

Personal Character and Career Success: 12 Habits to Adopt Today



As a long-time homebuilding executive who has built more than 5,000 high-end homes over a 20-year period, I've learned a thing or two about the importance of a solid foundation.

A good home must be built on a solid foundation. The same is true of a good career: it must be built on a solid foundation of personal character. Without strong personal character, any success will be short-lived.

So where do we start? Just ask Brian Kelly, the widely acclaimed head coach of the Notre Dame football team, who has famously said, “before we can start winning, we have to stop losing.”

In other words — we first have to stop doing all the things that undermine our success.

Although there are no cheerleaders, no big scoreboards, and no scheduled practices, being successful at work is a lot like being successful in sports. You first have to eliminate (or minimize) your bad habits and then go to work developing the good habits that will put you on the road to success. And just as there are fundamentals in football that lead to success, such as blocking, tackling, conditioning, and teamwork, there are also clear principles at work that lead to success.

Based on my experience as a businessman, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, I've identified 12 habits of career success, all of which are connected to personal character:

- Achievement – Using effort, ability, and courage to set goals, get results, and continually improve. It marks the progressive realization of a worthy ideal.
- Assertiveness – Saying what you mean and what you want clearly but in a manner that demonstrates kindness and respect for others.
- Competence – Possessing the skill and capacity to perform a key task correctly the first time.
- Discipline – Having the self-control to establish and follow a regimen that leads to accomplishment of a worthy goal.
- Hard Work – Going the extra mile, voluntarily, to get the job done right. Working with a sense of urgency.
- Judgment – Displaying the ability to understand a complex issue and see the most important factors at a given place and time. Knowing what to do when.
- Perseverance – Possessing the will and stamina to continue pursuing a goal despite obstacles, resistance, or discouragement.
- Reliability – Making good on your commitments. Following up as expected. Being dependable.

- Resilience – Having the ability to recover quickly and fully from setbacks, adversity, and hardships. Having the strength to endure.
- Responsibility – Taking ownership of a problem, a project, or a person. Holding yourself accountable and not making excuses.
- Responsiveness – Responding in a timely and considerate manner to the needs of yourself and others.
- Self-Control – Having the ability to control your emotions, words, and actions in a manner that shows respect for others.

Why Does Personal Character Matter at Work?

No man, as the saying goes, is an island. We all depend on each other. Having standards for behavior allows us to live in a more predictable world that respects the needs and dignity of everyone. Whether we realize it or not, we are all carefully observing the behavior of those around us, and we expect them to operate with good character—so much so that when they don't, we are very tough on them. Just ask Tiger Woods (fidelity), Barry Bonds (honesty), or Bill Clinton (integrity).

While it can take decades to earn a great reputation, you can lose it in an instant with a serious breach of character. And while having consistent good character will lead to many positive outcomes, it is also most valuable in preventing bad outcomes.

The more time you spend thinking about your personal character, the more conscious you become of things you could do better. This self-awareness is healthy, as it encourages the cultivation of virtues and the shedding of bad habits. And yes, we all have bad habits.

As you give more thought to your personal character and to its improvement, I can promise you six things will happen:

1. You will strengthen your personal character.
2. Your personal relationships will improve.
3. You will do better at work.
4. Your self-esteem will rise.
5. You will be happier.
6. Your chances of personal success will increase.

That's an impressive return on investment in your personal character. So don't shortchange your foundation. Everything else depends on it. Take the trouble to make it as solid and strong as possible so that it will support you on your journey.

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