

# Building CHARACTER

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## Leading From the Front

"Seventy-five percent of what we do is in the dark, when no one is watching."

Keith Jackson, president of Provident Security in Florida, knows that character is important. "We're in the business of security, of protecting other people's property. Our customers need to trust our employees."

More importantly, the employees need to trust their leadership. In an industry where the standard turnover is between 100% and 200%, Jackson has watched his company's rate fall from 60% to 30% in the past year.

What made the difference? Leadership example.

"Be committed to it even when it seems like a lot of work and it does not show immediate results," says Jackson. And it has been a lot of work. With 200 employees operating 24 hours a day at more than 50 locations, getting everyone together for an employee meeting was difficult. Mr. Jackson was determined to find a solution. He now travels to the two main offices each

month, and over the course of four days will hold 6 to 8 meetings in each location. It's exhausting, but it is important, and it has results. Morale is high, internal strife is low, and employees look forward to the monthly meetings.

To yield any results, the transformation had to begin at the top. Mr. Jackson began to work on his own character before presenting *Character First!* to his supervisors. That, he says, is the key to it all.

"It changed me first. When we began, I realized there were things in my own life that needed to change. When the supervisors saw that I was serious about it, that I was willing to work at [building character], they got on board."



*Bud Jackson (L) recognizes security officer Clyde Bloedel for creativity.*

## Resourcefulness vs. Wastefulness

*Finding practical uses for that which others would overlook or discard*

Five aspects of resourcefulness:

- See value in objects, ideas, and people.
- Repair, reuse, and recycle.
- Make wise use of your time, talents, energy, and mind.
- Give away or sell the things you do not use.
- Do not litter.



## Hidden Resources

Question: What do crop rotation, ice cream powder, and synthetic rubber have in common? Answer: They were all developed by the same man.

He was born in a slave cabin, but his hard work and love of knowledge soon drew him far from home in search of an education. After high school, he went on to college, where he earned a master's degree in agriculture. He then accepted a job as the head of the agriculture department at Tuskegee Institute.

The agricultural department was simply a large empty room. With nothing but his head and hands, he was expected to develop and furnish a laboratory. He did. He took his students to the dump, where they collected old jars, scrap metal, and anything else that could be useful. Using these materials, they built a lab and began their studies.

Around this time, he noticed that years of repeated cotton crops were depleting the soil. He encouraged farmers to grow peanuts and replenish the land. They tried it, and soon there were tons of peanuts and no market for them! He went back to the lab and emerged with over 300 products made from the peanut or components of peanuts.

George Washington Carver invented peanut butter, but he is remembered for much more. He was the first man to suggest rotating crops to enrich the land. He believed that everything had a purpose, even though that purpose might change over time. He refused to spend money on himself, instead spending himself on the value he saw in his people. He was resourceful, and he became a hero.

## The Pilot Project

Five years ago this month, a team of volunteers assembled in Oklahoma City to pilot the newly published *Character First! Education* curriculum written for elementary schools. At the time, no one imagined how fast the program would expand to the far corners of the world.

The success of the initial pilot program is due in part to the dedicated leadership of the Oklahoma City Public Schools who agreed to test the curriculum, and a local police officer who had the vision of developing new ways of building character in children.



As a community affairs officer with the Oklahoma City Police Department, Sergeant Clarence Powers faces the problem of juvenile delinquency on a daily basis. That is why he began to visit classrooms, challenging students to live a life of

responsibility and respect. After discovering the Character Training Institute in 1996, Sergeant Powers led the charge in requesting *Character First!* curriculum for elementary schools, generating community support for the program, and recruiting mentors to help young people make wise decisions.

Of the original eight Oklahoma City elementary schools that piloted the *Character First!* curriculum, all eight continue to voluntarily use the program. Teachers report that students cooperate with each other, respect their authorities, and carry out their academic responsibilities now more than ever. An overwhelming majority of teachers find the character lessons meaningful, effective, and a good use of classroom time. Last year, some fifth grade teachers graduated the first group of students to have had character training since kindergarten. For the first time the teachers were sorry to see the students go.

To all the teachers, administrators, students, parents, and volunteers who participated in the Oklahoma City pilot project, thank you for pioneering the way for thousands to follow. The investment you made and the tools you gave are not forgotten.

**“I’ve waited twenty years for a program like this.”**  
—an OKC teacher

## Perfect Present?

A rich man was determined to give his mother a birthday present that would be better than any gift ever offered. He searched high and low, rejecting priceless stones, rare art, and valuable collectibles as “too common.” He consulted friends, searched the internet, and called antique dealers, all to no avail.

Finally he discovered the perfect gift—a bird that had a vocabulary of 4000 words, could speak in numerous languages and sing 3 operatic arias. He immediately bought the bird for fifty thousand dollars and had it hand delivered to his mother.

The next day he waited for her to call and tell him what she thought. When he heard nothing, he telephoned to see if she had even received the gift. “What did you think of the bird?” he asked, excited. She calmly replied, “It was delicious.”

Have you ever spent foolishly, only to have people misunderstand the intent and waste your resources? Instead of money, try giving of your most valuable resource—your time.

## Character Council Conference

The energy was contagious. Around each table, a group of people huddled, eagerly sharing ideas. Plates of lunch were pushed aside as teams planned their strategy.

A brainstorming session at a creative firm? Not quite. The scene just described was the lunch workshop at the first International Character Council Conference. During this session, 124 attendees divided into teams and planned how each of six sectors—business, education, faith community, family, government, and media—could best be involved in a community-wide character emphasis. This workshop was but one activity in two packed days of sessions.

The conference was designed to help everyone interested in building a Character Council, from those wanting to know how to those who wished to take their city to the next level. Everyone left the conference with some new piece of information to take to their city and apply. Most attendees were excited about the abundance of insight they gained, stating that they could hardly wait to apply it.



Attendees at the Character Council Conference

The speakers had plenty of practical experience. Current character council presidents, city council members, business people, and community leaders shared from personal experience on topics ranging

from funding to media to involving law enforcement in a character emphasis.

Perhaps the biggest benefit, however, was the vision gained by those who attended. Repeatedly they stated, “Thank you for encouraging me in what we are doing. Now I know that we are on the right track.”

For more information on strengthening or starting a Character Council in your city, contact the International Association of Character Cities at 405-815-0001 ext 272.

## About CTI

The Character Training Institute (CTI) was established to encourage true success in businesses, organizations, schools, communities, and families by encouraging character growth and development. With forty-nine qualities at its center, *Character First!* offers a variety of training and resources to stimulate character growth in individuals from all walks of life.

CTI is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.