



Peninsula Chinese Business Association

美國華聯商會

Leading because we care

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Writer Message

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Dear Members and Friends,

We live in a world obsessed with talent. We often believe that success is determined by natural ability, leading us to overlook how far dedication, learning, and perseverance can take us. We underestimate the skills we can develop and the heights we can reach through continuous growth.

For decades, we have been told to follow our passion, discover our purpose, and pursue happiness. While this advice has inspired many, it is no longer enough. We already know these ideas, yet many people continue searching, waiting, and wondering why their work still feels unfulfilling. In an era when artificial intelligence can perform many tasks faster and more efficiently than humans, the old playbook is no longer sufficient. Those who live the most meaningful lives are guided not only by what they love to do but also by a deeper question: **"What difference am I here to make?"**

Progress depends less on how hard we work than on how well we learn, adapt, and grow. Our future is shaped not by the talent we are born with but by the character we build each day. Character is expressed through our core values—integrity, compassion, humility, accountability, perseverance, and service. These values are more than a moral compass; they are a lasting competitive advantage. They strengthen our leadership, enhance our performance, inspire trust, and enrich our well-being.

The true measure of our potential is not the height of the mountain we have reached, but the distance we have climbed and the obstacles we have overcome. Each challenge strengthens our resilience, and each lesson expands our capacity to serve others.

This month, let us intentionally uncover our hidden talents, affirm the unique gifts of one another, and strengthen the core values that define us. As **PCBA** leaders, let us lead by example, foster continuous learning, and inspire others to become their best selves. That is the spirit of the **Encouragement Scholarship**. Together, we can unlock extraordinary potential—not only in ourselves but also in everyone around us.

Enjoy the journey of discovering the leader within you.

With gratitude,

Johnny Da Rosa

johnnydarosa@post.harvard.edu



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Defining Our Character Skill



“Personality describes who we naturally are; character reflects who we choose to become”

In ***Hidden Potential***, Adam Grant argues that character is less a matter of willpower than a set of learnable skills. Character is more than simply having principles—it is the ability to live by them consistently. It is a capacity that can be developed throughout life.

For many years, psychologist William James believed that ***“character has set like plaster and will never soften again,”*** suggesting that while children could develop character, adults were hardly able to change it. Modern research tells a different story. A team of social scientists tested this assumption by studying 1,500 entrepreneurs—women and men in their 30s, 40s, and 50s who operated small businesses in manufacturing, services, and commerce. Their findings showed that character skills not only contribute to greater achievement but also continue to grow throughout adulthood. Character is not set in stone; it remains remarkably adaptable. William James was wrong—our character retains its plasticity.

Character is often confused with personality, yet they are fundamentally different. Personality is our natural disposition—the instincts that shape how we think, feel, and behave. Character, by contrast, is our ability to place our values above our instincts. Personality describes who we naturally are; character reflects who we choose to become.

Knowing our values does not necessarily mean we know how to practice them, especially under pressure. It is easy to be optimistic, determined, and generous when life is going well. The real test comes when circumstances are difficult. If personality is how we respond on an ordinary day, character is how we respond on our hardest days. Character reveals itself not in comfort but in adversity.

Personality is not our destiny; it is merely our tendency. Character gives us the power to rise above those tendencies and to remain faithful to our principles. Ultimately, success is determined less by the traits we inherit than by the choices we make about them.

DEFINING OUR CHARACTER SKILL

Character is not who we are.
It's who we **choose** to become.



PERSONALITY
IS OUR
TENDENCY



CHARACTER
IS OUR
CHOICE

As artificial intelligence and automation continue to transform society, this distinction becomes even more significant. Technology can build automobiles, fly drones, manage investments, diagnose illnesses, perform surgery, and increasingly carry out cognitive work once reserved for humans. As technical and analytical tasks become automated, we are entering what might be called a **character revolution**. The qualities machines cannot easily replicate—integrity, courage, humility, compassion, resilience, wisdom, and sound judgment—are becoming our greatest sources of value.

We often say that success and happiness are life's highest goals. Yet perhaps we should ask a deeper question: **Why isn't character at the top of that list?** We invest years in acquiring professional knowledge, technical expertise, and career credentials. How much time do we invest in becoming more trustworthy, more courageous, more compassionate, and more resilient?

The greatest achievements in life are rarely limited by talent. More often, they are limited by character. Traveling great distances requires the courage to embrace the right discomfort, the humility to seek the right information, the discipline to practice consistently, and the wisdom to accept the right imperfections. These are not talents we are born with—they are character skills we intentionally cultivate.

Our hidden potential is unlocked not merely by what we know, but by who we become. In a rapidly changing world, character is no longer simply a moral virtue—it is one of our greatest strategic advantages. It enables us to lead with integrity, build lasting relationships, make wise decisions under pressure, and create meaningful lives that leave a positive impact on others.

Johnny Da Rosa

Source: Adam Grant

Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap Through Our Values

One of life's greatest challenges is not knowing what to do—it is doing it. Psychologists call this the **knowing-doing gap**: the tendency to understand the best course of action yet fail to act on it. This gap widens especially during conflict, when hurt, anger, fear, or pride overwhelm our ability to regulate our emotions. Careers, friendships, marriages, and even lives can be damaged because people know better but fail to act on that knowledge.

Our values bridge knowing and doing. They remind us of who we want to be when our emotions tempt us to become someone else. Values are not merely beliefs we hold; they are commitments we practice, especially when circumstances make those commitments difficult.

Conflict threatens our identity. We want to believe we are fair, thoughtful, respectful, and worthy of respect. When someone challenges us, we often feel our identity is under attack. Research shows that affirming our core values helps protect our identity from this threat. When we are grounded in what truly matters, we become less defensive and better able to respond wisely rather than react emotionally.

Avoid Stereotyping

One of the quickest ways conflicts escalate is through stereotyping. When we feel threatened, our minds naturally look for shortcuts, and those shortcuts often lead us to assume the worst about another person's motives, character, or background. Instead of judging people by labels or identities, our values remind us to judge them by their character and actions. Leading with curiosity rather than assumptions opens the door to understanding rather than hostility.

Stay Open to Evidence

Conflict also narrows our thinking. Once we form an opinion, we tend to dismiss evidence that contradicts it and embrace information that supports our position. Before entering a difficult conversation, pause to reflect on your core values. Remind yourself:

***"My worth is not defined by being right.
My character is greater than this disagreement."***

This simple affirmation helps us remain intellectually honest—open to strong evidence while still thinking critically about weak arguments. True confidence is not refusing to change our minds; it is the courage to do so when the evidence warrants it.





Recognize the Other Person's Concessions

Another obstacle to reconciliation is our tendency to underestimate others' sacrifices while overestimating our own. Our compromises often feel significant because we know the cost. By contrast, the other person's concessions can seem small or insufficient. Values such as fairness, humility, and gratitude help us recognize others' genuine efforts. When people feel their concessions are acknowledged, trust grows, and negotiations become far more productive.

Choose De-escalation Over Escalation

Conflict often persists because neither side wants to appear weak. People double down on failing strategies rather than admit they are not working. Businesses throw good money after bad investments, and relationships follow the same pattern. Small disagreements become lasting feuds because pride refuses to step aside.

Our values remind us that winning an argument is never more important than preserving our integrity, our relationships, and our peace of mind. Sometimes the strongest person in the room is the one who chooses to de-escalate rather than retaliate.



Let Values Guide Your Interpretation

Our values shape not only how we respond but also how we interpret others' actions. When someone's words are unclear or ambiguous, we have a choice. We can assume bad intentions and fuel conflict, or we can extend grace and interpret their words as constructively as possible. A generous interpretation often elicits a generous response, redirecting a conversation that might otherwise spiral into misunderstanding and resentment.

Living Our Values

Our values define what matters most. They are most evident not when life is easy, but when we face disagreement, disappointment, and conflict. Every difficult conversation presents a choice: to react to our emotions or to respond to our principles.

The knowing-doing gap closes when our values become habits rather than aspirations. Character is shown not by what we know but by what we consistently do. Every conflict holds an opportunity—not merely to solve a problem, but to become the person our values call us to be.



Source: Paul Ingram

Johnny Da Rosa



Influence Begins with Purpose

“people willingly embrace difficult work when they understand the larger mission behind it.”

A visitor walked onto a construction site and noticed three workers. Curious, he approached the first worker and asked, ***“What are you working on?”*** The worker replied, ***“I’m building walls.”*** He walked over to the second worker, who was doing the same job, and asked the same question. ***“I’m building a room,”*** the worker replied.

Finally, he approached the third worker. ***“What are you working on?”*** the worker smiled and replied, ***“We’re building a palace.”***

All three workers performed the same task with the same tools and likely had similar skills. The difference was not in what they did but in how they viewed their work. The first worker saw only today's task. The second saw the immediate project. The third saw the larger purpose and lasting impact.

If all three workers have equal ability, experience, and workmanship, the palace builder will have the greatest influence on the job site. Why? Because people are inspired by purpose more than by process. Like the salmon swimming upstream, enduring tremendous obstacles to ensure the next generation's survival, **people** willingly embrace difficult work when they understand the larger mission behind it.

The same principle applies to leadership.

When introducing an idea or inviting dialogue, begin with purpose. A brief success story or a thoughtful cautionary tale helps people connect emotionally before they evaluate intellectually. Stories make ideas memorable, credible, and meaningful. They move people beyond merely hearing information to imagining what is possible.



"Great leaders do not simply tell people what to build—they help them see the palace clearly."

Successful stories do more than entertain—they inspire action, show what's possible, and help people envision a better future. They answer the question, **"Why does this matter?"** before asking, **"What should we do?"** Influence is not about winning arguments or persuading people to accept our opinions. It is about building a strong foundation of trust. It means creating an environment that is welcoming, respectful, and safe for open dialogue. In such an environment, people are more willing to look beyond their own interests and biases, consider the broader picture, and seek solutions that benefit everyone.

Great leaders do not simply tell people what to build—they help them see the palace clearly.

Influence begins long before decisions are made. It starts with building trust, fostering collaborative thinking, and helping others lower their defenses. When people feel respected rather than pressured, they are more open to new ideas and more willing to contribute their best thinking.

Ultimately, great influence begins not by waiting for people or circumstances to change, but by changing ourselves. As we become more purpose-driven, more trustworthy, and more committed to serving a cause greater than ourselves, we inspire others to do the same. Leadership is not about directing the work—it is about helping people see its meaning. When people see the palace, they willingly lay the bricks with greater passion, commitment, and excellence.

Source: Matt Norman

Johnny Da Rosa

Were Your Childhood Dreams Really Yours?



Many of our childhood dreams were never entirely our own.

Without realizing it, some of us grew up on paths shaped by our parents' hopes rather than our own curiosity. Our activities, hobbies, and even career aspirations were often guided by what we believed would make our parents proud. Years later, we may discover that what once seemed like wings to carry us forward had quietly become anchors, weighing us down.

Imagine a parent who always dreamed of becoming a pianist but never had the chance to study music. Wanting to fulfill that dream through their child, they insist on years of piano lessons, regardless of whether the child has any passion for or aptitude in music.

Most parents genuinely want the best for their children. Yet, without intending to, they can project their unfulfilled ambitions onto their children. As a result, children may follow in their parents' footsteps or pursue dreams that belong more to the previous generation than to their own.

Research shows this pattern. Sons are about 2.7 times more likely to work in the same occupation as their fathers, and daughters are nearly twice as likely to pursue their mothers' careers. These statistics are not trivial. They suggest that family expectations can strongly shape career choices, often without young people consciously recognizing the influence.

What children need most is not pressure to decide their future at an early age, but the freedom to explore possibilities beyond what their parents have experienced. Exposure to diverse people, ideas, and careers helps them discover strengths and passions that no one in their family may have imagined.

Letting go of childhood dreams that no longer fit is not a sign of failure—it is an act of growth. It creates space for new dreams that reflect who we have become rather than who others expected us to be. As we mature, our experiences broaden our understanding of the world, our talents, and our purpose. It is only natural that our aspirations evolve.

The greatest wealth is not merely achieving the dream we had at age ten. It is living a life aligned with our deepest values, abilities, and opportunities. Spending decades pursuing a dream we have outgrown can be one of life's greatest losses. Wisdom lies in the courage to ask, ***"Is this still my dream?"*** If the answer is no, we should not cling to yesterday's vision. We should embrace the freedom to create a new one.

True fulfillment comes not from remaining faithful to our childhood dreams but from staying true to the person we continue to become.

Source: Tom Rath

Johnny Da Rosa

"True fulfillment comes not from remaining faithful to our childhood dreams but from staying true to the person we continue to become."



Proofreader: Norman Ip
President: GoGo Wu
Graphic: GoGo Wu