

## EXPLORING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Patricia S. Pinnell, M.A.  
Extension Agent  
Preston County

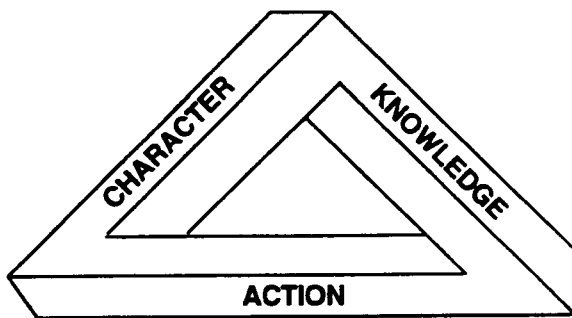
Shirley C. Eagan, Ed.D.  
Extension Specialist  
Volunteer Leadership

Americans today have an intensified interest in ethics, especially in light of some of the recent highly publicized scandals. Can you think of people/cases involved?

At the same time, public polls indicate a renewed interest in values. Parents and grandparents are asking how they can encourage children to develop a strong moral and ethical base.

Virtually all human activities have an ethical dimension. Research has shown that ethical attitudes and behavior can be learned and practiced at any stage of one's life.

This three-sided logo symbolizes the integration of three qualities of an ethical leader-- **knowledge, action, character**. The logo, conceivable, yet structurally impossible, represents the dilemma created when one quality is out of sync with the other two.



The language of ethics becomes confusing when society uses the terms "values," "ethics," and "morals" interchangeably. What do these words mean to you? How are they similar and how do they differ?

Describe the meaning of these words as you understand them.

### Values

### Morals

### Ethics

What differences do you note among the three words?

(See other side for discussion of these terms and how they relate.)

Now that you have begun to think about ethics and ethical leadership, please respond to the following questions.

1. Who is the most ethical person you know?
2. Why did you think of this person?
3. List three or four characteristics you associate with this person.

## Ethics, Values and Behavior

How did you do on the definitions? Below are some thoughts on each word.

### Values

Values are the core beliefs or desires that guide and *motivate* attitudes and actions. Each person has thousands of values. Can you think of some?

### Morals

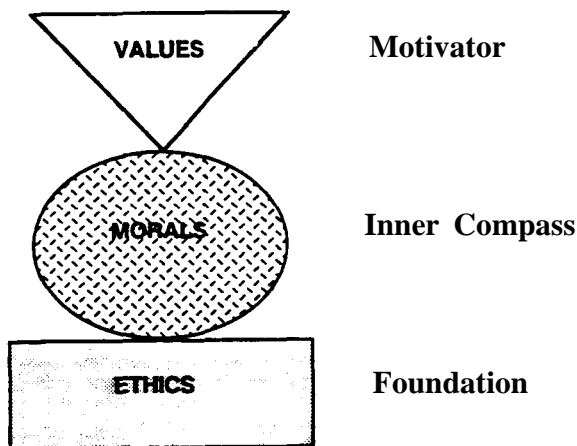
Morals refer to an individual's beliefs about what is right and wrong. Morals are a personal evaluation of values and behaviors. They also can serve as an internal alarm system.

### Ethics

Ethics refers to standards of conduct that indicate how people ought to behave based on specific values and principles that define what is right. Ethics deals with the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and the commitment to do what is right.

Two components of ethics are prudence and virtue. **Prudence** refers to doing something right because it is the smart thing to do. **Virtue** refers to doing something right because it is the good thing to do. Both of these result in ethical decisions.

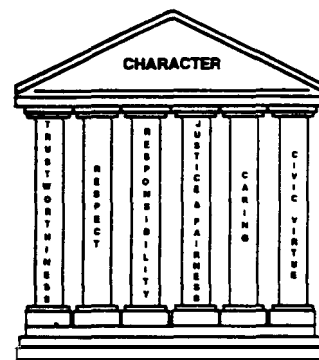
This symbol identifies the relationship of the three concepts:



## Pillars of Character

Michael Josephson, founder of the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina Del Rey, Cal.,

convened a group of people from across the nation in 1992. They came up with a set of ethical values that form the foundation of a democratic society.



From Ethics: **Easier Said Than Done**, Volumes 19 and 20. 1992, pages 80-81, published by the Josephson Institute of Ethics. Copyrighted information used with permission of the author.

- I. **Trustworthiness:** Worthy of trust, honor, and confidence. Includes such values as integrity, promise-keeping, loyalty, dependability.
- II. **Respect:** Regard for the dignity, worth, and autonomy of all persons. Treating people with courtesy, civility, politeness. Tolerance of others.
- III. **Responsibility:** Acknowledgment and performance of duties to others and self. Being accountable and self-disciplined.
- IV. **Justice and Fairness:** Making decisions on appropriate factors; being impartial; avoiding conflicts of interest; being reasonable and consistent; playing fair.
- V. **Caring:** Having regard for the well-being of others. Being kind, compassionate, considerate, unselfish, charitable.
- VI. **Civic Virtue and Citizenship:** Recognizing and living up to social obligations; participating in democratic process; being law abiding; doing one's share.

Our underlying convictions must be considered more objectively in decision making, however, because all people do not hold the same specific beliefs. Religious, cultural, and political beliefs vary substantially over time and among cultures, and even among persons of the same culture. Although we have our own beliefs, we must be careful about imposing these values on others.

Topic adapted from segments of **Enhancing Ethical Leadership**, a Family Community Leadership program, by Donna Rae Scheffert and Marjory Hamersly, the University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1993.