



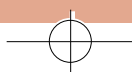
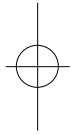
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# CRISES OF CHARACTER IN LEADERSHIP

BY DAVID M. ABSHIRE





CRISES OF  
CHARACTER IN  
LEADERSHIP:  
GOVERNMENT,  
BUSINESS AND  
EDUCATION

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OCTOBER 30, 2002

## Foreword

**A**MBASSADOR DAVID ABSHIRE was the ideal selection to be the Morris I. Leibman Distinguished Lecturer in the autumn of 2002. A long time associate of Mr. Leibman and advisor at the highest levels of U.S. national policymaking, Dr. Abshire is uniquely suited to reflect and comment upon his topic: the crises of character in American leadership.

After the Iran-Contra information was exposed, despite attempted cover-ups, Dr. Abshire was personally summoned by President Reagan to leave his post as Ambassador to NATO to serve in the Cabinet as Special Counsellor. His charge was “to get everything out.” He became the symbol and agent of the restoration of Presidential integrity. Morrie Leibman was an informal advisor in this historical and challenging experience.

Dr. Abshire was a founder of CSIS in 1962, and later became a founder of the CSIS Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy, which addresses principled leadership in government, business, and education. As President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency since 1999, he has pioneered the use of case studies in successes and failures of the U.S. Presidency, including the role of character.

The need to engage students on issues of leadership, character, and public service in their formative years is crucial. Dr. Abshire’s in-depth exchanges with Loyola University Chicago students demonstrated his deep interest in finding new ways of reaching the next generation.

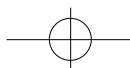
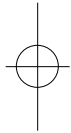
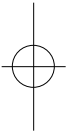
Dr. Abshire has served on corporate boards and been deeply exposed to the details of corporate governance. At Loyola, our Business School has taken a lead in corporate governance and ethics since the Dean of the School and later president of the University, Fr. Raymond C. Baumhart, SJ, supported the teaching of business ethics at a time long before



it was recognized as an important field of study. Today, Loyola University Chicago continues its intellectual leadership at the crossroads of business and ethics in the Society for Business Ethics and its *Business Ethics Quarterly*.

We are pleased to join the CSIS Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy and the Center for the Study of the Presidency in making Ambassador Abshire's timely remarks available to a wider audience.

Reverend Michael Garanzini, SJ  
President, Loyola University Chicago





*Morris Leibman  
and Dr. David  
Abshire at CSIS  
in January, 1985.*

I AM HONORED to be your Morris I. Leibman Distinguished Lecturer for 2002, especially following my good friend Newt Minow, Morrie's law partner. Through Morrie I also met the wonderful Scholl family whose foundation sponsors this lecture at Loyola.

I first encountered Morrie in 1962 when Admiral Arleigh Burke and I were forming the Center for Strategic and International Studies, then associated with Georgetown University. It took only one or two meetings before Morrie became, in effect, my counselor and advisor for life. At that time, he was on the Bendetsen Committee on Military Education along with that towering Jesuit figure, John Courtney Murray. Father Murray and Cardinal Suenens, whom I came to know while I was U.S. NATO ambassador living in Brussels, were the intellectual powers behind Vatican II. Morrie was so enthralled with the Jesuits that he jokingly referred to himself as our Jewish Jesuit.

The only time Morrie was happier than when in the company of a bunch of learned, jovial Jesuits was when he was surrounded by highly decorated jovial four-star generals. Deeply patriotic but to his deep regret physically unable to serve during World War II, Morrie paved the way for the American Bar Association to become formally involved in issues related to the defense of our nation. This led to the founding of its Standing Committee on Law and National Security.

Especially in the presence of his wife Mary, I am proud to give this lecture in honor of my mentor, such a uniquely great American. He appropriately earned the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Morris Leibman believed that dynamic, principled leadership was vital to government, business, and education. This is my subject today. Over recent years, we have faced a crisis of character among key leaders in America.

This crisis most recently touched corporate America, but a quick glance over recent history shows its reach is much

wider and more pervasive. Before the fall of Enron and the exposure of corrupt “Enronomics” throughout the corporate world, character crises rocked other bastions of leadership. Previous to this event, the American Presidency, in just three decades, went through both a resignation and an impeachment.

Perhaps the most upsetting character crisis of all is the one festering among our leaders of tomorrow. Many of the younger generation in our high schools and colleges believe they need to cut corners and cheat to get ahead. Some parents legitimize cheating because, as the ugly logic goes, it is the surest way to get their deserving child into the best college. Shockingly, this crisis even extends to our youngest students and their teachers. Recently, here in Chicago, cheating was uncovered in seven elementary schools where teachers aided students in passing standardized tests, inappropriately helping the students and advancing their own careers.

This crisis in academia is exacerbated by the postmodern belief expressed dramatically by a Zogby International poll published recently in *U.S. News and World Report*: “73% of the students surveyed said that when their professors taught about ethical issues, the usual message was that uniform standards of right and wrong don’t exist and that what is right and wrong depends on differences in individual values and cultural diversity.”

We need to examine the nature of character through a new perspective. Contrary to popular culture where charisma has supplanted character, the religious philosopher and scholar Os Guinness notes that character provides the point of trust that links leaders with followers. For the Greeks, character was a mark stamped on a coin, and also the mark stamped on our inner core as contrasted to our outerself. We need to see character in action, as it is played out in actual experience. We need to see how character is tested in the crucible of crisis.

I believe that character is best understood through the study of actual stories of “triumph and tragedy” as opposed to





simply preaching about it. These, in effect, become morality plays, where we walk through a range of virtues and vices.

### First, the Crises of the Presidency

**M**Y BELIEF IN APPROACHING LEADERSHIP in the political world through case studies led me to edit a volume of essays entitled “Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Presidency,” sponsored by the Center for the Study of the Presidency. These seventy-six case studies were issued in advance of the 2000 presidential election as a guide for Presidents and given to the new White House team and Cabinet. Tonight, I begin our study of character in leadership, then, with the telling of three of these case studies: Watergate, Iran-contra, and the Clinton impeachment. On with three tragic morality plays.

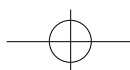
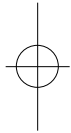
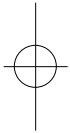
Richard Nixon, a Quaker by background, aspired to a great place in history as a peacemaker, by ending the Vietnam War without a U.S. disgrace, by bringing China into the international community, and by establishing détente with the Soviet Union.

On June 18, 1972, Nixon was vacationing at Key Biscayne, Florida. Over a morning cup of coffee, he approvingly read the *Miami Herald* headline “Ground Combat Role Nears End for the U.S.” This was certainly big news for his Vietnam policy and a success for his administration. He was on top of the world. He then noted a small story in the middle of the page in the left-hand column. The article read, “Miamians Held in D.C. Try to Bug Demo Headquarters.” Nixon dismissed the story as a prank. He never brought it up when talking later that morning with his chief of staff, Bob Haldeman.

Back in Washington on June 20, Nixon learned of the burglars’ connection to the Committee to Re-elect the President, so-called “CREEP,” and also to the White House. By June 23rd, Nixon made a move to try to have the CIA block the FBI investigation and thus began his obstruction of justice. In just five days, he had moved from peacemaker to

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impeachable offender. Impeachment hearings began in April 1974. The tape that recorded his obstruction of justice, the proverbial “smoking gun,” was released August 5, and Nixon resigned on August 9, the first presidential resignation in our history.

Like Nixon, Bill Clinton reached moments of extraordinary leadership. Despite campaign scrapes over the issues of draft evasion and womanizing, Clinton came to office with unusual promise. He possessed the greatest combination of political skills of any Democratic president since Franklin Roosevelt. He led the Democratic Party from what critics called a leftist counter-culture of ambiguous values and weak foreign and national security policies towards a commanding social and political middle—the so-called New Democrat. Like no other president, Clinton explored the need to face the balanced budget, produce surpluses, and bring a new creativity to government policy. In Clinton’s first two years in office, he became the best presidential advocate for facing and taking advantage of globalization, fighting successfully for passage of NAFTA.

Clinton read history and wanted to leave a great legacy. As Nixon’s legacy was to be the great peacemaker, Clinton’s was to be the great reformer of social security, medicare, and education.

If Nixon’s downfall began some five days after Watergate break-in, Clinton’s began when the Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky affairs crossed in the courtroom. This required Clinton to give sworn accounts of events.

Indeed, the reaction of the Clinton Administration was dominated by the fact that the President alone knew all the facts. Apparently, in the beginning of the crisis, Clinton confided in no one. He deliberately misled his own staff into making false statements, and much later, offered ambiguous and possibly perjurious testimony before a grand jury. Bill Clinton’s close advisor, George Stephanopoulos, concluded his memoir hauntingly: “Wondering what might have been—if only this good president had been a better man.”

Finally, I turn to the tragedy but what I think was an

eventual triumph of the Reagan presidency. Reagan took over the presidency at a low point overseas and at home, but he quickly took the offensive morally and politically. He restored American optimism. He built up America militarily to win the Cold War. Faced with an outdated and dangerous nuclear strategy, Reagan prepared a strategic defense initiative, which convinced the Soviets it could not compete with our technological revolution. He called for the Berlin Wall to come down. Though he was a hawk before becoming President, he was the first to see—before his Cabinet members—that Gorbachev had changed, that the Cold War tide had turned, and that new approaches were needed. Combined with his domestic conservatism, Reagan was on his way to achieving a historic sea change in both foreign and domestic policy.

Then, on November 3, 1986, a Lebanese weekly, *Al-Shiraa* reported that the United States had secretly sold arms to Iran, contrary to expressed policies on terrorism. After hurried meetings in the White House, where Reagan was furnished information by the National Security Advisor, Admiral John Poindexter, Reagan said in a public speech: “We did not—repeat—did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages, nor will we.” Shortly thereafter in a disastrous press conference, Reagan was forced to change his story. Well, there were some arms after all, but all the arms sold to Iran, he said, “could be put in one cargo plane, and there would be plenty of room left over.” This was one big fib.

By the way, trading arms for hostages in itself broke no law, but Reagan himself said giving in to such blackmail was immoral. He falsely rationalized he was doing something else.

Then came a bombshell. November 25, Attorney General Ed Meese reported to the President that there had been a diversion of funds from the Iranian arms sales to the Contras in Nicaragua. The attorney general worried that the illegal diversion might be an impeachable offense if the President knew. It became evident that there had been a cover-up involving the National Security Advisor and his free-wheeling staff member, Lt. Col. Oliver North. The latter was involved in the illegal transfer of funds, in shredding

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documents, falsifying chronologies, and other offenses. North later dramatically defended himself and his methods before Congress, arguing such things were necessary to save the seven hostages and sustain the Contras. He simply put aside the honor code that he had pledged to uphold as a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy and determined that the ends justified the means.

It was at this low point that the President and some of his top advisors took a dramatically different tack from Nixon and Clinton. After firing Poindexter and North, Reagan set up an independent bipartisan panel to investigate what went wrong and what to do about it. Reagan then requested that I return from NATO to serve in the Cabinet for several months as his independent Special Counsellor, reporting directly to him and under the mandate to “get everything out” to the investigators, and that meant anything that might be embarrassing or incriminating to him. There would be no executive privilege and no Presidential cover-up.

Franklin Roosevelt once said that, “the presidency is...principally a place of moral leadership.” Had Richard Nixon done anything like what Reagan did on December 26, 1986, Watergate would have been a footnote in history and we would have been spared our first presidential resignation. Had Bill Clinton done the same, the Lewinsky affair would have been over in a shameful week, and he and the nation would have been spared our first impeachment and trial since Andrew Johnson.

But President Reagan is not completely off the hook. Though Reagan moved from tragedy to a triumph of character, Iran Contra also teaches us a sad and sobering lesson. The President’s earlier inattentive style of leadership created an atmosphere that allowed key advisors to take liberties that seemed to serve the administration’s goals, yet directly contradicted Reagan’s basic principles. Consequently, while Reagan never ordered or knew of the illegal transfer of funds to the Contras, he nevertheless allowed a free wheeling environment in which that transfer took place.

This raises an important point for all three leadership

areas covered in this lecture. It is not always the direct action of a leader that produces fatal consequences. Nixon did not order the break-ins and Reagan did not order the diversion of funds, but both failed to create a climate and process to guard against such action.

We recall the classic story of how King Henry II of England unintentionally produced the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket—a tale famously told by T.S. Eliot in the morality play “Murder in the Cathedral.” Beset with bitter conflicts generated by Becket’s loyalty to the Church, Henry cried out, “what a pack of fools and cowards I have nourished in my house, that not one of them will avenge me of this turbulent priest.” He never dreamed that four loyal knights would set out to Canterbury and murder the Archbishop. This catastrophe turned Becket into a martyr and alienated the entire clergy and population.

Henry’s exclamation to avenge him of Becket is remarkably similar to Reagan’s directive to his staff to preserve the Contras “body and soul.” To Lt. Col. North, that meant by any means legal or illegal, including calculated deception, bold-faced lies, and shredding documents. The King and the President were misread by their top lieutenants. A leader must not only exhibit personal character, but must also establish an atmosphere of integrity, what we shall call a community of character.

### Crises of Corporate America

**N**OW WE MOVE TO CORPORATE LEADERSHIP and a new set of morality plays. Perhaps nowhere else have we seen such a monumental failure of both personal character and organizational integrity as we have recently witnessed in the corporate world. Like a plague, willful deceit and narrow self-interest have afflicted a significant number of America’s most successful corporations. Surely the Enron debacle makes for the most astounding morality play of modern business history. From the pinnacle of profitability and prestige Enron, fell into bankruptcy and financial ruin, wiping out thousands of jobs and tens of billions of dollars in

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investments, savings and retirements. Enron, once the nation's 7th largest company, was the first in a staggering series of business scandals that collectively destroyed investor faith and contributed to a multi-trillion-dollar market meltdown.

Many factors contributed to this colossal collapse, but foremost was an absence of character at the top level of the organization. In May 2000, a vice president went to see founder Kenneth Lay to warn him about the "selfishness" and "arrogance" of the executive team that was "growing" the company. He said that Jeff Skilling, the president of Enron, and his team "are not the same kind of people we are used to managing Enron." Clearly, from the top down, Enron's corporate culture placed little value on character.

In one of its most damning actions from a character perspective, the Enron board at one point actually voted to set aside its code of ethics. All the while, Skilling and Lay continued to tout Enron's "outstanding" results, telling analysts that Enron had never been stronger. Accordingly investors continued to buy and hold so that when Enron fell, millions fell financially with it. Isn't it ironic that Enron's mission statement asserted that the company prides itself on four key values: respect, integrity, communication, and excellence. Talk is cheap.

The Enron fallout has ushered in a new era of corporate mistrust calling into question the very structure of our economic system. During the recent market bubble, as stock prices increased at an astronomical rate, so did the variety of opportunities for cashing in—the most well-known, perhaps, being stock-options. And, as opportunities increased, so did temptations to cross the line—but where was that line? Who could tell during those heady times? More and more, it came down to a question of character.

How did all this happen? It seems that many business leaders, in their haste to make Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of capitalism work for them, forgot that the hand had to be connected to a body, and ultimately a conscience. As President Bush reminded all of us in his July 19 Wall Street address,

“There is no capitalism without conscience; there is no wealth without character.” I might add that capitalism without conscience leads to chaos, and wealth without character results in avarice.

We must not forget that Adam Smith, the economic philosopher of our market system, was first a moral philosopher. Seventeen years before his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith wrote his “Theory of Moral Sentiments” in which he focuses his discussion of human nature on answering the question, “What is virtue?” “Mere justice,” he writes, “is upon most occasions but a negative virtue and only hinders us from hurting our neighbors.” In the case of corporate reform, increased legislation and regulation are a “negative virtue” that only hinders companies from hurting others. Although regulation is necessary, the virtue of self-regulation that Smith preached is even more important.

Pope John Paul II added his voice in asserting the necessity of morality in the free market system. In his 1991 encyclical letter “Centesimus Annus,” written after the collapse of Communist Russia, the Pope challenged the virtue of the receding socialist and Marxist economic system and asserted the superiority of the market approach. He cautioned, however, as Adam Smith had, that the market economy needed a moral framework and appropriate laws to function properly—the invisible hand needed a conscience. The Holy Father called an ecumenical conference in Rome to discuss the encyclical and I, an Episcopalian, was privileged to attend.

“Profit is a regulator of the life of a business,” the encyclical reads, “but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.”

True success is lasting success, and that requires remaining committed to long-term goals and values. Surely, in the long run, character is the best investment. That investment can best be made if the structures of both corporate and Federal governance are designed to incentivise and promote good leadership and values.

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### Crisis Among the Leaders of Tomorrow

**T**HESE CRISES OF CHARACTER in both the presidency and the business world are distressing and destructive; they call into question the character development in our homes and schools, as well as the example displayed by our parents and teachers. How were those U.S. Presidents and the CEO's of Enron, Global Crossing, Adelphia and others brought up? What influence do these crises have on young people who will be our leaders of tomorrow—our future parents, teachers, CEOs and even our future Presidents?

The presidents of our universities and community colleges, and the superintendents of our high and middle schools, as well as primary schools, have a major challenge before them in changing the educational culture.

Today roughly 80% of college students admit that they cheated at least once, and since 1969, the percentage of students who said they allowed someone else to copy their work has increased from 58 to 98 percent. In June, the Wharton School of the Business at the University of Pennsylvania had to hire a firm to examine applications for exaggeration and lies.

Certainly, part of the problem is the growing pervasiveness of moral relativism and the belief that objective standards do not exist. As columnist John Leo writes, "the notion that truth is simply a personal preference" is increasingly taught in schools across America. A professor in upstate New York reported that "10 to 20 percent of his students could not bring themselves to criticize the Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews." While some expressed distaste for what the Nazis did, "they were not willing to say that the Nazis were wrong, since no culture can be judged from the outside and no individual can challenge the moral worldview of another."

In her book "Telling the Truth," Lynne Cheney (formerly head of the National Endowment for the Humanities) makes a similar argument—that the new emphasis in education strips students of a clear understand-



ing of right and wrong. “What gives the humanities their strength,” she writes, “are truths that pass beyond time and circumstance and speak to us all.”

How then, as both writers ask, can we expect young people to have a strong moral compass if we eliminate “true north” and deny the very existence of excellence, truth, good and evil? “It’s hard to see how things will improve,” writes John Leo, “if we teach the next generation that standards don’t exist and moral debate is a personal violation and a sham.”

### Moral Ambiguity

**T**HE PLOT THICKENS, and so we need morality plays. Unfortunately, life rarely presents us with black and white situations like the obstruction of justice or lying under oath, which under all circumstances are crimes.

I believe case studies lead us to examine real life situations, which may start out with genuine moral ambiguity where one right appears contrary to another right, or one loyalty the betrayer of another loyalty. In government and public policy decisions, however, sometimes the dilemma is between one bad outcome and a worse one. This is captured in the classic work by Protestant Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. A pacifist against the use of military force, Niebuhr comes to feel it necessary against Hitler, as he views Hitler’s conquests and atrocities.

Furthermore, what turns out to be bad often doesn’t start out that way, as we know from C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*. Better yet, as William Blake said of Milton’s *Paradise’s Lost*, Satan usually has the good lines. Here moral absolutism falters because issues are taken out of the larger context and the complexity of moral quandary eschewed. Nonetheless, what Emmanuel Kant wrote two centuries ago still stands: there must be a hierarchy of values.

There is in life what I would go so far as to call a “subtle evil” that deviously crept in to each of these leaders and students. Subtle evil can lurk in the shadows of the morally

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ambiguous. This is not the evil of a Hitler, a Stalin or a bin Laden—in these cases, the evil is clear and easy to recognize. In a way, “pure evil” can be less dangerous in the long term because it is much easier to identify, understand, and ultimately defeat. Subtle evil, however, requires careful introspection and self-evaluation and therefore provides a constant threat to the moral fabric of our society. I believe subtle evil can arise in all of us if we fail to look within ourselves and discover and come to terms with our own human failings.

This is the nature of moral dilemma facing students today and such was the story of the events that occurred at the revered United States Military Academy, more than half a century ago. This next case study about my alma mater helps keep me humble. It also takes us to the area of character leadership in sports, both coaches and athletes, which affects our natural culture.

When I attended, West Point was already a leader for 150 years in character development—the cornerstone of which was its fabled honor code. West Point must prepare cadets to be combat leaders, and in combat, the squad and the platoon, that is the team, become paramount. Team or group loyalty is an ethic. These values were doubly reinforced among the football team under its legendary coach, Colonel Red Blaik and his rising young assistant Vince Lombardi.

Shortly after I graduated, a cheating scandal erupted that threatened to undermine this sacred system. The West Point football team was one of the top in the nation, but many key members of the team were struggling academically. As was the standard at West Point, these cadets were assigned cadet tutors to help them, but the tutors took their assignment too far. Instead of simply instructing course materials, they passed copies of exams, since the same test was often given on several different occasions in any given week. The cadet tutors were clearly violating the honor code’s cheating prohibition—grounds for expulsion for the person passing along the information, the person accepting it, and any other person who knew of the cheating but did not report it.

How was the conspiracy finally discovered? Apparently,

several cadets had realized that these cadet coaches were not just tutoring but distributing copies of exams. In going to the cadet honor representative, they were told that what they reported was very bad, but it was generally going on among the team. Better to go along than create a massive scandal in the foremost team and military academy, so the reporting cadets agreed.

Finally, one cadet, he remains anonymous to this day, took a stand even though it ostracized him from friends and teammates. He bravely told a reputable member of the Honor Committee that his good friend had enticed him to study off of copies of the semester's final exams. This Committee member went all the way to the commandant of cadets with the shocking news.

The Commandant was determined to expose the ring by asking this anonymous cadet to join the cheating conspiracy in order to gather hard evidence for Honor Committee hearings. In this crucible, honor and integrity seemed to violate friendship and team unity, but this cadet had great moral courage and sorted out his conflicting values correctly.

Subsequent Honor Committee hearings uncovered a complex network of corruption unknown in the history of West Point. Investigations revealed a cheating conspiracy ring that enveloped star players on the West Point football team and other varsity sports teams and even members of the Honor Committee. After waves of admissions, accusations and turbulent hearing process, ninety-four cadets were discharged from the Academy. The football team and the corps of cadets suffered a severe blow. This is an extraordinary morality play.

The heroic, still anonymous West Point cadet refused this false moral logic and would later be thanked for "saving the West Point honor system." Like Ronald Reagan at the depths of the Iran Contra affair, a single West Point cadet in the crucible of crisis chose character as he sorted out conflicting values of friendship and team loyalty versus honor. He chose the harder right rather than the easier wrong, to use the words of the cadet prayer. There should be a statue at West Point, along with Patton, MacArthur and Eisenhower,

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dedicated to the “unknown cadet” who saved the Honor Code.

The cadets who kept quiet convinced themselves that team loyalty, friendship, and avoiding a public scandal came first. With good intentions, Nixon convinced himself that he was preserving the Office of the President to sustain and extend his diplomatic victories. Reagan wanted to protect the Contras while securing the release of American hostages, and Clinton wanted to protect his family, his presidency and himself from public humiliation. Even Ken Lay could have argued that Enron employed and supported millions of people and that exposing problems within the corporation would only put thousands of people out of work. Some teachers permit students to have a community of cheating, so that they can get into better colleges. These leaders, teachers and cadets actually perceived themselves as “good people” helping other people. Yet these “people” suffered from a terrible moral blindness. How often are we able to move through the ordinary events of life with moral blinders on—and then suddenly the jig is up and generally not just one but many people suffer?

### Moral Freedom

**R**ECENTLY, ALAN WOLFE WROTE A BOOK entitled *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice*. The respondee’s to Wolfe’s survey project on the new generation said they wanted second judgments and the freedom to determine and choose since moral choices are so rarely clear-cut. As Wolfe writes, they are “expressing a desire to have a conversation with God, or any other source of moral authority, in which they will not just listen, but also be free to express their own views.” That’s fine because the Hebrews of the Old Testament not only have these expressions but sometimes even have arguments with God, as did long-suffering Job. The good news is that Alan Wolfe concludes that in this new moral freedom, ultimately most are choosing sound values, and thus there is hope because values are being internalized and not simply imposed from the top.

This choice in favor of sound values must be sustained by the cultivation of a community of character and its reconciliation with America's community of competition. Students and leaders who strive for personal achievement must be surrounded by positive peer pressure that values the "game rules" of integrity and service. This is imperative, all the way from the West Wing of the White House and corporate boardrooms to the elementary classroom.

My daughter, a 5th grade teacher in Fairfax County, Virginia with many students from immigrant families reminds us that, regrettably, at this early stage that all too often even elementary students must make a choice between a community of character and the community of gangs. To foster positive peer pressure and cultivate character, she has established weekly classroom meetings that encourage affirmation and accountability while seeking their classroom community internalized solutions to problems and stressing the individual assessment role of testing and bonding over the belief that honesty is a higher mark than even the grade. Leaders in education must promote initiatives to foster a community of character all the way from middle schools to universities across the nation.

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Clearly, we must take more seriously the task of preparing young people with the character needed at the highest levels of leadership.

### Role Models

**W**E HAVE FOCUSED ON CHARACTER FAILURE. But we will all be helped by case studies of leaders who cultivated great character and who developed a community of character within their organization. We have talked about Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton; let's return to George Washington who set the presidential model. Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison were far more brilliant, but it was Washington's character around whom these three and thousands of others rallied to get us through the closely fought American Revolution, the often in doubt Constitutional Convention, and the novel first Presidency. Washington's character saved this country three times. As a young surveyor and colonial officer, he constantly worked at his character

development, very much as young Lincoln did. They never took their own character for granted and were never self-righteous or hypocritical. To more recent times Eric Sevareid would say of Harry Truman that he was not sure Truman was always right in his decisions, but “remembering him reminds people what a man in that office ought to be like. It’s character, just character.”

We have had corporate leaders of great character. While serving on the board of Procter and Gamble, I saw our CEO, John Smale, protest that his compensation was too high, and saw him move as the new reform chairman of General Motors, when it was in crisis, to establish rules of corporate governance that were modeled elsewhere, but not by Enron. Robert Galvin of Motorola has been my friend, and I know how he built a community of character at Motorola. John Templeton, founder of the Templeton Fund, is a shining light with his credibility as well as his generosity. Another such leader is Dr. Inamori, the founder of Kyocera, which packages half of the computer chips of the world. He has instituted a “community of character” throughout his organization. As a devout Buddhist, he believes in reinforcing the spiritual dimension of character.

To help in the process of developing leaders of character in a nation of moral freedom, there was founded at CSIS last April an Academy on Leadership. Kazuo Inamori, gave the lead endowment and the new academy is called the Abshire-Inamori Academy on Leadership. It plans to reach out to current leaders in government and business, and to leaders in the making during the formative college and high school years. Its mission includes inculcating a new generation of young people from all over the world with the character needed for leadership. As I said in my speech at the inauguration of the Academy, “This is not done by preaching, because everyone agrees with platitudes. Case studies, role-playing, exercises, and sorting out moral ambiguities are essential.”

Clearly, we must take more seriously the task of preparing young people with the character needed at the

highest levels of leadership. They are the future of government, business, education, and society, and in their formative years, we must better teach the importance of character and how it plays out in our civil society, for their character will surely be tested in the crucible of crises. It is not just a personal tragedy, but turned into national tragedies, when some leaders described in this lecture so miserably failed that test.

### Conclusion

**I**T'S NOT JUST THEM, IT'S US. In the personal "powerful morality plays" that are our individual lives, we must constantly strive to follow the counsel of our first President George Washington: "labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience."

While painting a dark and hidden corner of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Michelangelo was asked by a passer-by why he was working so diligently on a part of the ceiling that no one would ever see.

"God will see it," was his simple reply. Michelangelo's conscience would not allow him to cut any corners. He committed himself to doing the right thing, even though no one would have ever known if he had done the wrong thing. What we do when no one is watching is the essence of character.

Let us beware that while cultivating character we do not become self-righteous, nor cede to the simplicity of moral absolutism, condemning others as did the Pharisees, whom Jesus appeared to condemn more than the harlots. Becoming a leader of character demands certain humility and taking personal responsibility for our actions; it means admitting when we are wrong, accepting the blame and learning from it. It means being responsible for what occurs on our watch and under our leadership; it means setting the moral tone for the group; it means studying the past and learning to deal with conflicting values.

Indeed, the powerful morality play goes on—and let's make your and my verse count!

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**In the personal "powerful morality plays" that are our individual lives, we must all constantly strive to follow the counsel of Washington: "Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience."**

### David M. Abshire

**D**AVID M. ABSHIRE is President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. He was cofounder of CSIS in 1962, and served as its chief executive for many years. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, Chairman of the U.S. Board of International Broadcasting, and as a member of the Murphy Commission on the Organization of the Government, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and the President's Task Force on U.S. Government International Broadcasting. Dr. Abshire also served on the Advisory Board of the Naval War College and on the Executive Panel to the Chief of Naval Operations. From 1983-1987, he was Ambassador to NATO where he initiated a new conventional defense improvements effort to reduce NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons and was given the highest civilian Defense Department award – the Distinguished Public Service Medal. In 1987 he served as Special Counsellor to the President with Cabinet rank and has been decorated by eight heads of state.

Dr. Abshire was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and graduated from the Baylor School in 1944, receiving his bachelor's degree from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1951. He served in the Korean War as platoon leader, company commander, and division assistant intelligence officer, and received the Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster with "V" for Valor, Commendation Ribbon with medal pendant, and Combat Infantry Badge. He was awarded his Ph.D. in History from Georgetown University in 1959.

In addition to several journal, magazine, and newspaper articles, Dr. Abshire is the author of five books including *Preventing World War III* (Harper & Row, 1988), and recently edited the Center's *Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Presidency: 76 Case Studies in Presidential Leadership* (Praeger Press, 2001).





*Left to Right: Dr. David Abshire, Dr. Kazuo Inamori, co-founder of the CSIS Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy, and General Edward Meyer, USA (Ret.), Adviser, former Army Chief of Staff.*



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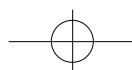
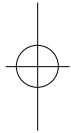
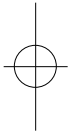
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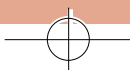
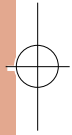
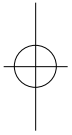
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**LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO**  
**820 N. Michigan Avenue**  
**Chicago, Illinois 60611**

**CSIS ABSHIRE-INAMORI LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**  
**1800 K Street, NW**  
**Suite 400**  
**Washington, DC 20006**

**CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY**  
**1020 19th Street, NW**  
**Suite 250**  
**Washington, DC 20036**

