

ESSENCE VALUES AND SOCIAL VALUES

BY ED MORLER, M.B.A., PH.D.

(Excerpt from *THE LEADERSHIP INTEGRITY CHALLENGE*)

Try not to be a man of success but rather try to become a man of value. —Albert Einstein

Values are qualities, symbols, or things that we consider to be important. Some values are more fundamental than others, not better but more fundamental. We refer to the most fundamental values as essence values. All others, including those derived from external sources, we refer to as social values. Both have their place and both need to be clearly differentiated and understood.

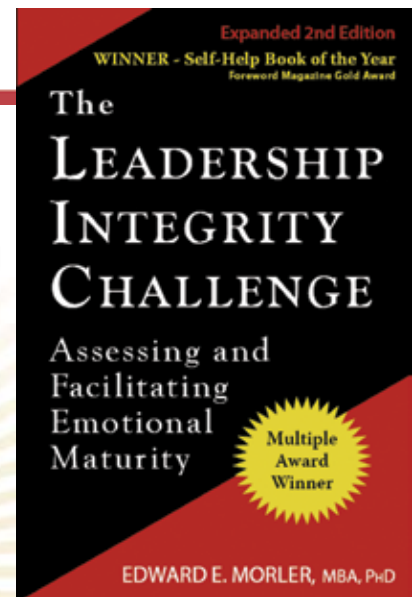
Man's activities are occupied in two ways—in grappling with external circumstances and in striving to set things at one in their own topsy-turvy mind. —William James

Essence values are those energetic qualities foundational to our very being, characterized by: 1) a presence that contributes to a more positive, supportive environment; 2) inclusiveness versus exclusiveness; and 3) independence of—but responsibly considers—context, circumstance, social mores, or external sources of acceptance. Examples are: authenticity, honesty, empathy, compassion, allowance, generosity, love, and forgiveness.



Essence values keep us in touch with our true purpose, power, and ability to make real contributions. They do not vary with time or context. When they are not our priority and senior standard, perspective is lost, priorities confused, decisions suboptimal, and authority abused. Since essence qualities are inherent to our very being, we cannot lose them but we can lose touch with them. That's when we get in trouble—make excuses rather than be responsible—and get further into the dung!

Social values, though sometimes desirable, helpful, and appropriate, are not fundamental or inherent to our being. They are created by and learned from our environment of what will (and will not) be acknowledged, admired, rewarded, and supported by the contemporary world. Social values can include such things as wealth, possessions, recognition, acceptance, admiration, praise, influence, titles, position, social status, and so forth. They also include group considerations (morals) of right and wrong, good and bad. Social values can and do change with time and context. Indicators of the level of emotional maturity present are how much contemporary social values, their emphasis, and relative importance, align with and support essence values—and what an individual or group is willing to do to ensure alignment.



A characteristic of social values that differentiates them from essence values is that they do not have, consistently, the three characteristics of essence values mentioned above. Loyalty is an example, for as highly regarded as it may be, it can be context-dependent, exclusive, and involve outside approval.

This is not to depreciate social values for they absolutely have their place and can inspire and contribute significantly. There is nothing inherently right or wrong with social values, or doing or having what they represent, unless they conflict with essence values and behaviors. When they do not conflict, they can complement essence values and add a wonderful richness to life.

However, we must keep social values in perspective, with our intention anchored in essence qualities. For example, how often do we observe people pretending essence qualities for social purposes? How often have we seen the rewards for obtaining results take priority over obtaining those results with integrity? How often have we observed information being misrepresented so that someone less deserving obtains some advantage?

When we pretend essence qualities, e.g., act compassionate, loving, and so on for social reasons (be accepted by the group, look good, be admired, etc.), we are not living essence values but performing them. Essence values such as love, honesty, and compassion may be stated as a group's values, but, unless they are owned and lived by individual group members, they act as little more than social fluff. This lack of authenticity creates additional problems internally (feeling dishonest) and externally (lack of trust). Authenticity is the foundation of trust; of ourself and others.

Essence values must have priority if we want to move beyond lower order needs and behaviors (survival, security, and belonging) to experience and meet higher order needs (esteem, actualization, and aesthetics; developed

further in chapters 5 and 6) and thus manifest a greater sense of contribution and fulfillment. When social values override essence values, intolerance of differences among groups expands and becomes a major source of continuing strife and misery. When social values complement and support essence values, we observe secure, happy people creatively and collaboratively making positive contributions. The degree to which social values actually support essence values is a measure of the level of emotional maturity of that individual, group, organization, or culture.

We need to clarify for ourselves what roles we want essence values to play in our life. We need to evaluate thoroughly whether our current social values and behaviors support essence values or ignore them. Do the organization's actual core values (those they actually operate from—may be essence or social) align with and support essence values? If we truly view living essence values as a priority, that clarity can provide a foundation for elegantly differentiating actually living essence values or pretending to do so. Only when an organization's core values actually are in alignment with, support, or are identical to essence values, does the foundation exist for the creation of a truly noble emotionally mature enterprise of integrity. Only when we make the choice to grow up will we not allow conflicting social considerations to co-opt essence values.

It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are. —Roy Disney

Points to consider:

- What is your highest priority value?
- When did you last violate it?
- What was your rationalization?
- List the values that you would like to be a key part of your life. How many are essence values?
- Pick an essence value and do something you have not done before to make it more a part of your life. Try another one.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Morler is president of Morler International, a management training and development firm specializing



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