent and maintain a single genuine persona?
- **Integrity:** Do they do what they say and not compromise the truth regardless of the circumstance?
- **Self-Control:** Do they resist temptations to take part in unethical or immoral activities?

Likewise, to demonstrate honorable character yourself:

- **Be respectful:** Treat others with respect. Know that it will be paid back to you in support and loyalty.
- **Stay humble:** Demonstrate your inner confidence by not promoting yourself above others or putting others down.
- **Live honorable core values:** Portray the ethical values you want others to embrace and follow.
- **Be authentic:** Be the person you want to be and let others get to know the real you.
- **Act with integrity:** Say only what you truly believe and are willing to back up with action.
- **Be honest:** Tell the truth. Stick to the facts. Don't exaggerate, not even to emphasize your point.
- **Maintain self-control:** Resist short-term temptations that compromise your long-term reputation.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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