



*We'll get you there.*

CPAs | CONSULTANTS | WEALTH ADVISORS

# Ethics In Leadership

State of Maine – Office of the Controller Training

September 17, 2025



The information herein has been provided by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP for general information purposes only. The presentation and related materials, if any, do not implicate any client, advisory, fiduciary, or professional relationship between you and CliftonLarsonAllen LLP and neither CliftonLarsonAllen LLP nor any other person or entity is, in connection with the presentation and/or materials, engaged in rendering auditing, accounting, tax, legal, medical, investment, advisory, consulting, or any other professional service or advice. Neither the presentation nor the materials, if any, should be considered a substitute for your independent investigation and your sound technical business judgment. You or your entity, if applicable, should consult with a professional advisor familiar with your particular factual situation for advice or service concerning any specific matters.

CliftonLarsonAllen LLP is not licensed to practice law, nor does it practice law. The presentation and materials, if any, are for general guidance purposes and not a substitute for compliance obligations. The presentation and/or materials may not be applicable to, or suitable for, your specific circumstances or needs, and may require consultation with counsel, consultants, or advisors if any action is to be contemplated. You should contact your CliftonLarsonAllen LLP or other professional prior to taking any action based upon the information in the presentation or materials provided. CliftonLarsonAllen LLP assumes no obligation to inform you of any changes in laws or other factors that could affect the information contained herein.

# Learning Objectives

---

At the end of this session, you will be able to:

Describe key concepts in ethics

---

Recognize practices to implement as an ethical leader

---

Explore how we can build sound moral habits as leaders

---

Examine how feedback and accountability are critical to leadership

---



# Principles of Ethics in Business

## Honesty

- Reliably share information with employees
- Tell the truth in communication and action

## Integrity

- Be consistent between words and actions
- Honor your commitments

## Loyalty

- Respect confidential information
- Recognize others for their accomplishments

## Fairness

- Hold all employees accountable
- Treat others the way you want to be treated

## Respect

- Practice active listening
- Welcome and encourage diverse viewpoints

## Courage

- Speak up when you see mistreatment
- Speak up when you see unethical behavior





# The Ethical Leader

Teambuilding

Influence

Delegation



# Teambuilding

Character – the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual

Derived from Greek “kharakter” for a stamping tool or instrument

“Character is Destiny”  
– Heraclitus

“Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for ‘tis better to be alone than in bad company”.  
– George Washington



# Teambuilding

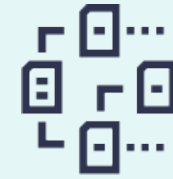
Build an organization with character. The success of an organization depends on its people.



Not everyone will have the same character and not everyone will fit to the same environment. It is critical to identify character early on and setup teams for success.



The most significant character indicator will be **actions over time**. This will not always align with what people say; we need to rely on actions and performance rather than the face value of what people say.



# Influence

1 Respect

2 Accountability

3 Service

4 Honesty

5 Justice

6 Community

<https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-ethical-leadership-and-why-is-it-important/>





# Influence

## Respect

- Valuing other's skills and contributions
- Dynamic is **bilateral** (mutual respect for others' ideas)
- Requires listening

## Accountability

- Take **responsibility** for actions
- Make decisions of integrity
- Don't look to place blame on others for shortcomings

<https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-ethical-leadership-and-why-is-it-important/>





# Influence

## Service

- Do what is right for employees, customers, and community
- Encourage employees to do the same

## Honesty

- Transparency in leadership builds **trust**
- Speak open and honestly about issues regardless of severity
- Enhance team member and customer loyalty

<https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-ethical-leadership-and-why-is-it-important/>





# Influence

## Justice

- Ensuring others obtain what they deserve in addition to following laws and regulations
- Build respectable work environments

## Community

- Consider **everyone** involved when making decisions
- Build inclusion and collaboration across teams

<https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-ethical-leadership-and-why-is-it-important/>



# Influence

- Critical rule – as a leader, *I am responsible*
- The initial situation, even if initiated by another team member, will eventually follow a fact pattern to leadership
- Accepting responsibility at the time of a problem allows us to change our thinking toward resolutions



# Influence

- Critical rule – *the golden rule*
- Treat others the way you want to be treated
- “I never asked them (teammates) to do something I wasn’t willing to do myself.”  
- Michael Jordan



# Delegation

- Those with the strongest character will be dependable in situations of adversity and will place the organization in a position to succeed.
- *Trust-building* with teambuilding.
- Delegate to trusted team members.



# Delegation

- Delegation is as *challenging* as it is critical. It is difficult to let go of responsibilities, but if a team of character is built, there is more confidence that a team member will make the beneficial decision.
- Over time, trust is built. Leadership transitions from a pattern of assignments into a dynamic of questions and suggestions.
- Eventually, a team member will make a decision that we *disagree* with, but trust and empowerment will allow the team member to follow through.



Helps employees make good decisions; leads to happier, more satisfied employees

Reduces liability

## Why Is Ethics Important in Business?

Ensures high quality customer service

Most importantly, keeps everyone off the front pages



# Breakdowns in Business Ethics

## Moral Muteness

- Not speaking up when witnessing unethical behavior
- Unwillingness to discuss ethics
- Discussing practices/decisions in a way that obscures your moral position and ethical beliefs (Bird & Walters, 1989)

## Ethical Fading

- Erosion of the ethical standard of a business in which employees become used to engaging in or condoning bad behavior

## Situational Influence

- Intent to please authority figure
- Focused on achieving a goal





# Building Good Moral Habits



# Building Good Moral Habits

---

“I want to  
be an  
ethical  
\_\_\_\_\_.”

“I want to be an ethical person.”

---

“I want to be an ethical employee.”

---

“I want to be an ethical accountant/CPA/auditor.”

---

“I want to be an ethical leader.”

---

“I want to be an ethical parent.”

---

“I want to be an ethical member of society.”

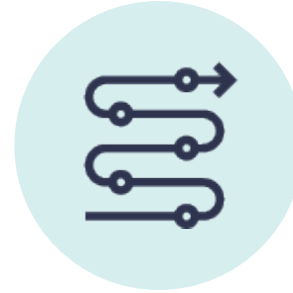
---



# Building Good Moral Habits



Being ethical is admirable and something we should all strive for, but perfection is not sustainable



Tendency is to want rapid success, but sometimes we fail to see that small habits and little choices are transforming us every day...for the good or the bad



The trick is not to strive for perfection, but rather to strive for continuous improvement and to get back on track when we veer off course

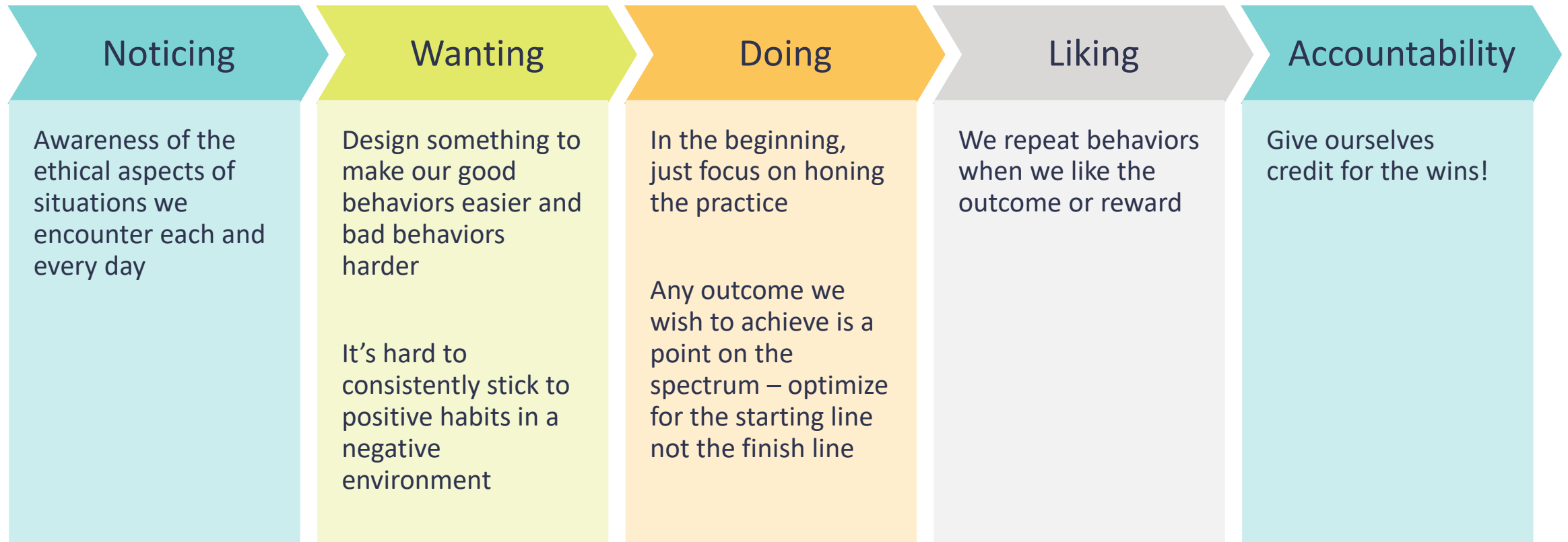


Build “Atomic Habits” to create an ethical lifestyle

[Source: “Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results” by James Clear](#)

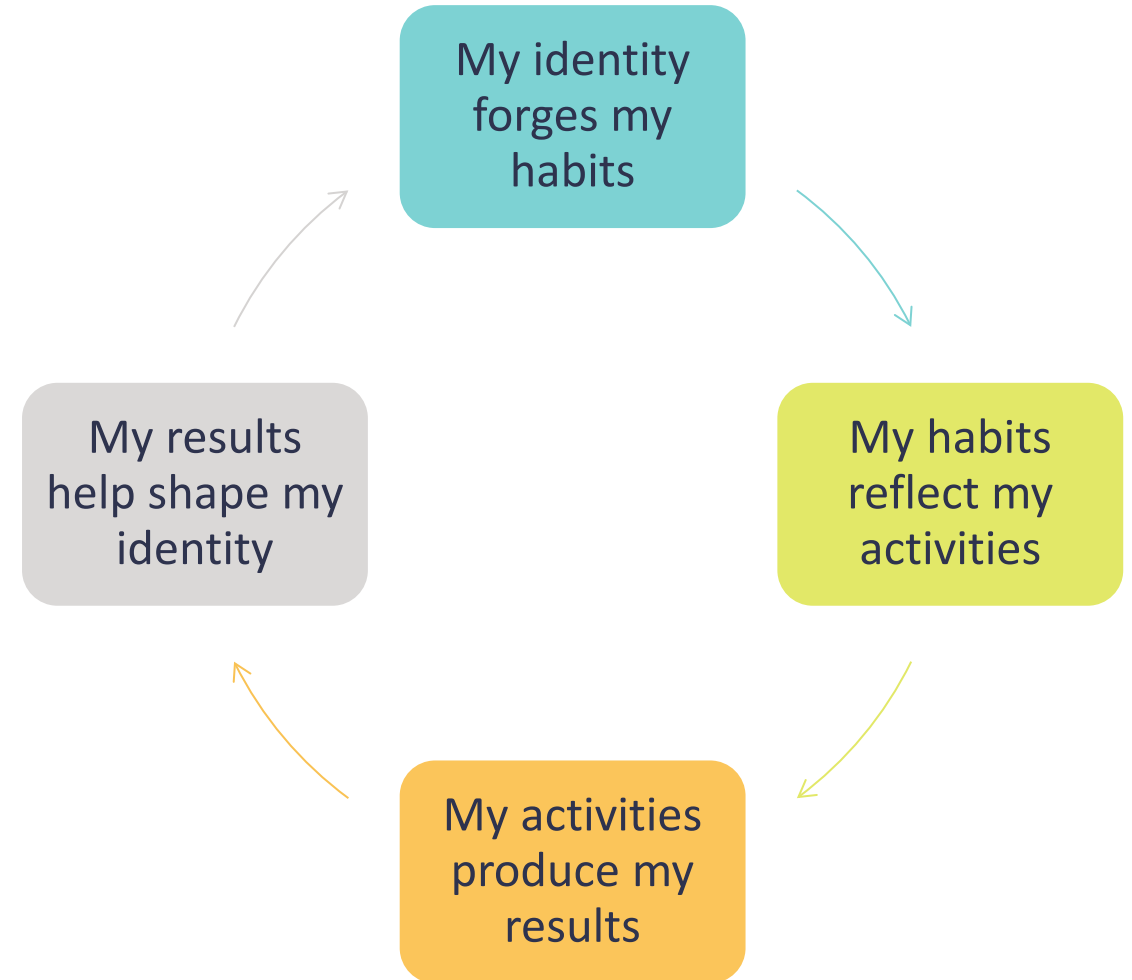


# Building Good Moral Habits



# Building Good Moral Habits

Strong, moral behaviors and ethical decision-making can happen habit by habit





# Building Good Moral Habits

## Systematic Moral Analysis

- Tool that helps us think through ethically complex situations before taking action
- Can also help us analyze the ethical dimensions of a complex situation after the fact

Source: [Ethics Unwrapped - Beyond Business Ethics - UT Austin \(utexas.edu\)](https://www.utexas.edu/mccombs/business/ethics-unwrapped) - Copyright © 2023 Ethics Unwrapped – McCombs School of Business – The University of Texas at Austin



# Building Good Moral Habits

Conceptualization: who might be harmed and how?



Justification: consider whether breaking a moral rule prevents a greater harm from occurring, or whether the harm you're causing legitimately addresses a more significant harm that was already caused



Consider alternative courses of action that would minimize harm





# Support through Accountability and Feedback




# Accountability

## accountability noun



Save Word

ac·count·abil·i·ty | \ ə-ˌkaŭn-tə-'bi-lə-tē  \

### Definition of *accountability*

: the quality or state of being accountable

*especially* : an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accountability>



# Accountability



# Accountability - Feedback

- The key to our success in our continuous growth and improvement
- Feedback allows us to reflect on our *experiences*, identifies and builds our *strengths and inspirations*, and helps us make **choices** which grow our *inspired careers*.



# Accountability



# Accountability - Feedback

## Challenges

### Opportunity

- We have too much going on to provide quality feedback

### Comfortability

- Conversations are challenging for those providing and receiving feedback

### Awareness

- Have we paid enough attention ?

### Direction

- Are we communicating with our teammate who needs the feedback?



# Accountability - Feedback

## Opportunity

- Solution – **Create Opportunities**
  - Our purpose – create opportunities for our people
  - Identify times of day that work mutually for our teams
  - Transparent scheduling – dedicated time, in writing
    - Enforces accountability!
  - The provider and receiver are **both** components of the solution



# Accountability - Feedback

## Comfortability

- Solution – **Curiosity**
  - Anything new is difficult when it's first performed
  - Practice in having difficult conversations will build confidence
  - This is an **investment in the relationship** (we care)
  - Once feedback is provided, the next course of action is the recipient's **choice**



# Accountability - Feedback

## Awareness

- Solution – **Clarity**
  - Solicit feedback from other team members
  - Provide feedback timely and continuously
    - Team members can *relate* feedback to experience
  - Transparency is key
  - Leave with a clear understanding of the discussion
  - **Document** the feedback



# Accountability - Feedback

## Direction

- Solution – stay the **Course**
  - It is okay to obtain input, but when we complain about performance without addressing it with the responsible party, *we are not addressing the issue.*
  - No one benefits
  - Establish a plan to ensure feedback is communicated
    - Everyone is responsible



# Feedback Strategies

Timeliness

Investment in  
the relationship

Multidirectional

Cooperative

Transparent

***Self-  
consequence***



# Questions?



# Thank you!!

Jim Piotrowski, CPA, CGFM, Principal  
[Jim.Piotrowski@CLAconnect.com](mailto:Jim.Piotrowski@CLAconnect.com)



CLAconnect.com



CPAs | CONSULTANTS | WEALTH ADVISORS

©2025 CliftonLarsonAllen LLP. CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP) is an independent network member of CLA Global. See [CLAglobal.com/disclaimer](https://claglobal.com/disclaimer).  
Investment advisory services are offered through CliftonLarsonAllen Wealth Advisors, LLC, an SEC-registered investment advisor.