Praise for Character Matters

"In a world where the hole in the moral ozone continues to widen, *Character Matters* is an absolute must read. With Lickona's brilliant new manual, parents and teachers have what they need to do what matters most: help their children become people of solid character."

> —Michele Borba, Ed.D., author of *Building Moral Intelligence* and *Don't Give Me That Attitude!*

"One of our nation's foremost authorities on character education, Tom Lickona has made another major contribution to the character education movement. Whether you are a parent, teacher, student, or concerned member of the school community, *Character Matters* will be an invaluable resource for implementing quality character education."

> —Sanford McDonnell, chairman of the board of the Character Education Partnership and chairman emeritus of McDonnell Douglas Corporation

"Tom Lickona has done it again. This outstanding book is the ideal blend of theory and practice. It is a wonderful resource for parents, teachers, and all those concerned with our young."

-Kevin Ryan, founder and director emeritus of the Boston University Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character

"*Character Matters* is an extremely useful book for all—whether they be parents, teachers, or counselors—who work with young people. Down-to-earth, pithy, accessible, the book is full of sound advice and practical help. We should all be deeply grateful to its author, Tom Lickona, for sharing his considerable wisdom with us."

> —F. Washington Jarvis, headmaster, The Roxbury Latin School, Boston

"*Character Matters* is both a tour de force and an excellent guide for parents and teachers who want to help young people toward strong character development. It will be useful both in public schools and in programs where religious values are recognized as part of character formation. If you are really concerned about the character development of young people in our culture, you may find yourself buying several copies!"

-Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., psychologist and author of *Spiritual Passages*

"Character Matters offers a comprehensive set of hands-on strategies for helping children develop the strong moral character they need to navigate the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. Imbued with a clear vision of the potential and promise of young people and punctuated with illustrations and anecdotes, this book makes character education eminently accessible, enormously creative, and a highly collaborative undertaking. Lucid, engaging, and rich in practical wisdom, *Character Matters* is a must read for parents and educators who care about the kinds of *persons* our children will become."

> —Karen E. Bohlin, head of school, Montrose School, Natick, Massachusetts, a National School of Character; senior scholar, Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character

Character Matters

ALSO BY THOMAS LICKONA

Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues (editor)

Raising Good Children

Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility

Character Development in Schools and Beyond (edited with Kevin Ryan)

Sex, Love & You: Making the Right Decision (with Judith Lickona and William Boudreau, M.D.)

Character Quotations: Activities That Build Character and Community (with Matthew Davidson)

CHARACTER MATTERS

How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues

Thomas Lickona

ATRIA PAPERBACK

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi



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to Mary, with gratitude for her constant care

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And, finally, to God, who makes all things possible.

Cortland, New York July, 2003 A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting and, when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities, corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands.

—Abraham Lincoln

Fame is fleeting; popularity an accident; riches take wings. Only one thing endures: character.

-HORACE GREELEY

The aim of education is to guide students in the process through which they shape themselves as human persons armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues—while at the same time conveying to them the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which they are involved.

-JACQUES MARITAIN

Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. —Martin Luther King, Jr.

A general dissolution of principles and manners will more surely overthrow the liberties of America more than the whole force of the common enemy.

-John Adams

Morals are the foundation upon which a country rises to great heights. Take away morals, and individuals, leaders, and countries fall.

-OLD SPIRITUAL WISDOM

Children develop character by what they see, what they hear, and what they are repeatedly led to do.

-JAMES STENSON

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Portraits of character touch something deep in the human heart. In the award-winning Civil War documentary by Ken Burns, one of the most commented on and moving moments was the reading of a letter written by a Union soldier, Major Sullivan Ballou, to his wife, Sarah, a week before his death at the Battle of Bull Run:

My very dear Sarah,

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days—perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more.

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt. . . .

Sarah, my love for you is deathless . . . and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on to the battle field.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. . . . I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whis-

pers to me—perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name.

Here was a humble man, a courageous man, who loved his family and loved his country and, spurred on by high ideals, did his duty as he saw it without complaining. Tom Brokaw, interviewing veterans of World War II in his best-selling book *The Greatest Generation*, was struck by many of the same qualities. September 11 produced abundant examples of unassuming heroism and sacrificial generosity.

We are moved by these stories of character because they show us human beings at their best. They reveal our capacity for goodness. They challenge us to be more than we might otherwise be. And they renew our faith in every child's potential to grow into a person of character.

As we begin a new century, we have a sharper sense of how much character matters. We need good character to lead purposeful, productive, and fulfilling lives. We need character to have strong and stable families. We need character to have safe, caring, and effective schools. We need character to build a civil, decent, and just society.

We are troubled, however, by the unraveling of the moral fabric of our society. In a recent national poll, nearly three of four American adults said that they believe that people in general lead less honest and moral lives than they used to.¹ Says a high school teacher, "Kids today are more cynical than ever about the lack of honesty they see in the adult world."

We're troubled by all the ways societal moral decline is reflected, as it inevitably is, in the attitudes and behavior of our children. We're troubled by the precocious sexual behavior of the young. We're troubled by the bad language that comes out of the mouths of even elementary school children. We're troubled by the breakdown of the family and the growing numbers of parents who seem to let their children do and watch what they please. We're troubled by a ubiquitous media culture that grows more violent and vulgar by the day.

How can we renew our moral culture?

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Children are 25 percent of the population but 100 percent of the future. If we wish to renew society, we must raise up a generation of children who have strong moral character. And if we wish to do that, we have two responsibilities: first, to model good character in our own lives, and second, to intentionally foster character development in our young.

Happily, an effort to do this is under way. For more than a decade, there has been a resurgence of character education in our nation's schools. It can be seen in a spate of character education books and curricular materials; in federal funding for character education and character education mandates in more than two-thirds of the states; in the emergence of national advocacy groups such as the Character Education Partnership and the Character Counts! Coalition; in the new *Journal of Research in Character Education*, the National Schools of Character awards competition, and reports on how to prepare future teachers to be character educators; and in an explosion of grassroots character education initiatives.

Character education is welcomed by parents who need support for the hard work of raising good children in a hostile moral environment; welcomed by teachers who went into teaching hoping to make a difference in the kind of person a child becomes and are demoralized to be in a school that gives up teaching right from wrong; and welcomed by all of us who are saddened by the decline in values as basic as common courtesy that we once took for granted. Effective character education in our schools is something all of us have a stake in, not just educators and parents, but everyone who cares about a decent society.

The premise of the character education movement is that the disturbing behaviors that bombard us daily—violence, greed, corruption, incivility, drug abuse, sexual immorality, and a poor work ethic—have a common core: the absence of good character. Educating for character, unlike piecemeal reforms, goes beneath the symptoms to the root of these problems. It therefore offers the best hope of improvement in all these areas.

Character education, of course, is not only the responsibility of schools. It is the shared duty of all those who touch the values and lives of the young, starting with families and extending to faith com-

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munities, youth organizations, business, government, and even the media. The hope for the future is that we can come together in common cause: to elevate the character of our children, our own character as adults, and ultimately the character of our culture.

At the heart of effective character education is a strong partnership between parents and schools. The family is the first school of virtue. It is where we learn about love. It is where we learn about commitment, sacrifice, and faith in something larger than ourselves. The family lays down the moral foundation on which all other social institutions build.

Parents, if they make the effort, can remain formative influences even during the challenging adolescent years. *Building a Better Teenager*, a 2002 research report based on hundreds of studies, concludes that the most academically motivated and morally responsible teens—and the ones least likely to engage in risky behaviors—are those who enjoy warm and involved relationships with their parents and whose parents set clear expectations and monitor their activities in age-appropriate ways.²

For the past nine years, our Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (respect and responsibility) at the State University of New York at Cortland has worked with schools and parents to promote the development of good character. We publish a *Fourth and Fifth Rs* newsletter (www.cortland.edu/c4n5rs) spotlighting character education success stories and run the Summer Institute in Character Education, which trains teachers, counselors, administrators, and other educators from across the country.

Character education, we always emphasize, is not a new idea. Down through history, all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help students become smart and to help them become good. They need character for both. They need character strengths such as a strong work ethic, self-discipline, and perseverance in order to succeed in school and succeed in life. They need character qualities such as respect and responsibility in order to have positive interpersonal relationships and live in community. At the beginning of our republic, the Founders argued that a democracy—government by the people—could not thrive without virtuous citizens, ones who understood and honored democracy's moral un-

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derpinnings: respect for individual rights, voluntary compliance with the law, participation in public life, and concern for the common good. For most of our nation's history, character education was at the center of the school's mission.

Unlike the nondirective and often relativistic values education of the recent past—which encouraged students to "make your own decision" without grounding them in the content of character character education is the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue. The school *stands for* qualities of character such as hard work, respect, and responsibility. It promotes these through every phase of school life, from the example of adults to the handling of discipline to the content of the curriculum.

What is the content of character that we should try to model and teach in school, at home, and in our communities? In this book, I set forth ten essential virtues that are affirmed by nearly all philosophical, cultural, and religious traditions: wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, a positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude, and humility. Part 1 explains these ten essential virtues and the way character profoundly affects the quality of our individual and collective lives.

Part 2 shows how parents can raise children of character and how schools can help parents fulfill their primary role as children's first and most powerful moral teachers.

Part 3 shows how all classroom teachers, regardless of subject matter, can create a learning community that fosters responsible work and moral behavior.

Part 4 shows how any school can become a school of character. Here and throughout the book, I report on exemplary elementary, middle, and high schools, many of which have won national recognition for excellence in character education. These schools have reaped the rewards of fewer discipline problems and higher academic performance by putting character first.

Part 5 shows how to involve an entire community in promoting good character.

Character education, to be sure, can be done ineffectively, as little more than slogans, banners, and adults' urging kids to be good. But schools that do character education well—in a way that transxxvi

INTRODUCTION

forms the school culture, the daily experience of students and staff—create an environment in which diligent effort, mutual respect, and service to others are the rule rather than the exception. A growing body of character education research (see, for example, *What Works in Character Education,* www.character.org) documents these positive outcomes. Hal Urban, an award-winning high school history teacher, a character education speaker, and the author of *Life's Greatest Lessons,* shares his firsthand observations:

I've had the good fortune to visit schools all over the country that have character education programs in place. The first word that pops into my mind when I visit them is "clean." I seen clean campuses and buildings, hear clean language, and see kids dressed cleanly and neatly. I also see courtesy being practiced by everyone—students, teachers, administrators, custodians, and cafeteria workers. Most important, I see teaching and learning going on in an atmosphere that is caring, positive, and productive.

At the end of a unit on slavery, a fifth-grade boy in New Hampshire said, "We think slavery was bad, but what are people going to say about us in a hundred years?" Most of us would be likely to agree that our contemporary society faces serious social-moral problems and that these problems have deep roots and require systemic solutions. Many of us are also now coming to recognize the link between public life and private character—that it is not possible to develop a virtuous society unless we develop virtue in the hearts, minds, and souls of individual human beings. Families, schools, and communities can and must each do their part in creating a culture of character by raising children of character. Indeed, the health of our nation in the century ahead depends on how seriously all of us commit to this calling.

PART ONE

Why Character Matters

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CHAPTER 1

Why Character Matters

I was a punk before I came to this school. I used to make little kids cry. When I met Mrs. Brown, I changed. I'm not a punk anymore, because Mrs. Brown taught me character.

-DREW, A SIXTH GRADER

Nothing is more important for the public weal than to train up youth in wisdom and virtue.

—Ben Franklin

W hy does character matter? A headmaster remembers that above the door to the main classroom building where he went to school as a boy, the following words were engraved:

Be careful of your thoughts,

for your thoughts become your words.

Be careful of your words,

for your words become your deeds.

Be careful of your deeds.

for your deeds become your habits.

WHY CHARACTER MATTERS

Be careful of your habits,

for your habits become your character.

Be careful of your character,

for your character becomes your destiny.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said it simply: "Character is destiny." Character shapes the destiny of an individual person. It shapes the destiny of a whole society. "Within the character of the citizen," Cicero said, "lies the welfare of the nation."

"Transmitting values," as the essayist Lance Morrow points out, "is the work of civilization." A glance at history reminds us that civilizations do not flourish forever. They rise, and they fall. They fall when the moral core deteriorates—when a society fails to pass on its core virtues, its strengths of character, to the next generation. The historian Arnold Toynbee observed, "Out of twenty-one notable civilizations, nineteen perished not by conquest from without but by moral decay from within."

More than a century ago in a lecture at Harvard University, Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted, "Character is higher than intellect." Writes the psychiatrist Frank Pittman, "The stability of our lives depends on our character. It is character, not passion, that keeps marriages together long enough to do their work of raising children into mature, responsible, productive citizens. In this imperfect world, it is character that enables people to survive, to endure, and to transcend their misfortunes." "To do well," Stephen Covey says, "you must do good. And to do good, you must first *be* good."

All of us who are parents naturally want our children to be successful. But we know in our bones that success without *character*—qualities such as honesty, a sense of responsibility, kindness, and determination in the face of difficulty—doesn't count for much. The novelist Walker Percy once said, "Some people get all A's but flunk life." In living a life well, as a proverb puts it, "An ounce of character is worth a pound of intelligence."

As a society, we are beginning to recover this age-old wisdom. Schools are taking up the work of character education. We have a renewed concern about the character of our government and corporate leaders, having learned painfully that expertise without ethics is

a menace to society. Best-selling books such as *Emotional Intelligence*,¹ *The* 7 *Habits of Highly Effective People*,² and *The Book of Virtues*³ are essentially reflections on character and its importance in our individual and collective lives. Life, such writings remind us, is a moral and spiritual journey for which we need a reliable inner compass.

THE RIGHT STUFF

Character is having "the right stuff." As parents and educators, we labor to teach kids this—that it's what's inside that counts.

We know good character when we see it. At age nineteen, Bob Wieland landed a contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates but was drafted to serve in Vietnam. There he lost both of his legs in a mine explosion. In the hospital, he sank into a deep depression and wasted away to eighty-seven pounds. Then one morning he woke up and said to himself, "What can I do? It won't help me to focus on what I can't do." He began to lift weights, then to lift competitively, and went on to set a world record by bench-pressing five hundred pounds. He also learned to walk on his hands. On September 8, 1982, with pads on his knuckles, he left his California home and set out to walk across America on his hands. He got thousands of people to sponsor his trip, with the proceeds going to alleviate hunger in this country and around the world. It took him three years, eight months, and nearly 5 million hand steps to reach his destination of Washington, D.C. When he got there, he said, "I wanted to show that through faith in God and dedication, there's nothing a person can't achieve."

For the past two decades, images of character have come in abundance from the Giraffe Project (www.giraffe.org), based in Langley, Washington. This project is dedicated to finding and honoring "human giraffes"—people sticking out their necks for the common good. Codirectors Ann Medlock and John Graham have created a character education curriculum around these everyday heroes. Students read giraffe stories, find and tell stories about giraffes in their own school or community, and then are challenged to become giraffes themselves by sticking their necks out to make a dif-

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WHY CHARACTER MATTERS

ference. Over the past twenty years, the Giraffe Project has built a bank of more than a thousand stories of giraffes of all ages. Here are just three:

Every payday for more than a quarter of a century, the late Michael Greenburg bought three pairs of gloves. On the coldest days of winter, he headed for the toughest parts of town and talked street people into accepting them. He helped the homeless by doing what he could—over and over again.

Twelve-year-old Craig Kielburger in Toronto read about the murder of a Pakistani child who had spoken out against child slavery in his country. Craig started Free the Children, a movement dedicated to ending slavery worldwide. He raised money, spoke out, and even went on a global factfinding trip. After the media picked up his story, several major companies pledged not to buy products made by child labor.

British doctor Alice Stewart has quietly done a lifetime of painstaking research on the effects of radiation. One of her many discoveries was that a single X-ray of a fetus could double the risk of childhood cancer. Thanks to her, thousands of children's lives have been spared. She has ruffled a lot of feathers in medicine and industry but continues her research on public health hazards.⁴

These human giraffes have compassion and courage, but they also have another quality: They find fulfillment and even joy in their work. It feels good to do good. Some years ago, the PBS talk show host Dennis Wholey edited a book titled *Are You Happy?*—a question he put to forty people, half famous, half not.⁵ In every case, people cited as the source of their greatest happiness the times they made a positive contribution to the lives of others. The world tells our children that happiness is to be found in sexual pleasure, beauty, popularity, wealth, power, or unending good health. They need to Why Character Matters

learn what Aristotle taught ages ago: A fulfilling life is a life of virtue. You can't be happy unless you're good.

THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER

In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King, Jr., said he dreamed of the day when all Americans "will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

What is the content of character? The content of good character is virtue. Virtues—such as honesty, justice, courage, and compassion—are dispositions to behave in a morally good way. They are objectively good human qualities, good for us whether we know it or not. They are affirmed by societies and religions around the world. Because they are intrinsically good, they have a claim on our conscience. Virtues transcend time and culture (although their cultural expression may vary); justice and kindness, for example, will always and everywhere be virtues, regardless of how many people exhibit them.

We can assert that virtues are objectively good—not subjective preferences like taste in music or clothes—because they meet certain ethical criteria:

- They define what it means to be human. We are more fully human when we act virtuously—generously rather than selfishly, justly rather than unjustly, honestly rather than deceitfully.
- Virtues promote the happiness and well-being of the individual person.
- They serve the common good, making it possible for us to live and work in community.
- They meet the classical ethical tests of reversibility (would you like to be treated this way?) and universalizability (would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?).