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Letter from the Editor

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...from the editor

The “ethic of reciprocity,” more commonly known as “the golden rule,” is universally known: “*Treat others how you wish to be treated.*” This maxim has been integrated into the fundamental tenets of many religions, faiths, and creeds, and represents the application of *values-based leadership* at both the corporate and personal levels.

Values-based leadership – for some, a culturally-influenced catchphrase for all things good and moral – invariably reflects the nature of our social interactions. While shaped by our own upbringings, cultures, and career choices, this concept may be better explained through both a deconstruction of its individual components and by extracting its common constructs.

“Values-based leadership” has three interrelated parts: beliefs, values, and purposes which, as examined by JVBL board member, **Joseph P. Hester**, collectively describe our organizational culture. He notes that *belief* and *value* are intrinsically intertwined in ethical decision-making. *Beliefs* are merely opinions, grounded in the authoritarian assumption that what is believed by an individual or group of like-minded people is unassailably true while *value* pertains to the relative worth we ascribe to those matters we deem important. Combined, value and belief create a *values hierarchy* – “a scale of values which we follow as a guide or ordering our behavior.” This values



hierarchy, Hester explains, is often used to define both personal and organizational *ethics*, shaping our interactions with one another both inside and outside the office walls, ultimately providing us with *purpose*.

Relativism and subjectivity, Hester continues, enter the discussion since our own core ethics – reflective of our behaviors toward and perceptions about humanity – are not always uniform. Thus, “ethics is reducible to an interchange of belief and value” – reflective of our corporate culture – and continues to form the basis of an ongoing ontological and didactic discussion, especially in the wake of scandal, public outcry, scientific research, and legislative changes. Many will attempt to separate core from insignificant values as a reason for change in mission and to answer one’s own moral intuitions. It is imperative to hear from others and then, applying reason, identify and draw upon common perspectives.

Hester warns that a disservice is done with the decoupling of morals and ethics from a metaphysical foundation and/or relegating such examination to the cynical world of relativism. Rather, the concept should be exposed to a process of contemplation, reflection, debate, ethical evolution, and potential transformation.

Others have contributed to this reflective process by contributing their own definitions as shaped by their particular work experiences and social circumstances. The following testimonies represent a sampling of definitions offered by business (for-profit and nonprofit), academic, and government representatives:

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On a very basic level, *values-based leadership* is seeking the truth and then honestly implementing it based upon the facts. I actually believe that each of us has the truth within us, but it takes a great deal of courage to speak the truth. There are also people who take action based upon what they say is the truth — knowing full well that something else is the actual truth. Despite spiritual and cultural differences, I believe we all have commonalities and an obligation, particularly those serving in a public role and elected as our government leaders, to speak the truth and seek common ground. Furthermore, as a citizen, we *all* have the duty to call out those who are not speaking the truth. — **Dr. Jill Long Thompson, Chair of the Board and CEO of the U.S. Farm Credit Administration, Washington D.C.**

Values-based leadership, in the business sense, is a commitment to performing the basic tenets of one’s job in harmony with a values system. In human resources management, timeliness, honesty, and sensitivity to needs of employees and potential employees are paramount.” — **Pierre-Alain Petit, DCNS (Thales Group–Defense and Space), Tours, France**



I work in the world of international development and specifically focus on improving literacy in multilingual settings. *Values-based leadership* in my daily work consists of ensuring that the projects that I oversee or develop are going to address the needs of the learners. Although this sounds straightforward, oftentimes, the funders want a simplified and more “cost-effective” program which will deprive these learners of the right to learn in their own language. I continue to press for the rights of these learners in everything that I do, even though this may cost me funding and makes my life more difficult, because of the values I hold and my role as a leader in this field.

— **Rebecca Stone, Literacy Specialist at American Institutes for Research, West Springfield, Massachusetts**



Success in any facet of life, whether personal or professional, is grounded in core values. These values are necessary for effective leadership, especially when servant-leadership is the modeled behavior. — **Margie C. Sweeney, MD, OFS, CPC, Founder, Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc., Tampa, Florida**

Values-based leadership represents our ongoing efforts to identify and implement what we believe is right for ourselves and for those with whom we interact. It is an evolving process, subject to continuous scrutiny, reflection, and on occasion...change. — **Elizabeth F. R. Gingerich, Ed.**