Abraham Lincoln once said, “Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it and the tree is the real thing.” How true is that statement? Stop and think about that quote for a minute. Then ask yourself how people view your shadow? If it is not in as positive a light as you would like, it is probably time to look at the tree. The tree doesn’t lie. It is the real thing.

Today, we hear and see the word character everywhere. What exactly does it mean and how does it relate to leadership?

Character is the inherent complex of attributes that determine a person’s moral and ethical actions and reactions. Words that describe a person of good character include: honest, inspiring, courageous, unselfish, competent, tactful, loyal, trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and citizenship.

Bennis (1989) said that after vision and passion, integrity (character) is the most basic trait of a good leader. Character, proper ethics, and integrity are based on the foundation of trust. Do the people you lead trust you in your leadership role? This is something all leaders must ask themselves. If the answer is no or not completely, then what can we do as leaders to develop that trust?

Interest Approach

Use Attachment 1 (Character/Ethics Worksheet) to brainstorm with participants the importance of character and ethics in leadership.

Lesson

1. Introduce the topic (slide 1).
2. Read the quote from Abraham Lincoln (slide 2).
3. Have participants do some individual brainstorming before moving on through the presentation (slides 3-5).

4. Discuss character as it relates to leadership (slide 6).

5. Discuss who is concerned about character as it relates to leadership (slide 7).

6. The six pillars of character were developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (slides 8-14).

7. The Four-Way Test from Lussier and Achua can help you determine whether or not you are making an ethical decision (slide 15).

8. Summarize the lesson (slide 16).

**Application**

If we set the appropriate example, then others will trust us and we can continue to lead effectively. It is important that we take our leadership roles seriously and always remember that our character describes who we are.

**References**


