DEVELOPING LEADERS OF CHARACTER

at the
United States Air Force Academy

A
Conceptual Framework

Center for Character and Leadership Development

2011

Watch your thoughts, they become your words.
Watch your words, they become you're actions.
Watch your actions, they become your habits.
Watch your habits, they become your character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.

- Unknown

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Foreword

Ask any cadet at the Air Force Academy and he or she will tell you that I'm always challenging them to "find their WHY" -- their enduring commitments and noble purpose.

It's not easy to find your WHY. It requires asking the right questions. Relentlessly. Persistently.

But in the end, finding our WHY touches our deepest motivations and inspires others to join our enterprise.

At the United States Air Force Academy, our WHY is to develop leaders of character who our nation can count on: leaders equipped to respond to the complexity, uncertainty and asymmetry of today's world because they possess a firm and stable character that reflects the virtues embodied in our Core Values.

While our mission endures, our constant challenge at USAFA is to consistently and fearlessly ask ourselves how best to accomplish our mission -- and here is where the Conceptual Framework developed by the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) has hit the target. The ideas and approaches articulated in this document offer each USAFA Mission Partner: (1) a *concise* definition of what it means to be a leader of character; and, (2) a compelling set of approaches on how each of us can best challenge and support cadets to "own" their own development.

Significantly, the language and principles in this document are already informing the Center's mission, approach, and practices. I have seen first-hand how the concepts in this Framework document are changing how CCLD goes about inspiring cadets to live honorably, how cadets are being inspired to lift others into their best possible selves, and how to elevate performance toward a common and noble purpose.

The Center for Character and Leadership Development offers this Conceptual Framework in the spirit of supporting and assisting all USAFA Mission Partners toward accomplishing our historic mission. I invite you to contact the Center and learn more about how you can use the fertile ideas in this document as you strive to educate, train and inspire men and women as they become officers of character motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to our Nation.

Brigadier General Richard Clark
Commandant of Cadets
United States Air Force Academy

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Executive Summary

The Conceptual Framework highlighted in these pages articulates a comprehensive approach aimed at advancing the Air Force Academy's bold vision to be the world's premier institution for developing leaders of character. While the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD or "the Center") readily acknowledges that scholars have written on the intersection of these two concepts, the team of military and faculty leaders chartered to develop this Framework could not identify a single institution or organization that has implemented a rigorous and evidence-based approach that integrates *both* leadership and character. Yet the Center is convinced that the American people are asking its military to do just that: *develop leaders of character.*

Every effort was made to build a theory-supported, evidence-based framework. We incorporated insights and perspectives from a wide number of disciplines, specifically the fields of moral development, leadership development, organizational behavior, theories of motivation and cognition, developmental science, high impact pedagogical practices, organizational dynamics, philosophy, military science and positive psychology.

The Conceptual Framework is also an effort to synthesize and expand on the concepts and approaches currently in place in the Air Force and at the Academy. In particular, *AFDD 1-1*, *Leadership and Force Development*, offers an illustrative model and a list of critical abilities. We have also drawn heavily on the features of the Academy's Officer Development System (ODS), especially its noble aim to increase the competence, confidence and commitment of cadets. Our approach is also consistent with and builds upon the USAFA Institutional Outcomes and the competencies outlined in the Air Force's Institutional Competency Listing (ICLs). In sum, the Framework is certainly more evolutionary than revolutionary.

Section One defines a "leader of character" as someone who: (1) *Lives honorably* by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Core Values; (2) *Lifts people* to their best possible selves; and, (3) *Elevates performance* toward a common and noble purpose.

Section Two focuses on the critical question of development and how the Academy should strive to inspire cadets to take "ownership" for their own development and growth. We define development as the "crystallization and consolidation of observable new insights, knowledge, skills and commitments." Finally, this section highlights a set of guiding principles of intentional development, including one that the Center believes is foundational: *A primary role of USAFA is to inspire cadets to become responsible for their own development.*
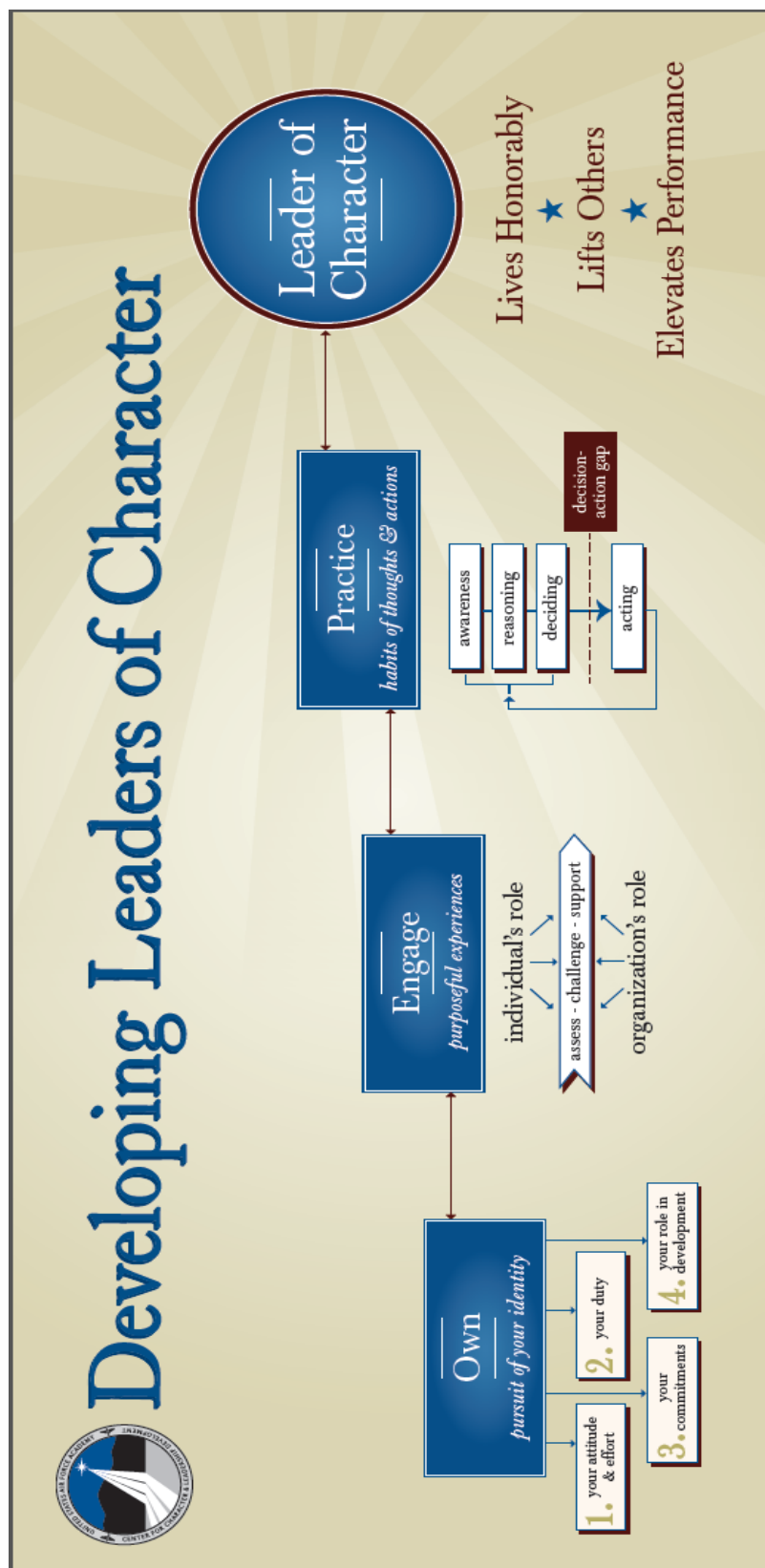
Section Three explains the model of *purposeful engagement*, a practice that researchers confirm predicts growth and development, especially among college-age students. The model is grounded in social learning theory and the concept of self-efficacy (which is usually defined as an individual's belief about his or her capacity to perform). Self-efficacy is derived from the ability to master experiences and challenges, as well as the ability to receive constructive feedback and encouragement about one's perceived capacities. Inherent in this model are key mechanisms for successful engagement: identifying and leveraging their strengths, offering feedback and coaching, and encouraging reflection. In short, self-efficacy underpins a person's drive for competence, confidence and commitment.

Section Four emphasizes that developing leaders of character requires extensive and
sustained practice (and reflection on that practice) in preparation for operating in a complex environment. We introduce the ARDA Model, four capacities that cadets must be able to adapt and expand. These four capacities are: (1) Awareness; (2) Reasoning; (3) Deciding; and, (4) Acting. Some readers may recognize that this four-step model reflects James Rest's model of ethical thinking, and indeed it does. *Our contention, however, is that these steps are critical to our capacities as <u>leaders</u> as well as our capacity to act ethically and that these capacities extend beyond the cognitive domain.* This section also discusses the importance of cadets using their commitments and character strengths (e.g., courage, self-discipline, resiliency) to push through what we call the 'Decision-Action Gap' (e.g.,"I knew the right course of action, but I just didn't follow through").

Section Five highlights four institutional mechanisms critical to effectively implementing the Conceptual Framework at USAFA. These mechanisms include: (1) <u>Aligning Programs and Courses</u> to ensure that all character and leadership experiences, programs, and courses are "threaded together" in a deliberate, intentionally-designed, integrative system; (2) <u>Aligning Assessments</u> to ensure that the Academy is gathering and analyzing rigorous and comprehensive assessment data to measure the extent to which the Framework's concepts, approaches and interventions are (or are not) producing results; (3) <u>Aligning Rewards Systems</u> to ensure that our institutional reward system is driving behavior that advances the Academy's core mission; and, (4) <u>Aligning Words and Actions</u> to ensure organizational integrity and support for the other three mechanisms.

Figure One on the next page offers readers a "snapshot" of the Conceptual Framework, including the three core pillars upon which the Framework rests (OWN, ENGAGE, PRACTICE).

Figure 1

Developing Leaders of Character

Leader of Character

Lives Honorably
Lifts Others
Elevates Performance

Practice
habits of thoughts & actions

awareness
reasoning
deciding
acting
decision-action gap

Engage
purposeful experiences

individual's role
assess - challenge - support
organization's role

Own
pursuit of your identity

1. your attitude & effort
2. your duty
3. your commitments
4. your role in development

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Section 1:
Defining a Leader of Character

"The vision of the United States Air Force Academy is to be the Air Force's premier institution for developing leaders of character."

Early scholarship on leadership generally viewed the leader's role as a manager, whose job was to get effective performance from his or her subordinates, and to do so efficiently, by maintaining control over people and resources. In the 1970s and 1980s theories on the nature of leadership moved beyond this "industrial model" to one that views leadership within the context of *mutual purposes*. Burns speaks to this new approach when he writes that "the function of leadership is to engage followers...[so] that people can be lifted into their better selves."[1]

Much of the current scholarship on leadership marks a commitment to this notion of *development* and *growth*, for both the leader and followers. Furthermore, a few scholars are beginning to address the dynamic relationship between character and leadership, often by highlighting specific traits or qualities of character that are critical to effective leadership.[2]

In a general sense, the term "character" has come to mean the constellation of strengths and weaknesses that form and reveal who we are. Contrary to some perspectives, our character is not engraved by age six -- or even sixteen. Each of us can change and improve our character. Just as a mountain is constantly being reshaped by weather patterns, our character is reshaped by the different choices we make and the virtues we choose to practice.[3]

Unfortunately, little existing scholarship exists that systematically integrates these two concepts. Yet the very mission of USAFA demands that the Center for Character and Leadership Development address and attend to this integration.

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[1] See Burns (1978).

[2] CCLD's Conceptual Framework has been influenced by the pioneering work on the nature of leadership conducted by Rost (1993); Bass (1996); Avolio (2005); Gardner 1990); and Greenleaf (1977), among others.

[3] The field of character education has produced a number of seminal works on the philosophy and psychology of character development. For an overview, see Berkowitz (2002) and Davidson, Lickona and Khmelkov (2008).
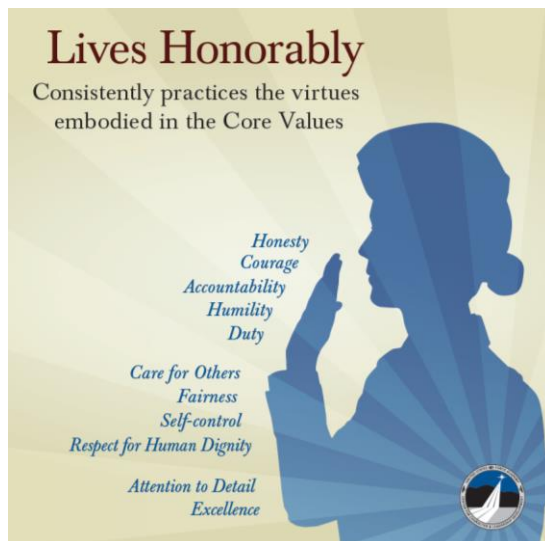
One critical step toward this integration is for the Center to articulate – with a combination of simplicity, clarity, and intellectual rigor – what we mean by the term "leader of character." Our definition is delineated in Figure 2:

Figure 2

A Leader of Character:

- *Lives honorably* by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force Core Values

- *Lifts others* to their best possible selves

- *Elevates performance* toward a common and noble purpose

We offer below a brief rationale for each phrase, including the pertinent scholarship that informs each concept of our definition:

Lives Honorably
Consistently practices the virtues embodied in the Core Values

Honesty
Courage
Accountability
Humility
Duty

Care for Others
Fairness
Self-control
Respect for Human Dignity

Attention to Detail
Excellence

Lives honorably…
The term "live honorably" has significant meaning and saliency to all Airmen – indeed to all men and women who serve in the military. We are bound by a code of behavior that defines our chosen profession. These standards bind and define us, and falling short of these high standards tarnishes the noble profession to which we have committed ourselves. In other words, from the moment of our oath of office, it becomes our responsibility to honor those who have come before us, especially those who have paid the ultimate price in service to our nation. In

short, living honorably means committing ourselves to live by certain standards of behavior – standards that do not (necessarily) bind those outside the military. Notably, the concept is also an essential aspiration of the Cadet Wing Honor Oath: "*I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, so help me God.*"[4]

**…by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force Core Values**
Living honorably extends far beyond mere compliance with the technical and legal requirements of our commission. Instead, living honorably means understanding and consistently practicing the *virtues* essential to the core values of the military profession. Duty. Respect. Courage. These are just some of the virtues that define the military officer. There are also the virtues that enable us to practice the habits of integrity (honesty, fairness) and the virtues necessary to put "service before self" (self-sacrifice, humility). Being committed to a military career also demands that we strive to embody *excellence* in every facet of our character and conduct. Moreover, it becomes our responsibility to know what virtues are needed in a particular situation – and then exhibiting and modeling the competence and confidence to "do the right thing." In short, living honorably means consistently "living the virtues" embodied in the Air Force Core Values.[5]

The Cadet Wing Honor Code also speaks to the essential role of habits ("consistently practicing the virtues") affirming that "making the right decisions all the time no matter how seemingly insignificant the issue, will build *a habit of honorable behavior* that will be with you when times are tough" (emphasis added). Significantly, there is growing research that suggests at the core of developing habits is keeping or honoring "one's word."[6]

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[4] It is critical to note that the very goal of honor education is to inspire cadets to *"conduct all activities in a manner that develops a life-long commitment to… living honorably…"* See page 13 of the Cadet Wing Honor Code Reference Handbook (*Honorable Living, Volume 1*).

[5] There is a growing literature suggesting that the concept of character has three dimensions: Ethical/Moral Character, Relational Character, and Performance Character. These three dimensions fully align with the AF Core Values of *Integrity* (moral/ethical), *Service Before Self* (relational), and *Excellence* (performance). See Davidson, Lickona, Khmelkov (2008); Sanders, Lindsay, Foster & Cook (2011); Berkowitz (2002). For more information on the Air Force Core Values, see "The Little Blue Book" (1997).

[6] On the relationship between habits and character, see Wakin (1996). On "honoring one's word," see Erhard, Jensen and Zaffron (2010).
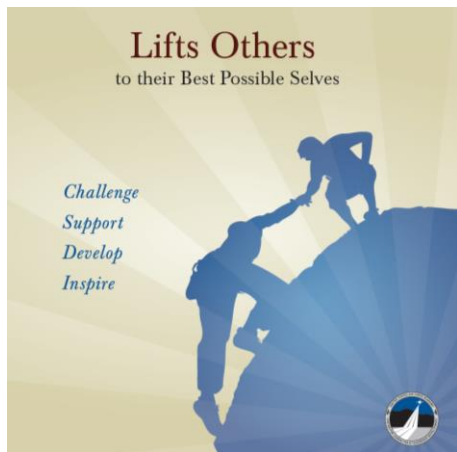
Lifts Others to Their "Best Possible Selves"

There is growing recognition that the "best possible self" concept is integral to our development as leaders.[7] The concept is steeped in the transformational leadership theory and has been developed over the past two decades by researchers interested in how the repertoire of our "possible selves" provide the meaning, organization and direction through which we set our goals and aspirations (as well as how we face our fears and threats). The concept of the 'best possible self' connotes that each one of us has the capacity to pursue the "best" of who we are (or want to become). One team of researchers summed up the potential and promise of the 'best self' concept when they wrote that the self-images, goals and aspirations of our 'best selves' serve as "both an anchor and a beacon, a personal touchstone of who we are and a guide for who we can become."[8]

At USAFA, the challenge is how to provide ample opportunities for cadets to "lift others" in ways that optimize individual (and team) performance. For example, Sanders and his colleagues suggest that leaders "have the fundamental capacity to care about others, their feelings, and motives in such a way as to have a positive influence on followers. This concept is especially critical in the Cadet Wing where upperclassmen have a responsibility to develop themselves as role models as well as a responsibility to develop the cadets under their supervision.[9]

In sum, just as the Wright brothers were pioneers in trying to understand aeronautical lift – our 21st century vision at CCLD is that our cadets will begin to see themselves as pioneers in the discovery of human lift, the capacity to be

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[7] See Avolio and Gardner (2005).

[8] See Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy and Quinn (2005).

[9] These points reflect the *PITO Model*, as well as Day's (2000) work on leadership development. See also Sanders, Lindsay, Foster & Cook (2011)

laser-focused on mission and purpose while simultaneously having the ability to recognize, support and "lift" the strengths, passions and commitments of those around them.[10]
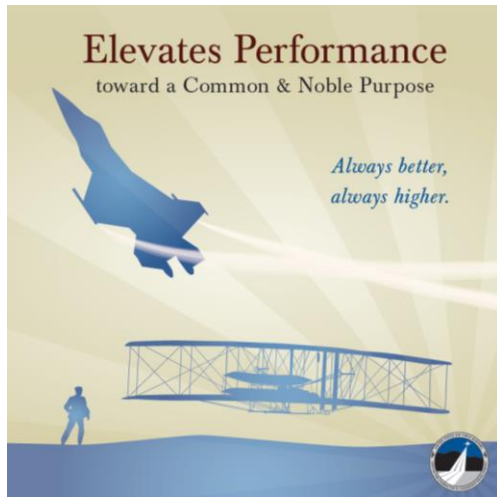
Elevates performance…
Historically, leaders "get things done" (e.g., accomplish objectives) by influencing others. Yet, at the Air Force Academy, a leader of character goes beyond simply "getting things done" to finding ways -- large and small -- to enhance and transform *how* things are done.[11] In other words, leaders are always *striving* – they never simply rest on their laurels, rank, or current level of capability. The most outstanding leaders are always growing, developing, and searching for new ways to expand their capacities (and their mission) beyond the minimum standard of expected performance.

…toward a common and noble purpose
Finally, our definition explicitly addresses *why* a leader engages in the exercise of leadership. We use the term "noble purpose" to denote that not all commitments are alike (indeed, some purposes and commitments are blatantly unethical). We are suggesting that a commitment is noble in the sense that it extends beyond one's own narrow self-interest, and focuses instead on the common good (at the level of the squadron, Air Force, or world). These sorts of commitments enable us to experience (cognitively as well as emotionally) that there are important ideals and principles in the world that are right to care about.

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[10] The metaphor of human lift was developed by Quinn and Quinn (2009).

[11] For research on the concept of "making a real difference" see Bass (1996), Avolio (2005) and Erhard, Jensen & Granger (2011).

Section 2:
Owning the Process

This section focuses on the critical question of development, so central to the mission of the Air Force Academy. At CCLD, we define development as: *the crystallization and consolidation of new insights, knowledge, observable skills and responsibilities.*[12]

It is critical to underscore that training is <u>not</u> development (nor is education), although both these processes offer opportunities for an individual to learn new information, skills and habit patterns. Training typically aims at acquiring a specific skill or capacity (such as physical training or pilot training), whereas education is oriented to learning about a wider set of principles and information (such as learning about world history or the principles of electrical engineering). Cadets can receive training or education and yet never *develop* a deeper insight or awareness.

Development is both a process and an outcome experienced by an individual (but never an end-state). Institutions may offer experiences that results in development, but no institution can claim with any authority that an individual will develop new insights or commitments by a certain date. In many ways, educational and training experiences are the essential "stepping stones" to development.

Figure 3 highlights the Center's guiding principles about development. These principles have been culled from current research on the nature and function of development, various streams of scholarship on the defining characteristics of development, and recent research on effective leadership development.[13]

Together, these nine principles suggest that a fundamental role of the Academy is to *inspire cadets* to become responsible for their own development.[14]

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[12] Our definition is informed by Lewin's (1954) model in which people "unfreeze" from stable practices and perspectives to a new state where changes occur (transition) until these initial changes -- initially fragile and tentative -- become consolidated as new, stable practices and perspectives (refreeze).

[13] Related to applied developmental science, see Lerner (2002). For scholarship on leadership development see McCauley, & Van Velsor (2004); and, Hogan & Kaiser (2005).

[14] Inspiration is an important component of any developmental experience (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). It is important to note, however, that while inspiring cadets is one of core missions of the Academy, there is certainly no expectation that all USAFA experiences and curricula have to include this affective (inspirational) objective.

*Figure 3*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF
PURPOSEFUL DEVELOPMENT

➢ **Development is different than education or training, although related.**

➢ **Development is not a uniform process. Individuals arrive at an organization at different levels of development and with different levels of readiness or motivation to develop.**

➢ **Development occurs in an environment of trust and respect.**

➢ **Development can become the norm of a culture when individuals grasp that everyone around them is striving to develop, and that there exists mutual accountability regarding development.**

➢ **Development occurs through a variety of experiences and sources.**

➢ **Development does not occur just because an individual has *experienced* a particular program or activity. When it comes to development, more is <u>not</u> always better.**

➢ **Development often occurs when someone is "challenged and supported" beyond his or her perceived capability.**

➢ **Development often occurs through the crucible of hardship or failure.**

➢ **Development requires consistent and timely feedback and structured self-reflection.**

"Owning" Your Development

We use the term "Own" to underscore how critical it is for cadets (or anyone) to take responsibility for their own development. The term draws on Albert Bandura's theories of self-efficacy, which we define as an "individual's belief about his or her capacity to perform, master experiences and challenges, as well as the ability to receive constructive feedback and encouragement about one's perceived capacities."[15]

In addition, we examine the relationship between development and *pursuing one's identity*. We also highlight the four dimensions that comprise the "own the process" concept (Figure 4). These are: (1) Owning Your Attitude and Effort; (2) Owning Your Duty; (3) Owning Your Commitments; and, (4) Owning Your Role In Development.

Figure 4
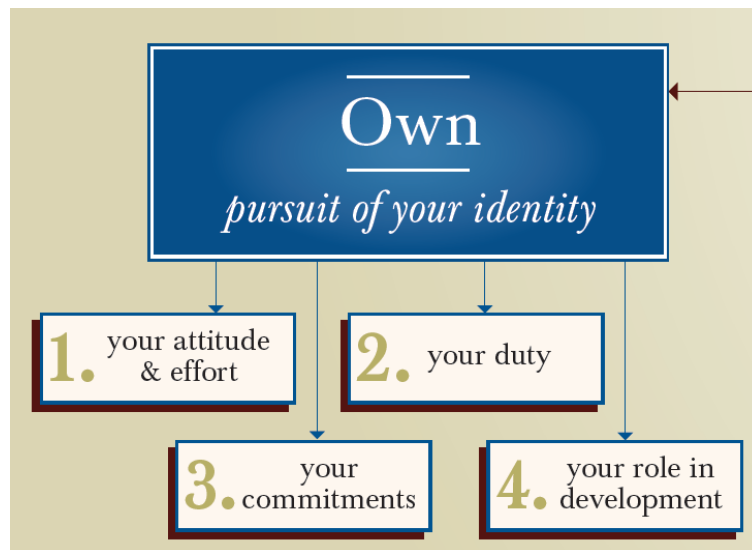
- **Pursuit Of Your Identity**

The question begs to be asked: *Development toward what end?*

Since its inception, the United States Air Force Academy has sought to develop leaders who possess the capacity and habits of thought and action requisite for membership in the profession of arms.

In short, USAFA is today -- and has always been -- in the "identity development" business.

The Academy's goal is to provide cadets with a sturdy foundation upon which to

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[15] See Bandura (1997).

grow into their identity as a military officer with an unyielding commitment to service and excellence. Interestingly, the research literature suggests that one's identity is rooted in an individual's internal drive for self-consistency.[16]

Ideally, a cadet who has developed an identity as a military officer is one who has fully embraced and integrated the values of the profession and consistently applies these values in how he or she thinks, feels and acts. For example, the philosopher Charles Taylor writes that "my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done or what I endorse or oppose."[17]

The process of identity development is different for each cadet. However, USAFA strives to provide each cadet with intensive leadership training, education and a multitude of leadership experiences by which cadets develop and engrain identity-conferring behaviors into firm and stable habits. At the core of these experiences are the knowledge, skills and responsibilities requisite to becoming a leader of character.

Moreover, the USAFA process of identity development includes integrating the following critical dimensions into the cadet experience:

> - Embracing and consistently living in accordance with the Air Force Core Values
>
> - Learning and mastering a wide-range of leadership competencies in preparation for commissioning (Institutional Competency List)
>
> - Assessing the extent to which cadets can demonstrate competence, confidence and commitment to the USAFA outcomes

(1) Owning Your Attitude and Effort

During their time at the Academy there are many factors beyond a cadet's control. But every cadet can "own" his or her attitude and effort. To use an analogy, each cadet is responsible for "stepping up to the plate" and swinging the bat, rather than deciding to leave the bat on their shoulder. There are also practical benefits to this positive mindset: recent research has also shown that people who are pulled into a downward spiral fueled by negative thoughts and behaviors are less likely to cope with adversity and setbacks.[18]

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[16] See Snook and Ramo (2008).

[17] See Taylor (1989). For research on identity see Blasi (1984, 2005) and Lapsley (2008).

[18] See Frederickson (2009).

(2) Owning Your Duty

In the military, duty is defined as a "moral obligation to place accomplishment of the assigned task or responsibility before all personal needs and apprehensions."[19] We use the term to denote that cadets ought to possess a repertoire of cognitive and behavioral resources and abilities that enable them to subordinate their personal desires to the needs of the mission. In short, "owning your duty" means the ability to consistently demonstrate self-sacrifice over your narrow self-interest.[20]

(3) Owning Your Commitments

Philosophers have long suggested that moral and ethical action springs from an evaluation of one's commitments – commitments so deeply rooted (and motivational) that it would be unthinkable for an individual to act or behave otherwise. An individual's commitments serve as powerful psychological drivers, with tremendous emotional and cognitive force. The philosopher Charles Taylor explains the significance of these commitments when he writes "To know who I am…is a species of knowing where I stand." In short, leaders of character recognize that their commitments cut deeply to the core of who they are -- or who they're striving to become. At USAFA, our institutional challenge and mission is to inspire cadets to establish and live the commitments that align with the Air Force core values.[21]

(4) "Owning" Your Role in the Development Process

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[19] See *The Armed Forces Officer* (2006).

[20] The concept of duty is central to the USAFA experience, embodied in the core value "Service Before Self" and prominently expressed in the Cadet Honor Oath: "I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, so help me God." In addition, cadets learn quickly about the "5 Rights": Right place, right time, right uniform, right attitude, ready to do the right thing.

[21] See Taylor (1989). The concept of commitment underpins recent moral self-identity research conducted by Blasi (1984, 2005) and Lapsley (2008). In regard to inspiration, it is often defined as a "spark" with the potential to fuel and sustain our commitments. It is important to recognize that inspiration comes in many sizes and shapes. While some cadets will be inspired by listening to the personal story of a Wounded Warrior, others are inspired by people they know well (often family members). Moreover, while inspiration can be pursued, no one can "force" us to be inspired. *It is a choice.* Finally, as highlighted earlier in the Framework, being inspired helps us to connect with our passions, our commitments, and our "best possible selves."

One of the cornerstone insights of this Conceptual Framework is how critical it is for the Academy to inspire cadets to take "ownership" for their own development and growth. However, we have identified five historical forces or perspectives (embedded within the Academy culture) that have served to diminish a sense of cadet ownership for his or her own development. These are: (1) a perceived lack of connection or coherency between an eclectic collection of leadership and character development experiences; (2) a prevailing perspective that simply providing cadets with a leadership experience or activity meant that they "got it;" (3) little or no sustained feedback for cadets regarding their development as leaders of character, except if an individual has fallen short of a minimum standard; (4) little time to reflect on experiences, largely due to time pressures that all cadets face; and, (5) the difficulty in effectively communicating to cadets the "value" of owning their development.

In addition, emphasizing cadet responsibility for their own development does not mean that the USAFA staff has less responsibility for training and educating cadets. The principle of cadet ownership should not be used as a threat against cadets or as a signal to staff that they're relieved from attending to cadet development. From the Center's perspective, the principle of "cadet ownership" will require *more effort* from the institution in the sense that the Academy will need to figure out how to increase cadets' awareness and commitment that they are indeed responsible for their own development. The next section explores how to optimally "show up" in this engagement process.

Section 3:
Engaging In Purposeful Experiences

The previous section examined the Center's belief that a cadet ought to be an *active participant* in the developmental process. Indeed, developing oneself is something that cadets must take responsibility for, rather than something that's *"done to them."* More than merely showing up, cadets must be vitally *engaged* in their own development.

Similarly, all individuals representing the Organization – whether a coach, instructor, cadet Element Leader, a member of the Cadre or the Superintendent – also have a set of responsibilities that help to create the context for cadet development and growth.

The Center has adopted the "Engagement Model of Development" to explain the essential features of this relationship. The model is shown in *Figure 5* below:

Figure 5

At the heart of this model is the concept of **purposeful engagement**, a practice that researchers confirm predicts growth and development, especially among college-age students.[22]

Furthermore, the model is predicated on two assumptions: first, that all individuals at the Academy – from a cadet to a coach, from Squadron leaders to the 3-star General – have the *primary responsibility* for their own development; second, that the organization has a set of responsibilities for *supporting* an individual's development. Notably, everyone at the Academy will at times be the "individual" (responsible for their own development) and at times the "organization" (responsible for fostering the development of others). In short, this relationship is best understood as a c*ollaboration* between those in the roles of the individual and the organization.[23]

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[22] There is ample research on college student development that shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Moreover, researchers have documented that certain institutional practices are known to lead to higher levels of student engagement (Kuh & Schneider, 2008). These principles include: student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991).

[23] The dynamic role of individuals and organizations vis-à-vis development is addressed in multiple chapters in McCauley & Van Velsor (2004). See also Hackman (2002).

What do we mean by Purposeful and Engaging?

By purposeful, the Center means that all experiences and relationships are "threaded together" intentionally (with the ultimate outcome being developing leaders of character). We recognize that purposeful experiences and relationships require an intensive commitment by all stakeholders at the organizational level; indeed, there is ample research to suggest that these experiences and relationships, while difficult to achieve, are a key predictor of development.[24]

By engaging, the Center means experiences and relationships that are sustained over time and meaningful to the individual. These experiences should connect those developing with those who are supporting their development. That is, these relationships should serve as an antidote to an "us versus them" mentality that too often hinders or halts development, and should also challenge those in the developer role (i.e., "institution") to intentionally step to the plate. By no means is the Center suggesting that the Academy should "lower the bar" in its expectations of cadet achievement. Instead, the Academy ought to create a set of sustained and engaging experiences that *challenges the capacities* of each individual. These challenges should engage the individual and activate his or her competitive juices and achievement orientation. Challenges can also serve as a source of inspiration.

Three essential practices or expectations underpin "The Engagement Model of Development."[25] In brief, these are:

- **Assess** – Every organization ought to be dedicated to creating a culture where individuals are encouraged to learn more about their strengths as well as gaps in their performance. Creating "data points" enables an individual to grasp patterns and connections. Whether formal or informal, at the individual or organizational level, an assessment is always intentional in its focus on understanding areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

- **Challenge** – Change is often motivated by a discrepancy between current and desired ability (what are commonly known as "stretch goals"). Individuals are often quite motivated when effectively challenged to test their perceived confidence, competencies and commitments, especially against assessed feedback. Those who desire to strengthen certain

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24 McCauley & Van Velsor (2004).

25 These three practices (Assess, Challenge and Support) are essential to the work of the Center for Creative Leadership. See Ting & Scisco (2006).

competencies are then held accountable to their developmental plan. "Challenge" helps the individual strive toward "excellence in all we do."[26]

- **Support** – It is the responsibility of the organization to support the individual during all "developmental" experiences. Essential components of Support including trusting relationships, guidance toward new practices, and encouragement to persevere through setbacks or hardships.[27]

The Engagement Model of Development is not limited to the Cadet-Permanent Party relationship only. For example, a secondclass cadet (i.e., junior) may have discrete "Individual" responsibilities but, serving as an Element Leader, this same cadet will have "Organizational" responsibilities as well. Likewise, a new instructor transits almost daily between his or her responsibilities as a member of the "Organization" and as an "Individual" striving to understand (and develop) his or her responsibilities as a new instructor.

In sum, *every* stakeholder at the Academy – at one time or another – will assume both "Individual" and "Organization" responsibilities.

Engagement in Action

It is through purposeful and engaging relationships and experiences that the tools for development are delivered. However, this delivery process has unique phases and responsibilities. In an effort to more clearly demonstrate how the Engagement process occurs, it is useful to defining the key responsibilities for the Individual and Organization within three distinct phases of engagement.

Phase One: Preparing and Readiness
During this initial phase of engagement, the Organization has a responsibility to communicate the purpose of instruction or training, and the Individual has a "readiness" responsibility, striving to understand (and receive) the purpose of instruction or training.   In addition, this is an important time to assess and identify the individuals' strengths to leverage during the development process.

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[26] It is widely understood that trust is an essential ingredient to full engagement, especially during the Challenge phase. An important implication of trust is the willingness to feel vulnerable. Furthermore, development is enhanced at various levels of trust: trust in self, those in supervisory roles, and the organization.

[27] It is important to clarify what the research reveals about the scope of support. Support includes developmental experiences as well as cognitive supports, commonly called "scaffolding" experiences in the educational literature (Knight & Sutton, 2004). Providing support entails guiding the individual, whether by providing resources or setting standards. In this way, challenging an individual is also a form of support.

"Character strengths" are indispensable to a military officer, especially since these positive dispositions focus largely on the *moral dimension* (in this way an individual's character strengths are distinct from his or her talents or abilities). The different strengths of a leader -- such as open-mindedness, bravery, kindness, perseverance, humility, and gratitude -- also contribute to the well-being of the individual. These strengths enable us to experience such positive qualities as curiosity or courage, positive relationships, meaning and purpose, and accomplishment or achievement. Most critically, character strengths can be defined and assessed. There is also a body of research that suggests individuals possess a set of "signature strengths" that we depend on (especially in new or challenging situations), that we are excited about (intrinsically), and that we readily seek opportunities to practice and display. In sum, the Center is excited to work with each Mission Partner to demonstrate the benefits of establishing the Academy as a *strengths-based institution*, one that provides opportunities for individuals to "soar" with their strengths.[28]

Phase Two: Providing Aligned Opportunities.
In this phase, the Organization has a responsibility to create challenging and purposeful experiences (to include training and education), while the Individual has a responsibility to embrace these challenges by being open to new experiences and then reflecting on those experiences. In addition, the Organization has the responsibility to provide feedback in a timely and constructive manner. Current scholarship suggests that feedback is a "gift" to the individual, and one that is optimally given within the context of a sustained coaching relationship. Actionable, timely and consistent feedback is critical, especially within the context of one's leadership or character *performance*. In addition to feedback based on observable data, the Center has created opportunities for cadets to receive "developmental coaching" that focuses on developing the individual's strengths, commitments and competencies. In short, actionable feedback and developmental coaching should work in tandem, providing an opportunity to assess, support and challenge each individual.[29]

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[28] The research on developing the strengths of an individual (and organization) is rapidly growing. Seligman and Peterson (2002) conducted measurement research that focuses on 24 character strengths. Interestingly, the Air Force incorporated in 2010 a strengths-based model. See the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program (see http:www.amc.af.mil/caf). The motto of this new program is: *"Don't just survive. Thrive."*

[29] Fundamentally, feedback guides all performance, from the ability to sustain airspeed and increase altitude while flying to developing skills that improve leadership and character. The leadership literature is quite extensive on the role and benefits of feedback in development and leadership performance.

A final key element of aligned and engaging opportunities is the need to provide time for (and possibly even training or modeling in) effective reflection.[30] Recent research suggests that encouraging reflection supports development. [1] Reflection opportunities can take many forms, including journaling, one-to-one discussions, in-class reflections, etc. These interventions help the individual to focus on crystallizing and consolidating new insights, knowledge, skills and commitments. Indeed, making meaning of experiences and identifying patterns and tendencies is crucial for learning and development, at both the level of the individual and organization-wide. In addition, it is critical for the organization to develop the capacity of individuals to optimize their reflection opportunities, foremost by training individuals on how to maximize their reflection opportunities as well as modeling these reflection practices and competencies.

Phase Three: Consolidating and Connecting
The third phase illustrates where "development" as a process becomes development as an outcome. Once again, the Organization has a responsibility to help the individual "connect the dots" (often by making sense of the experience), while the Individual has a responsibility to consolidate and crystallize new insights, knowledge, skills, beliefs and commitments.[31] In addition, the Individual should also own the responsibility of exploring other contexts in which these insights, knowledge, etc. can be applied.

These three phases highlight the "enabling conditions" for developing the competence, confidence and commitment of cadets, indeed all individuals at the Academy. The next section examines a set of supporting mechanisms that are also essential to the engagement process.

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[30] For example, as an individual practices developing a command presence, he or she must strive toward becoming competent in that aspect of leadership while simultaneously striving to suppress any nervousness or counterproductive doubts about being in such a role. Combined with direct feedback, the leader can accurately identify what he or she is doing well and the specific areas in which improvement is needed. This example reflects what Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) have written about regarding self-efficacy in the workplace.

[1] See Guthrie & King (2004).

[31] We use the term "connect the dots" to emphasize a growing perception at USAFA that the Permanent Party needs to help cadets *make connections* between their myriad of experiences, rather than just offering cadets a series of disparate experiences ("collecting the dots").

Section 4:
Practicing Habits of Thoughts and Actions

Our nation's 21st century security dilemma is dynamic, complex, and at times chaotic. It is imperative that we develop leaders of character with the requisite capacities to interact with this asymmetric environment in a focused and intentional way. They must be attuned to cues within themselves (and within the environment) that indicate or influence the opportunity to live honorably, to lift others to their best possible selves, or to elevate performance toward a common and noble purpose. In addition, they should demonstrate the ability to reason and decide on the best course of action, and even more importantly demonstrate the courage, discipline and commitment to act in a manner consistent with a given decision.

The Center believes this process represents a critical set of capacities that leaders of character must acquire and consistently demonstrate. While a list of specific values, responsibilities, skills and knowledge may represent the optimal assortment of tools available to a leader of character, it is equally important for leaders to know <u>when</u> and <u>how</u> to employ these tools. In other words, USAFA's mission extends beyond mere competencies to include building the behavioral integrity and relevant cognitive and affective capacities of our cadets.[32]

The Center has drawn on the scholarship of James Rest to offer such a capacity-building process. Rest developed a highly regarded four-part theoretical framework to capture patterns of thought and behavior related to ethical and moral concerns.[33]

Significantly, the Center believes the Rest model can also be used to help individuals understand, practice and assess their leadership development as well. Indeed, this four-step process (**A**wareness, **R**easoning, **D**eciding, and **A**cting), which we call the ARDA Model, represents a <u>technique</u> and <u>approach</u> to ethical and effective leadership that can be used and practiced by all individuals

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[32] Simons (2008) defines behavioral integrity as the perceived pattern of alignment (or misalignment) between an individual's (or organization's) word and deeds. The concept has recently emerged as an important organizational construct, predicting trust formation, organizational performance, leader effectiveness, cynicism, and deviant behavior. We have also drawn on research regarding complex-adaptive leadership. See Hanna, Eggers & Jennings (2008); and Hanna, Woolfolk & Lord (2009).

[33] See Rest (1979). Also, Rest (1999). It should be noted that Rest developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT)to measure conventional and post-conventional moral thinking. For several years all entering cadets at the Air Force Academy have taken the DIT.

at the Academy, via a wide variety of experiences, programs and courses.[34]   We also acknowledge that the affective domain plays a significant role in this process; and accept that awareness, reasoning, and deciding could occur after the action step (i.e., action might precede or inform the previous steps--thus the feedback loop).

Figure 6 offers a brief overview of the steps in the ARDA Model.

Figure 6.
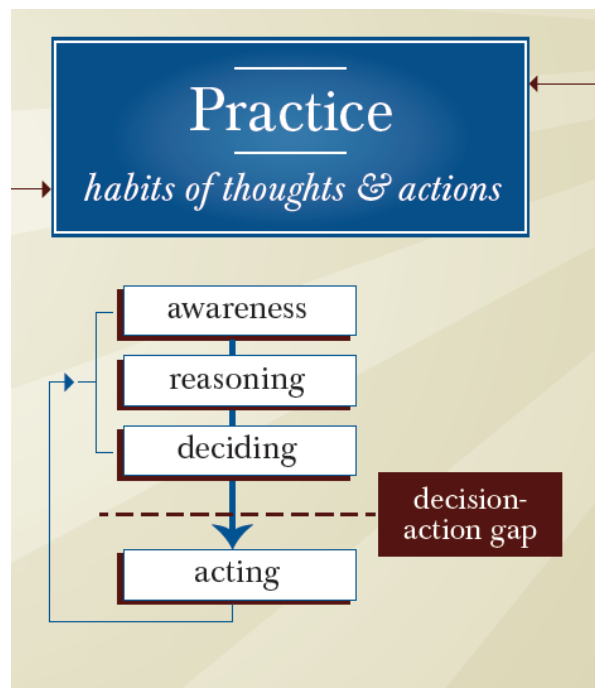
Awareness
The capacity to scan, spot/recognize, identify, interpret or "diagnose" whether a situation is a leadership or ethical "moment"…often by imagining the implications of current scenarios and of possible future scenarios...awareness includes the capacity for self-understanding, empathy and perspective-taking skills.

Too often, events pass without any internal alarm being sounded that "this moment matters," indicating the need for intentional consideration or engagement. Leaders of character have developed a capacity for heightened awareness and vigilance in identifying such moments. Often, perpetrators of

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[34] It is important to note that a number of studies have demonstrated that ethical growth can be influenced by educational interventions. See Bebeau (2006).

failures (of character or leadership) have responded to their missteps by stating, "It didn't seem like a big deal at the time" or that "it never even crossed my mind to react differently." Indeed, we believe the most effective leaders can skillfully detect character and leadership situations or opportunities, and use these "awareness skills" to manage choices and actions.

What is important to underscore is that character or leadership moments are seldom presented as obvious, glaring dilemmas. Instead, these moments are often subtle or incremental in nature, requiring us to be *mindful* and *diligent* in our attention and perceptions. The capacity to be aware means having the "radar" to notice even subtle character or leadership moments "on their scope." Our awareness can be enhanced through experience (e.g., someone returning from Africa to the United States may be more aware of our nation's material abundance as well as what we waste) or other contextual factors (e.g., the parent of a child learning to walk becomes more aware of the sharp corners in the house).

Emotional factors also develop and enhance our awareness. For example, someone who has received an honor violation is very likely more aware of the everyday opportunities to live honorably. Similarly, being inspired by someone (whether a family member or someone in the military) can heighten our awareness regarding the opportunities to lead or inspire others. Our awareness may simply be triggered by a "gut feeling" that *something is just not right*. This intuitive signal may also be the result of training and experience.

In sum, there is nothing to reason about or decide if an individual does not first recognize that there is an opportunity to act as a leader of character. Yet individuals can learn to strengthen their awareness capacity, the skill to recognize the saliency or "intensity" of a particular moment. [35] In many cases all that's required is the ability to slow down, breathe, and learn how to pay attention to the moment at hand. President Ronald Reagan, in an address to cadets at The Citadel spoke directly to this idea when he said, "The character that takes command in moments of crucial choices has already been determined…by a thousand other choices made earlier in seemingly unimportant moments." The first step in developing as a leader of character is to be aware that "even this moment counts" for living honorably, lifting others or elevating performance.

Reasoning
The capacity to reason about the best course of action, based on past experiences, self-reflection, as well as your obligations, values, ideals and commitments.

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[35] See Jones (1991) to learn more about the concept of "moral intensity." The ARDA Model suggests as well that situations can present themselves with differing degrees of "leadership intensity," situations that are particularly salient with regard to an opportunity "lift others" or "elevate performance."

The reasoning process includes the criteria by which one evaluates potential courses of action. These processes can, and often do, reflect assumptions, biases and inaccuracies that limits one's reasoning. Therefore, leaders of character must be aware of and monitor these tendencies and biases, and intentionally develop the habits and capacities to consider other perspectives before selecting a course of action. Leaders of character train themselves to "think about their thinking," and ask such as questions as: Have I considered other viewpoints? Am I simply rationalizing my reasons to line up with the opinions of my friends? How are my emotions informing my reasoning? What criteria am I using or not using (fairness, respect, care and concern)?

At all times, leaders of character should use criteria consistent with their commitments, including the values of the organization they represent.   More specifically, someone who is pursuing an identity as a member of the profession of arms should filter their reasoning through the lens of what is expected of him or her as a military officer.

In addition, developing the ability to create potential scenarios and then deciding how to respond to the situation is also an effective way for individuals to sharpen their reasoning capacity. For example, every cadet should practice what he or she would say if someone asked them to violate the honor code, or what they would say if someone asked them to have a drink, even though they are under-age. Working out these responses (or "scripts") in advance helps to reduce or even eliminate the tension that will arise if and when the situation does occur[36].

This is not to say reasoning is purely a logical endeavor. It also includes caring deeply for our obligations, values and ideals that form our commitments. Thus, during this moment in the process, we need to recognize what we care about. Our caring is the motivational force that will help us reach the decision that is consistent with the type of person we are trying to be. When we care deeply about our commitments, we can literally "feel" their importance and seriousness.

These practices will enable the leader of character to develop habits of "focused and flexible" reasoning that reflects their commitment to live honorably, to lift others to their best possible selves, and to elevate performance toward a common and noble purpose.

Deciding
The capacity to connect your "reasons" to your self-identity and commitments.

This step in the process indicates an intentional commitment to a particular

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[36] The importance of scripts is central to the work of Mary Gentile's "Giving Voice to Values" program in partnership with the Aspen Institute. Visit www.GivingVoicetoValues.org .

course of action (which includes, at times, doing nothing). Very often individuals know what the right decision is, but they spend a great deal of time working backward to "rationalize" their way out of what they know (often in their gut) is right. Therefore, individuals must fearlessly evaluate whether their decision – even in the face of pressures, fears and doubts – is consistent with their commitments. We recognize that it is not easy for individuals to make a decision that may put them in an uncomfortable position with friends or peers. No one looks forward to having an awkward (even dreaded) conversation. But leaders of character decide to have that conversation because they possess the competence, confidence and commitment to "walk their talk."

Acting
The capacity to act in ways that align with your commitments, values, and beliefs, including developing the "habits" of courage and self-discipline to bridge or cross the "Decision-Action Gap."

This step in the process acknowledges that decisions and intentions do not always align with actions. Indeed, there are many forces that discourage individuals on acting in accordance with their well-reasoned decision. The "Decision-Action Gap" is frequently created by various *challenges* (e.g., social norms, counterproductive reward systems, time pressures, resource constraints, comfort/discomfort considerations) as well as various fears and doubts (e.g., which results in diminished self-efficacy). These challenges and pressures place individuals "at the gap."   At this moment, they must either cross the gap and do the "right thing" or rationalize a different decision to avoid facing their particular challenge or pressure.

To offer a somewhat literal example of "standing at the gap," many cadets have failed to jump from the 10-meter platform into the swimming pool below, despite their strong desire and determination to do so. While they have made a "decision" to jump, their fear keeps them from doing so. Similarly, many more cadets (as well as faculty and staff) never correct their peers for fear of social discomfort. The "Decision-Action Gap" reflects what all of us have experienced at one time or another (e.g., "I knew the right course of action, but I just didn't follow through)."   Moreover, the words we hold so dear – integrity, discipline, courage, resilience – are simply the terms we ascribe to people who have demonstrated the ability to cross the gap.

At the Center for Character and Leadership Development, we strive to develop in our cadets the competence, confidence and commitment ("the 3 C's") to enable them to overcome the pressures that created the gap. As individuals, we need the *competence* to know the right way to jump into the pool to avoid injury, or the right way to talk to peer about their commitment to live honorably. Developing these requisite skills can make the gap less daunting. Through consistent practice and training (and feedback on their performance), individuals also gain *confidence*, which is why cadets work their way up to the 10-meter platform only

after successfully jumping off platforms at a lesser height. Finally, our *commitments* often enable us to overcome even our lack of competency or confidence. Our commitments to something larger than ourselves serve as the final motivational lever in helping us resist push the gnawing pressures and reasons not to act.

At the Air Force Academy, we also aim to equip our cadets with the *character strengths*, the virtues that we know through experience helps an individual cross the "Decision-Action Gap." These strengths include two virtues prominently emphasized throughout the four-year Academy experience: courage and self-discipline."

The Promise of the ARDA Model
The ARDA Model offers a process and language that lends itself to teaching, learning and practicing across the Academy. Second, it is grounded in decisions and actions, rather than mere intellectual judgments. Third, it is a comprehensive approach that ultimately requires *action* rather than just reason (a shortfall that limits other approaches). Put differently, while teaching moral reasoning is vitally important, it must be accompanied by the individual's *ability to act* on one's reasons and commitments. Conversely, action in the absence of appropriate reasoning is insufficient (if not dangerous). The Center's challenge is to provide opportunities and experiences for cadets to achieve a degree of mastery across all four steps; "expertise" in one area doesn't equate to what it takes to be a leader of character.

Section 5:
The Importance of Organizational Alignment

The Center for Character and Leadership Development fully recognizes the challenges of aligning our Conceptual Framework within the strategies, structures, systems, shared values and leadership styles of each Mission Partner. Indeed, research clearly demonstrates that within organizations, strong alignment occurs only when these five facets are compatible, mutually supportive and consistent, and linked to each other.[37]

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[37] See Galbraith (1977), Hanna (1988), Lawler (1996), and Miles (1997).

In order for us to be successful in developing leaders of character, we must create a culture where the principles of development are constantly present. Where the language and actions associated with ownership, engagement and practice become "the air we breathe." This culture fosters the development of individuals, but also defines and strengthens the organization itself.

Thus, moving forward, CCLD welcomes the opportunity to work with each Mission Partner to align the principles and practices of our Framework across the following key dimensions of Academy life:

(1) Aligned Programs/Courses

The perennial challenge for Academy leaders is to help cadets connect or "thread together" their different experiences at USAFA. Moving forward, the Center is excited to work with each Mission Partner to articulate a rationale on the "timing and sequence" for each leadership or character development experience, whether it be a commissioning education lesson, a CCLD program, or an entire academic course. The objective should be to create a deliberate, intentionally designed, integrated system that aligns with best practices, principles of development, USAFA outcomes, and institutional competencies.

(2) Aligned Assessments

The Center looks forward to working with different Academy stakeholders to design and implement a comprehensive assessment program to measure the extent to which the Framework's concepts, approaches and interventions are (or are not) producing results. These assessments should span different levels, ranging from the assessment of individuals to program effectiveness to organization-wide assessments.

(3) Aligned Reward Systems

The prescient statement that 'every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it achieves' implicates the need for CCLD, in collaboration with each Mission Partner, to analyze the Academy's current rewards system. We offer three examples to illustrate the need to strengthen and align our reward systems across the Academy: (1) Cadets too often place a premium on their academic performance (compared to their PITO duties), because they are strongly rewarded for it; (2) AOCs too often monitor cadet performance related to the Outstanding Squadron System rather than emphasizing cadet development experiences, because they are rewarded for it; and, (3) Instructors focus on performance beyond excellence in the classroom because they are rewarded for doing so. These three examples remind us that ***rewards drive behavior*** and that misaligned rewards reinforce Kerr's thesis about the "folly of rewarding A while hoping for B."[38]

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[38] See Kerr (1975).

The Center for Character and Leadership Development welcomes the opportunity to work with each Mission Partner in an effort to more intentionally align the Academy's rewards system with its institutional priorities.

(4) Aligned Words and Actions

Finally, there is ample research demonstrating that a leader's actions speak louder than his or her words.[39] Therefore, at the level of the institution, the Center for Character and Leadership Development will seek opportunities to work with each Mission Partner to design and implement new processes that critically examine – wherever possible – the Academy's own level of institutional integrity.

Conclusion

The Center for Character and Leadership Development has defined a leader of character as someone who: (1) *Lives honorably* by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Air Force Core Values; (2) *Lifts people* to their best possible selves; and, (3) *Elevates performance* toward a common and noble purpose.

We also identified three pillars that underpin the Center's intentional efforts to develop leaders of character: *Own* the Process, *Engage* in Purposeful Experiences, and *Practice* Habits of Thoughts and Actions. In addition, we highlighted research to demonstrate that there exists a set of mechanisms that support cadet development across each Mission Partner (Identify and Leverage Strengths, Offer Feedback and Coaching, Encourage Reflection). We also introduced the ARDA Model, a process by which to practice habits of thoughts and actions. Finally, we identified four alignment levers that cut across the Academy's mission (Programs/Courses, Assessments, Reward Systems, and Words and Actions).

We believe these ideas and approaches are essential to advancing our mission. Yet, we also recognize that the model and approach will fail if a "stovepipe" solution is offered as the easiest way forward. Our hope is that this Conceptual Framework is seen as portable, relevant and effective across all situations and contexts at USAFA, wherever character and leadership experiences occur.

It is important to emphasize that the ultimate goal of USAFA is to not only develop Leaders of Character, but to produce those who develop other Leaders of Character -- developers of developers. The ideal end state is one where cadets own their roles in convincing others about the value of Owning; engage in a manner that increases others' understanding and appreciation of Engagement;

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[39] See Simons (2008).

and are consistently aware, and reason toward decision and action about teaching others such a process of honorable habit-building. While this may seem somewhat circular, it is critically important that those who pursue the identity of Leader of Character see themselves as developers of others toward that same end. As such, they must themselves leverage Ownership, Engagement, and Practice.

In sum, we all have a role to play in advancing the Academy's core vision of being the premier institution for developing leaders of character.

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