

# **Personal Journey with Character Development**

## **Important Information for the Workshop Facilitator and the Supervisor**

### **Objectives of workshop:**

- To explore a process designed to help identify opportunities to strengthen (a) our influence as leaders; (b) our capacity as role models for the Y's values; and (c) our own character.
- To develop a strategy for personal growth.
- To explore ways to develop a support system for those who wish to continue their personal character development.

### **Target audience:**

This workshop is designed for staff members as well as policy and program volunteers.

### **How this workshop could be used:**

A good character development practice for YMCAs is to have in place a set of practices and common behaviors that staff members have agreed to follow. This workshop is not intended to take the place of these practices and behaviors, but rather to give individuals the opportunity to develop a plan to take their own character to the next level. The purpose of this workshop is to provide the opportunity for staff members and volunteers to explore personal character development in a structured session with their colleagues.

### **Who can facilitate the activity?**

Anyone with facilitating skills and a basic understanding of YMCA Character Development can easily facilitate the activity.

### **Should a supervisor or leader facilitate this activity?**

There are two schools of thought. Because it offers a chance to champion a long-term character development approach, some believe it is best for the workshop to be facilitated by someone who supervises, leads, or relates to the workshop participants. Others believe it is best for a supervisor or leader to be a participant along with those he or she supervises, so that the process is not perceived as compulsory. The choice is yours.

Most importantly, participants should not feel coerced or intimidated in this process. When it relates to changes or shifts in personal behavior, a supervisor can help raise awareness of the importance of YMCA staff members' and volunteers' consistently modeling the core values in their behavior. While the goal is for participants to strengthen their character, each individual will have to choose his or her own path. Keep in mind that some of your staff members and volunteers may be interested in their personal character development, but may choose not to participate. This workshop is one way—but not the only way—to strengthen one's character.

**Time required:**

Two hours are required to complete the process in this design. This does not include time for the implementation of a process, following the workshop, to keep the momentum going for the group.

**Important notes for the person who supervises, leads, or relates to the participants of this workshop and for the workshop facilitator:**

The process presented in this workshop is not designed to be a one-time event. The workshop will help participants to identify some personal growth opportunities and to develop their own implementation plans. Some thought needs to be given to how to keep alive the long-term process of strengthening one's character. We are reminded by experts that making positive changes in behavior usually works best when there is support and reinforcement from others.

The workshop design gives participants a chance to brainstorm ways to support each other in their personal journeys. The design also explores strategies for keeping the process going in the future. It will be helpful if you, the supervisor, and/or the workshop leader, do some thinking in advance about ways to support a long-term character development process, always keeping in mind that the process is a personal one for each participant and cannot be mandated. What can you do to help willing participants receive coaching and feedback on their personal journey? What can you do to reinforce positive changes they make? Will it be possible to carve out some time in future staff gatherings to find ways to keep the participants motivated?

In reality, the process of developing one's character never ends, but involves a life-long effort. Supervisors and leaders should plan to keep the momentum going.

**Planning Information and Tips for the Facilitator****Format of the workshop:**

The design describes how to present certain material but should not have to be read word for word. Review the design and adjust it to make it more comfortable for you.

**Facilitator approach:**

Keep in mind the need to choose behaviors that will increase the comfort level of the participants. For participants to feel comfortable exploring ways to develop their character, the facilitator's words and actions must send the message that she or he respects the confidentiality of the participants' work. See the suggested Ground Rules, below (p.7).

**Participants:**

This workshop works best when the participants do not feel rushed and when they have enough personal space to feel comfortable writing.

**Facilities:**

- Keep in mind that the goal is to create a warm, friendly, and non-threatening environment in which participants feel comfortable enough to be honest with themselves.
- Participants will need a surface for writing and enough personal space to feel confident of the privacy of their writing.
- You will need a newsprint chart pad, markers, and an easel or masking tape and a surface for posting.

**Handouts:**

- “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development” (one copy per participant)
- “Journey to Strengthen My Character” (one copy per participant)
- “My Plan to Build a Better Me” (two copies per participant)

**Charts to prepare in advance:**

- Objectives of the workshop
- The questions from the handout “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development”
- The Core Values
  - caring
  - honesty
  - respect
  - responsibility
- “We take measure of ourselves mostly by our good intentions, but others take measure of our character (and their willingness to be influenced by us) by our actions and behaviors” —*Anonymous*
- Blank chart paper for participants’ group activity

<p><b>Distribute name tags</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Personal Journey with Character Development</b></p> <p><b>OPENING</b></p> <p>(Welcome the participants and introduce yourself. Mention any important housekeeping details, e.g., location of restrooms.)</p> <p><b>ICE BREAKER (10 minutes)</b></p> <p><b>Instructions for the ice breaker activity:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Distribute name tags. These should be large enough for a person’s first name in the center and a word or phrase in each corner of the name tag.)</li> <li>2. Print your first name in the center of the name tag leaving plenty of empty space in the four corners.</li> <li>3. Take a minute to think about four important values or guiding principles or philosophies that you believe in <i>and that are reflected in your daily decisions and behaviors</i>. These would be principles or values that you believe in so strongly that you hardly ever violate them with your behavior. An example might be that your family comes first or your belief in respecting others. (Allow a couple of minutes for reflection.)</li> <li>4. In each corner of your name tag, print one of the four most important values or guiding principles that clearly are reflected in your daily decisions and actions. (Allow a minute for their work.)</li> <li>5. Now move around the room and meet the people you do not know and learn about the values that are important to them. (Allow a few minutes for interaction.)</li> <li>6. (Ask participants to take their seats.) In this activity, I asked you to think about <i>values</i> or guiding principles or philosophies that you believe in and consistently use to guide your decisions and actions.</li> </ol> <p><b>Ask this question:</b> When you hear the word “values,” what does the word mean to you?</p> <p>(Facilitator note: Possible responses include beliefs that guide our actions; the basis of who we are and how we treat others; principles that help distinguish right from wrong; they are based on our beliefs and our faiths.)</p>
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7. **Ask this question:**

How many of you believe that it is important for an individual to have a set of positive values to use as a guide for one's decisions and actions?

8. **Ask this question:**

Would one or two of you share why you think it is important for an individual to have a set of positive values to use as a guide for daily decisions?

(Facilitator note: Possible responses include to build integrity, to help make decisions, to give consistency, to keep one grounded, to help one become a better person.)

9. **Offer this comment:**

The YMCA has adopted a set of four widely-held, positive values that we want to encourage the people we serve and involve to use as a guide for their decisions and actions. These four core values are caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. The process used by the YMCA to accomplish this is referred to as "character development," and the process requires leadership from each of us as YMCA staff members and volunteers.

**SET UP FOR THE WORKSHOP (5 minutes)**

**Ask this question:**

When someone in a leadership position attempts to use his or her influence to motivate you to take a certain action, how do you determine if you will choose to be influenced by that person?

**Offer these comments:**

In our positions here at the YMCA, each of us is asked to lead others from time to time. Experts tell us that leadership is about *influence*. In order to be effective in our jobs, sometimes we are asked to use our influence to motivate others to take certain actions.

It might be using our influence to encourage a child to try a new game or to encourage someone who is facing a difficult decision to choose to do the right thing. (Facilitator note: Use examples that are appropriate for your participants.)

Experts also tell us that people *voluntarily choose* to be influenced by someone in a leadership position primarily because the leader is *credible*. They perceive the leader as a person who is competent, honest, worthy of their trust, and who does what he or she says he or she will do.

**Chart: Objectives**

**Ask this question:**  
How does a person determine if someone is competent, honest, worthy of trust? What does one look at to determine if a leader is credible?

(Facilitator note: He or she looks at the person’s actions to determine if the person is a credible leader.)

**Ask this question:**  
Some of us have heard the old adages, “What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying,” and, “Practice what you preach.” How do these two sayings relate to each of our jobs as we use our influence to motivate people to choose to take certain actions?

**Make these comments:**  
The bottom line is that for us to be effective in leading others and in motivating them to strengthen their character, each of us needs to be perceived as someone who has credibility as a person of character.

This workshop is designed to help us explore some tools that might help each of us in the process of becoming a more credible leader, a stronger role model for the Y movement’s core values, a more effective character-builder, and a person of stronger character.

**PRESENT THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE WORKSHOP (5 minutes)**

- To explore a process designed to help identify opportunities to strengthen (a) our influence as leaders; (b) our capacity as role models for the Y’s values; and (c) our own character.
- To develop a strategy for personal growth.
- To explore ways to develop a support system for those who wish to continue their personal character development.

**Ask this question:**  
How do you feel about these objectives?

(Facilitator note: From time to time, these objectives might cause anxiety among some participants who may be concerned that the process will be used against them. To avoid this, assure participants that this workshop is entirely voluntary, and it is offered as merely one path—not the only path—by which Y staff

**Chart:  
Ground Rules**

members and volunteers might explore their personal character development. Keep in mind that some of your staff members and volunteers may be interested in their personal character development, but may choose not to participate in this workshop.)

**Ask this question:**

Based upon the objectives, how might this workshop be beneficial to you beyond your YMCA job?

(Facilitator note: Possible responses include make me a better employee for any job, make me a better role model, make me a better person, make me more effective as I work with youth and other staff members.)

**SUGGEST GROUND RULES (1 minute)**

During the time we are together in this workshop, everyone should do their best to choose attitudes and behaviors that reflect the Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility, as well as to be supportive of one another. Because character development is a process, and none of us is perfect, it is good to keep in mind that each of us is a work-in-progress. One way to begin to practice the four core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility is for everyone in the room to agree to keep confidential what they hear about one another's journeys—in other words, to agree that what is said in the room stays in the room. This applies equally to the facilitator and supervisor, as well as to all other participants. During this workshop, you can rest assured that you will not be forced to share your work, but if you choose to, you may share anything you want to share.

**Facilitator note:**

The purpose of the next section is to ensure that all participants share some common knowledge of the background of the YMCA movement and its commitment to character development.

If you (and the participants' supervisor) determine that all the participants have a good understanding of this background, you may choose to spend less time on this section.

The background information helps participants understand the big picture of where the Y movement wants to go with character development. This understanding can help participants see more clearly their role in promoting the Y movement's core values and help liberate their creativity as character-builders.

<p><b>Chart:</b>  <b>The questions from the handout “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development”</b></p> <p><b>Distribute handout: “Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development”</b></p>	<p><b>BACKGROUND FOR THE Y MOVEMENT’S RENEWED COMMITMENT TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT</b>  (15 minutes)</p> <p>Before we explore the process for personal growth in character development, it is important that we all understand the background of the YMCA’s commitment to character development.</p> <p><b>Give these group activity instructions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Form pairs and sit next to your partner.</li> <li>2. (Point to chart) With your partner, develop the best answers you can to each of these questions. You do not need to write your responses, but you can if you want to.  You have 5 minutes.</li> <li>3. (After 5 minutes, distribute the handout <i>Important Concepts about the Y Movement’s Commitment to Character Development</i> and allow the participants to review the answers provided by YMCA of the USA.)</li> <li>4. <b>Ask these questions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did anyone learn anything new from the handout? If so, what?</li> <li>• The YMCA movement has been involved in character development for a long time. It is part of why we exist. Would someone volunteer to explain in his or her own words the mission of the YMCA?</li> <li>• Would someone volunteer to share with the group his or her understanding of the relationship between character development and the Christian principles mentioned in the national YMCA mission statement?</li> <li>• A person of strong character is one who strives to do what is right even when no one is looking because the person <i>believes</i> it is the right thing to do. Would one of you explain your understanding of how the YMCA develops the character of the people it serves and involves?</li> <li>• Are there any questions or other reactions to the background information about the YMCA and character development?</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
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**SETTING UP A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH THE Y MOVEMENT'S CORE VALUES (5 minutes)**

**Chart:**  
**Core Values**  
**Caring**  
**Honesty**  
**Respect**  
**Responsibility**

**Give these instructions for an individual activity:**

1. We have learned how YMCA of the USA chose the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. These core values do not belong just to Christians or to the YMCA. Caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility are shared values and are embraced by all major world faiths.
2. Let's attempt to connect personally to the Y movement's core values. (Point to the chart.)
3. Look at your name tag and the important values, guiding principles, or philosophies that consistently guide your daily decisions and actions.
4. Think about these four core values in broad terms and think about how many of your important values could fit under one or more of the values on the chart. For instance, if one of your guiding values is *your friends* or *your family*, this value could fit under each of the Y's core values because you would probably want each of these values to guide your relationships with your friends or family.

If you have difficulty connecting your values with those on the chart, it might be helpful to refer back to the listing of values related to the core values, which you will find on page two of the handout, "Important Concepts." (Allow a minute or so for reflection.)

**Facilitator note:**

If participants are having difficulty connecting their values with the Y's values, you may wish to show where your guiding values might fit with the Y's values. The purpose is to demonstrate that the Y's values are shared by people of diverse backgrounds and faiths.

5. **Ask this question:**  
How many of you discovered that many of your guiding values were generally connected with the Y's values?
6. Hopefully, we have discovered that the Y's core values are shared by people of various faiths, ages, and backgrounds.

<p><b>Chart:</b>  <b>“We take measure of ourselves mostly by our good intentions, but others take measure of our character (and their willingness to be influenced by us) by our actions and behaviors.”</b>  —<i>Anonymous</i></p>	<p><b>SETTING UP FOR THE INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY (5 minutes)</b></p> <p><b>Offer these comments:</b>  Certainly the YMCA can and does expect staff members and volunteers to choose attitudes and behaviors that reflect well on the Y and its mission.</p> <p>But a decision to take the journey to further develop one’s character must be made by the individual.</p> <p>During this workshop, you can rest assured that you will not be forced to share your work, but if you choose to, you may share anything you want to share.</p> <p>The background handout stated that in order to be successful with character development, each of us must accept as part of our job the role of teacher of values or character-builder.</p> <p><b>Ask this question:</b>  What qualities would an effective character-builder need to possess?</p> <p><b>Offer these comments as a response to the question:</b>  Veteran YMCA character-builders tell us that the most effective character-builders are people who consistently model the Y’s core values in their attitudes and behaviors—they lead by setting the appropriate example.</p> <p>Effective character-builders help the people they serve and involve to see what the YMCA’s core values (caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility) look like in their own behavior.</p> <p>When others take a measure of the actions of role models or character-builders, their behavior sends no mixed messages. The character-builders’ behavior is consistent with the Y’s values. They walk their talk. Therefore, their effectiveness is increased because of this credibility.</p> <p>(Point out quote on chart paper.) Here is a quote that suggests the way that many people take measure of themselves and their own character.</p> <p>Because most people have good <i>intentions</i>, they tend to take measure of themselves based upon their good intentions. Our colleagues and the people we serve and involve cannot see our good intentions. The only way they have to measure our character and our credibility as character-builders is by the attitudes and behaviors we choose.</p>
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Research by Barry Posner and James Kouzes (in their book, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*) suggests that people voluntarily choose to be influenced by a leader primarily because that leader has credibility. People will be influenced by the leader because the leader is honest, keeps promises, and walks the talk.

Because we are human, sometimes we *unintentionally* choose actions and behavior that are not consistent with the Y's values.

The result is that we send a *mixed message* that could confuse others about how one should act. We also lose some of our credibility as character-builders.

(Facilitator Note: For inexperienced participants, facilitator may need to give examples of mixed messages or ask participants to offer some examples. In the Y, we say that we believe in the value "caring." But when we interact with others with sarcasm and feelings are hurt, we send a mixed and confusing message about what caring should look like. We may preach "responsibility" on the job by asking others to show up on time or complete their assignments on time. But when we miss a deadline or show up late for work, we are sending a mixed message about responsibility.)

Many successful YMCA character-builders have reported that becoming a champion for YMCA character development has motivated them to begin a *personal* journey to take their character to the next level.

Like you and me, these successful character-builders had done a pretty good job of choosing behaviors and attitudes that reflect the Y's core values, but they wanted to make some additional shifts in their behaviors to strengthen their character.

They began with "baby steps," trying each day to do a better job of choosing attitudes and behaviors that reflect the Y's core values.

Many of these character-builders used a tool just like the one we will test today.

**INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: JOURNEY TO STRENGTHEN MY CHARACTER** (20-25 minutes)

**Give these instructions for the individual activity:**

**Distribute handout:**  
***“Journey to Strengthen My Character”***

1. (Distribute the worksheet “*Journey to Strengthen My Character*” to each participant.)
2. This is an individual and personal activity. You will not be required to share your work, and you will not be asked to turn in this worksheet to anyone.

The worksheet is designed to help individuals identify opportunities to strengthen their character.

3. (Have participants follow along as you read the paragraph at the top of the worksheet.)
4. You will note that each of the Y movement’s core values is listed along with the definition that YMCA of the USA uses for each. If you prefer a different definition for a value, use it.

For each value, you have the opportunity to explore any positive new behaviors or attitudes that you might want to add to your inventory of behaviors.

For each value, you have the opportunity to identify if there are any current negative behaviors or attitudes in your inventory that you might consider discarding.

As your facilitator, I plan to invest some genuine effort in my worksheet and I encourage you to do the same. Remember that our efforts to strengthen our own character will strengthen our effectiveness to help others develop and enhance their own character.

5. Are there any questions? Then take 10 minutes or so to begin your journey. Please feel free to ask any questions as they come up.

(Facilitator should not walk around the room, but work on his or her own worksheet while being available for questions.)

(After about 10 minutes, ask how much more time is needed and allow the time that is requested.)

**6. Give instructions for sharing in pairs:**

Now, take a couple of minutes and pair up once again with your partner and share any thoughts you had about this process. Remember that you are not being asked to share any of your work. Simply share how you felt about completing this activity and any insights you might wish to share.

**INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: NARROWING DOWN THE LIST**

(25 minutes)

**Give these instructions for the individual activity:**

**1. Ask this question:**

How many of you have ever made a list of New Year's resolutions that you didn't keep?

2. Experts in changing behavior suggest that one reason people are not successful with resolutions is that they make too many of them. They do not focus on the most important change.

Take a few minutes and review your "Journey" worksheet and circle the *three* changes in behaviors or attitudes that are most important to you. (Facilitator should allow time for reflection as she or he follows the instructions for her or his own worksheet.)

3. Now rank the top three, with number one being the most important to you. (Facilitator allows time and follows directions with own worksheet.)
4. Let's now focus only on your first priority. Let's explore a plan that could help us be successful in making the change we desire.
5. (Distribute to each participant the worksheet "*My Plan to Build a Better Me.*")
6. This worksheet is designed to help individuals focus on what they can do to make a change successfully in their behavior (e.g., add or eliminate a behavior).
7. The first step is to state the desired change in terms that are specific and measurable. The desired change needs to be stated in measurable terms so that, at any point in the future, you will know what progress you are making.

**Distribute handout:  
"My Plan to Build a  
Better Me"**

<p><b>Chart:</b> <b>Key words from participants' responses</b></p>	<p>An example of a poorly stated goal is, “Over the next three months, I will be a more caring person.” How would you measure your success with such a broad goal?</p> <p>A better statement of the goal would be, “For each day of the next three months, I will give a genuine and sincere compliment to three people and I will call them by name.”</p> <p>The first goal statement is hard to measure and the second is easily measured.</p> <p>8. You will note a box at the bottom left of the worksheet. In this space, write the number-one change you want to make in specific and measurable terms that will enable you to measure your progress each day. (Allow enough time for participants to write down their change.)</p> <p>9. <b>Ask this brainstorming question:</b> The next step is to develop some action steps that will help us be successful in making the change. Let’s take a couple of minutes and brainstorm as many motivational gimmicks and tools that we have heard people use to help them change a behavior. What are some of these techniques that you have heard about?</p> <p>(Facilitator note: Possible responses include baby steps, rewards, visualize yourself doing it, daily affirmations, tell a friend who can offer feedback and keep you accountable, etc.)</p> <p>10. Experts in behavioral change suggest that it takes about three months to successfully add a new habit or rid ourselves of an existing one—<i>if</i> the person really wants to make the change and if he or she focuses.</p> <p>Use the space in the box at the right of the worksheet to generate a list of steps that you can take over the next three months to help you make the change. Remember that sometimes corny tactics work.</p> <p>(Allow time for participants to develop their plan.)</p> <p>11. Now each of you should have a plan to help you with the change you want to make. In reality, your plan at this stage is just some ideas on paper. It will take commitment and motivation to convert these ideas into real changes.</p>
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**Distribute a second copy of handout: “My Plan to Build a Better Me”**

**12. Ask these questions:**

Here are some questions for you to consider:

- On a scale of one to ten, with one being the lowest and ten being the highest, take measure of your level of motivation and commitment to make this behavioral shift actually happen.
- What will be the source of your motivation?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for working your plan?

**13. Give instructions for sharing in pairs:**

Take a couple of minutes and share your thoughts about where you will get your motivation.

14. (Distribute a second copy of the worksheet. Suggest that they will be building on the success of thee and tackle the second most important change in behavior.)

**POSSIBLE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (15 minutes)**

**Make these comments:**

Many people have found it a challenge to keep their motivation high as they try to make a successful shift in behavior.

Experts in behavior suggest that for *some*, having support and reinforcement from others can increase their likelihood of being successful.

**Ask this question:**

Is there anything the character-builders gathered here in this room can do to encourage one another in our personal character development journeys and to help each other be accountable for our goals?

**Give these instructions for a small group activity:**

1. Let’s divide into groups of three and spend a few minutes brainstorming ideas to keep each other motivated and encouraged to make the behavioral shifts we desire.
2. (Give each group a piece of chart paper or other paper and a marker and turn them loose.)

**Distribute a piece of chart paper and marker to each group.**

**Chart:  
Objectives**

3. (After a few minutes, ask the groups to report out their best ideas. Allow members of the total group to adopt any ideas they wish.)
4. (This would be a good time for the staff supervisor to share his or her thoughts about where this process goes from here and maybe even ask how he/she could help.)

**CLOSING** (10 minutes)

**Review workshop objectives:**

1. (Review the three objectives for today’s workshop and ask the participants if they feel that the objectives have been met.)

**2. Ask this question:**

If we as a group are successful with our behavioral shifts collectively, what positive results might we earn from our investment of effort?

(Facilitator note: Possible results include staff members and volunteers gain new respect from Y members as people who have integrity; staff members and volunteers are more effective role models for the Y’s values, and the children who watch them may pick up on their good choices; the Y gains new respect for its character-building credibility; etc.)

**3. Ask this question:**

For each individual who is successful with his or her behavioral shifts, what might he or she gain personally from his or her efforts?

**Make closing remarks similar to these:**

Since YMCA founder George Williams first set the standard of leading by example, Y staff members and volunteers have done their best mission work when they have led by example.

Our credibility as character-builders is only as strong as the link between our own choices of behavior and the core values of the YMCA.

Choosing to be involved in a process to take one’s character to the next level offers a way to deepen one’s personal sense of commitment and connection to the YMCA movement and the people whom it serves and involves.

The consequences of strengthening our own character benefit the people we serve and involve because we show them a better example of people who choose to do what is right.

Another consequence of our efforts to strengthen our character is an increased respect for ourselves as we try each day to do what we ought to do.

In fact, no one loses and everyone gains from the effort to grow our character.

**Evaluation of workshop experience:**

(Facilitator should determine the best way to evaluate the experience.)

**Handouts follow**

## **Important Concepts about the Y Movement's Commitment to Character Development**

### **What is the YMCA's commitment to character development?**

In the early 1990s, many YMCAs became concerned that our nation was caught up in a rapid decline in morality. It seemed as though many children were unable to tell right from wrong. YMCA of the USA began to address this concern in the mid-1990s by launching the YMCA character development thrust: a strengthened commitment to build the character of our movement and the people it serves and involves. Through the Y's ongoing commitment to character development, many YMCAs have begun a process to become more intentional and purposeful in their efforts not only to teach the Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility, but also to use these values to guide individual actions and behavior, as well as organizational practices, decisions, and priorities.

### **Is character development new to the YMCA?**

No, character development is not a new subject for the YMCA movement. We've been shaping character and adhering to Christian principles for more than 150 years. However, our methods have changed over the years. Today, as part of the character development thrust, many YMCAs across the country have adopted four specific values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—as their core values. Some YMCAs have adopted the six pillars of the Character Counts! Coalition: caring, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, citizenship, and fairness. The process of character development is the same regardless of which positive values serve as the core values. These core values reflect major tenets of Christianity, and yet they are also shared by nearly all of the world's religious traditions.

### **How does character development relate to the YMCA's national mission statement?**

Character development will strengthen our ability to deliver what the national mission statement promises. The YMCA national mission statement is "to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all." Christian principles, taken together, are like a code of conduct, based upon Biblical teachings.

These principles consist of many positive values that are also accepted by many other religious traditions as "the right things to do." Some YMCAs consider the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility to be among the most important Christian principles and to be derived from the umbrella concept of faith. (YMCAs welcome as members persons of all religious affiliations who wish to join and cooperate in support of the ideals and values for which we stand. Each member is encouraged to be faithful to the teachings and practices of her or his own faith.)

Character development is one method Ys use to encourage the people they serve and involve to put Christian principles or positive values into practice in their daily lives. YMCA programs are one of the vehicles Ys use to accomplish our character development

goals. But another vehicle is the behavior of staff members and volunteers who are encouraged to model consistently the Y’s values in their actions and behaviors. A mission-driven YMCA will offer programs that will encourage people to act on these principles in a manner that is inclusive of all people (ages, abilities, incomes, genders, backgrounds, and beliefs).

**How would one describe a person of strong character?**

The dictionary defines character as “the ethical traits marking a person, attributes, held values.” A person of strong character strives to do the right things (to act on positive values) even when no one is looking. He or she chooses to do what is right because he or she honestly believes in the positive values as the way to behave.

**Why did YMCA of the USA adopt the four core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility?**

The selection of these core values was the result of a process conducted by the stakeholders in 30 YMCAs across the country to identify the values Ys held in common—shared values. After the list of common values was completed, four core values—ones that encompassed most of the values—seemed to emerge.

YMCA of the USA felt it would be more effective at changing behavior by concentrating on only four values because it is important to concentrate on only a few of the most important values, continually emphasizing their importance and how they should be applied in various situations. Here is a partial list of other values that are related to the Y’s core values:

<b>Caring</b>	<b>Honesty</b>	<b>Respect</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
compassion	integrity	acceptance	commitment
forgiveness	fairness	empathy	courage
generosity	trustworthiness	self-respect	health
kindness		tolerance	service/citizenship

**How can YMCA staff members and volunteers develop the character of the people they serve and involve?**

We encourage the people we serve and involve in our programs to *believe in* positive values and to *act on* them with their daily choices. Our goal is not to coerce people to do what is right only when someone of authority is watching them. Our goal is for people to choose to do the right thing because they *believe in* the values and *want* to do what is right. Therefore, our challenge is to find ways to encourage those we serve and involve to believe in and to act on positive values and the behaviors associated with them.

YMCA of the USA has suggested six actions a character-builder can take that, over time and with consistency, can encourage people to want to do what is right—to choose attitudes and behaviors that reflect positive values. (These actions are presented in the workshop titled, *Process to Strengthen the Effectiveness of Y Staff Members and Volunteers as Character-Builders.*)

Once again, one of the most powerful ways Y staff members and volunteers encourage people to want to do what is right is to provide them with a good example—to demonstrate consistently attitudes and behaviors that reflect the Y's core values.

**How should the character development focus affect how Y staff members and volunteers view themselves and their jobs at the Y?**

To be effective, Y staff members and volunteers must accept as part of their jobs the role of teacher of values, the role of character-builder. For the people we serve and involve (including those we supervise), we must look for ways that will encourage them to want to choose to do what is right. We must also lead by example in our own choices of attitudes and behaviors.

**How should the character development core values affect how a Y does business?**

Ideally, the core values should guide everything we do: how we lead and manage, how we supervise, how we make decisions, how we treat others, etc. Ideally, the stakeholders for each YMCA management function area (including the board) should examine their Y's policies, practices, and behaviors against the core values and make any adjustments that are needed.

## Journey to Strengthen My Character

A person of strong character strives to do what is right, even when no one is looking. Part of effective YMCA character development is about personal journeys begun by YMCA staff members, volunteers, and others who want their lives to stand for the positive values associated with the YMCA. We take measure of ourselves mostly by our good intentions, **but others measure our character (and our credibility as a character-builder) by our actions and behaviors.** This personal journey offers the challenge to do a better job each day of choosing attitudes, words, and behaviors that are consistent with the Y's core values and mission. This will strengthen our capacity as role models and as character-builders and will help us to take care not to send mixed messages.

**CARING: to demonstrate a sincere concern for others, for their needs and well-being.**

*Related values: compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and kindness.*

What new behaviors and attitudes could I choose to make me a more **caaring** person?

What current behaviors and attitudes could I **do away with** to make me a more **caaring** person?

**HONESTY: to tell the truth, to demonstrate reliability and trustworthiness through actions that are in keeping with my stated positions and beliefs.**

*Related values: integrity and fairness.*

What new behaviors and attitudes could I choose to make me a more **honest** person?

What current behaviors and attitudes could I **do away with** to make me a more **honest** person?

## **Journey to Strengthen My Character (cont.)**

We take measure of ourselves mostly by our good intentions, **but others measure our character (and our credibility as a character-builder) by our behavior.** This personal journey offers the challenge to do a better job each day of choosing the attitudes, words, and behaviors that are consistent with the Y's core values and mission.

**RESPECT: to treat others as I would want them treat me, to value the worth of every person, including myself.**

*Related values: acceptance, empathy, self-respect, tolerance.*

What new behaviors and attitudes could I choose to make me a more **respectful** person?

What current behaviors and attitudes could I **do away with** to make me a more **respectful** person?

**RESPONSIBILITY: to do what is right—what I ought to do, to be accountable for my choices of behavior and actions and my promises.**

*Related values: commitment, courage, health, service, and citizenship.*

What new behaviors and attitudes could I choose to make me a more **responsible** person?

What current behaviors and attitudes could I **do away with** to make me a more **responsible** person?

# My Plan to Build a Better Me

God said, "Your task is to build a better world."

"How?" I replied. "This world is such a large, vast place, and there is nothing I can do."

But God, in all His wisdom, said,  
"Just build a better you."

*Author unknown*

In order to build a better me, for the next three months I will focus on this one specific and measurable behavior:

Here are the "baby steps" and actions I will take in the next three months to help me make this behavior a habit (or to help me get rid of this behavior):