Hire for Character. Train for Competence.

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A hospital hired a brilliant surgeon who was top of her class at Harvard Medical School with an impressive list of publications in leading journals. The hiring committee thought they had struck gold. In the operating room the surgeon's skills were impeccable. However, her ability to collaborate with nurses, listen to concerns from junior staff, or admit when she needed help created a toxic environment. Surgical teams dreaded working with her. Safety issues went unreported because staff feared her harsh reactions. Despite her impressive credentials, her lack of humility and empathy was undermining the entire department's performance.

In the same hospital, another surgeon had a far less prestigious background. He graduated from a state medical school with solid but unremarkable grades. However, he was a person of extraordinary character. He approached each surgery with humility and actively sought input from every team member. When complications arose, he remained calm and collaborative. He openly discussed his mistakes in monthly reviews, turning them into learning opportunities for the whole department.

Over time, an interesting pattern emerged. Surgical teams working with the elitely credentialed surgeons experienced high turnover and increasing complications. The high character surgeon teams flourished. The nurses requested to work with him. Junior residents flocked to learn from him. His complication rates dropped steadily as his teams became more collaborative.

The hospital's leadership noticed. When they analyzed the data, the high character surgeon outperformed the low character surgeon despite her elite credentials. Character was the difference.

This story illustrates a profound truth: while competence is a threshold skill, character has a disproportionate impact on performance. Technical brilliance is undermined by character flaws. In contrast, strong character can amplify solid competence into extraordinary performance.

The hospital learned its lesson. They revamped their hiring process to hire character and train for competence. Of course, clinical competence remained important. Thereafter, character was a non-negotiable necessary attribute. They started asking questions such as: "Tell me about a time you made a serious mistake. How did you respond?" and "How do you ensure every team member feels heard?"

The results were transformative. Over the next few years, team performance improved, turnover lessened, and most importantly, patient outcomes got better. The hospital discovered that many organizations learn the hard way: you can train for competence, but character is the multiplier that turns good performance into excellence. We define character as having virtue, which means excellence. This paper discusses the performance benefits of virtue.

Hire for Character and Train for Competence
When hiring or promoting, consider a person's competence (what value they offer) and their character (who they are). Competence and character are not in a competition. In fact, character is a performance multiplier of competence (1). Figure 1 presents features of individuals who demonstrate varying combinations of competence and character.

Peak Performers
Teammates who are high in competence and high in character are peak performers. These are the people who define your culture at its best. They do the right thing, the right way, for the right reasons. They are trustworthy and dependable under conditions of stress, pressure, and adversity.

Trainable
Teammates who have threshold competence and high character are trainable. People of high character are unwilling to accept threshold competence. These people will give everything they have to up their game. Hiring a person who is trainable is a relatively low-risk decision.

Selection Error
Teammates who are low competence and low character represent a selection error. You may still love them, but they need to be removed from your team or better yet not hired to begin with.

Culture Killers
Here is your nightmare. The person with high competence and low character. Cunning, clever, and competent is a deadly combination. You would much rather have teammates who are dumb and lazy because at least you see it coming. It is tempting to hire rock star surgeons, sales rainmakers, or uber strategists, even when all that competence is attached to an exceptionally large ego. You might excuse away their narcissism as something that comes with exceptional competence. The risk is that arrogant leaders insulate themselves from feedback and from new ideas from teammates. This is why arrogance isn't just annoying—arrogance destroys teamwork.

How an organization makes hiring, promotion, and separation decisions can be pressure tested by answering two questions:

1) Does a person of high character and threshold competence get a chance?
2) Does a person of high competence and low character get a pass?

Character is Defined by Virtue
In a world increasingly defined by uncertainty, stress, and pressure, human beings often find themselves teetering on the edge, unsure how to navigate uncertainty. It is in these moments that we come to realize an undeniable truth: our ability to endure and thrive through these challenges is not solely dictated by external circumstances, but rather by the character we cultivate within ourselves and teammates.

This character though sometimes dismissed as "soft," is, in fact, the anchor that can hold us steady in a storm. We define character as aspiring to practice virtue. Trust, compassion, courage, justice, wisdom, temperance, and hope—these are the seven classic virtues that, lauded by philosophers for millennia, remain as powerful today as ever (2, 3). After all, wouldn't a person

or team grounded in trust, compassion, courage, and wisdom naturally fare better when faced with adversity than one defined by distrust, callousness, cowardice, and despair? This simple truth transcends time and boundaries, echoed by thinkers like Aristotle, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, Heraclitus, Confucius, and Lao Tse. The U.S. service academies view virtue as essential for developing the competence and commitment needed to build and lead resilient teams that can succeed under any conditions (1).

And here lies the power of virtue: it is not reserved for saints or sages. It is for all of us. For every person who has ever faced a moment of uncertainty. For every leader who has tried to guide a team through crisis. For every individual who has sought a way forward in a world that often seems chaotic and overwhelming. No culture is completely virtuous or completely devoid of virtue, so think of virtue along a continuum. When we tip our behavior toward virtue, we better navigate uncertainty. When we lean away from virtue, life gets even harder, especially during volatile times.

There is no shortage of examples where fame and fortune were achieved without virtue. So, virtue will not serve the interest of those pursuing victory at any cost. Yet, winner take all strategies are chock full of reputational, legal, and financial risks. Choosing virtue reflects who we aspire to be as individuals and organizations. This strategy reduces risk and attracts talent, customers, and investors who want to win the right way.

Organizations operate across a virtue spectrum rather than falling into simple "good" or "bad" categories. At one end stand companies that consistently emphasize ethical conduct, respecting employees, customers, and communities while pursuing financial success. Though imperfect, these organizations make the right choices more often than not. In the middle, many organizations show mixed patterns, strong on transparency but weaker on environmental responsibility, or excellent at customer service but struggling with internal equity. At the lower end, organizations may regularly compromise ethics for short-term gains, though even these typically maintain basic standards to stay operational. This continuum appears in specific behaviors: how companies manage mistakes (cover-ups versus open acknowledgment), treat employees (exploitation versus development), or approach competition (predatory versus fair practices).

The competitive advantages typically grow stronger as organizations move up the virtue continuum with benefits (1,2) such as:

- Stronger employee loyalty and easier recruitment.
- More stable customer relationships built on trust.
- Better resilience during crises due to accumulated goodwill.
- Reduced legal and regulatory risks.
- More sustainable long-term growth.

Virtue is not about perfection but about the persistent effort to move toward better practices while maintaining business success. The following brief descriptions of the virtues illustrate the virtue continuum at the high and low ends.

TRUST IS EFFICIENT
When we look out for the interests of others as if their interests were our own, we build healthy human relations. Efficiency rises as we prioritize others' interests. Without trust, customer, colleague, and business partner relationships deteriorate. Mistrust slows down decisions and wastes money. A personal life absent trust lacks the social safety net that we all need to function and flourish (4).

COMPASSION: SERVICE BEFORE SELF
Compassion broadens perspective and deepens human connection, despite personal pressures. It sounds better to be pro-compassion than pro-ruthlessness. That is the easy part. The hard part is putting service before self when we are busy and preoccupied with our own priorities. Without compassion, we fail to relate to others or consider how our decisions affect others. We alienate people. A personal life without compassion is empty and incomplete.

COURAGE: DO THE HARD RIGHT RATHER THAN THE EASY WRONG
Rather than limit courage to extraordinary acts of bravery, expand courage
to mean something that fits all of us: the decision to speak up in a meeting, to take on a new challenge, to stand up for what is right even when it is difficult. Courage means that we choose a greater benefit than individual comfort and achievement. Without courage, we back down in the face of adversity. We lack the persistence needed to work through difficult issues. Without courage, life is frozen by fear.

JUSTICE: LIVE BY CONVICTION, NOT CIRCUMSTANCE
What if we inspired trust by operating a marketplace based on commitment to virtue rather than rules, while recognizing that the rule of law cannot be ignored? Without justice, bloated egos cause us to take things personally. When things get personal, our judgment gets fuzzy. Being just does not mean we become doormats. It does mean we chip away at our ego with the hope we might treat others - all others - with respect and dignity.

WISDOM: STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND RATHER THAN TO BE UNDERSTOOD
Like all virtues wisdom is learned. First, we make our habits, then our habits make us. Wise leaders listen carefully, seek feedback, and recognize others' contributions. They actively seek mentors while mentoring others, creating a cycle of continuous learning and growth. Without wisdom, we make flawed decisions. Without wisdom, we blame others for inferior performance creating a culture of fear and disengagement. People stop caring. As apathy goes up, so does risk – both organizational and personal.

TEMPERANCE: CALM IS CONTAGIOUS
Temperance involves moderation, balance, and self-control. The root word of temperance is *tempus*, or "time," which raises the question, "What are we living for?" Without the temperance of self-control, discipline, and moderation, we lack the ability to be responsible. Without temperance we struggle to perform under pressure.

HOPE: BE BETTER, NOT BITTER

Hope is about the future not yet realized. Hope involves what is possible and realistic, as opposed to fantasy. We cannot always control our circumstances but we can always control our response. Without hope, cynicism blocks learning, reflection ceases, and we become fragile.

The Surprising Science of Character as a Performance Amplifier

When hiring, five tangible factors are easier to evaluate than character: competence, circumstances, metrics, pay (and other extrinsic motivators), and talent. But five intangible factors—character, response to circumstances, relationships, intrinsic motivation, and deliberate practice/having a growth mindset —are harder to assess, yet have a greater impact on performance, again both organizational and personal (Table 1).

As Einstein stated, "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts (5)." The text that follows pairs each tangible factor with its intangible counterpart (the pairings) in service of demonstrating that character and the pursuit of virtue drive high performance. In each pairing, a supportive story precedes a brief review of objective supportive evidence – the science.

Pairing 1: Competence Matters. Character Matters More.

In the past five years, Standard & Poor's 500 total shareholder return (stock price appreciation and dividends) increased in value by 82%. The Standard & Poor's Industrial Companies increased by 62%. Over this same period, manufacturing Parker Hannifin's (Parker) stock increased in value by 233%.

While financial returns are impacted by a range of macro- and micro-economic variables, there is a tight correlation between virtue and engagement. In 2014, Parker's engagement scores were fourth quartile compared to peer companies in their industry sector. A decade later in 2024, Parker's engagement scores were first quartile compared to its peers (6).

There is indisputable evidence that engagement drives organizational performance factors such as financial returns, customer experience, and productivity. Engagement is about pro-social behavior, and virtue is the most pro-social technology ever invented. At Parker, character defined by virtue has been practiced both because it is worthy in and of itself and because it affects engagement. Internal experimental studies at Parker have demonstrated a causal relationship between engagement and the practice of virtue. Over a 12-month period, when leaders and teams consciously practiced virtue, engagement scores consistently increased by 10 and 20 percent.

When it comes to the practice of virtue, the hopeful outcome is that we do not have to practice perfectly. But we do need to try. The moral life defined by virtue is not about a purity code. In fact, practicing virtue involves setbacks, tensions, and misunderstandings. However, when we get it right—or even try by continually exercising our altruistic muscles -we deepen trust that results in higher levels of engagement. After all, the root word of "morale" is "moral."

Further Evidence for Character and Virtue
Think of character and competence as a multiplication equation, not an addition problem. Yes, competence matters - zero competence times any level of character still equals zero. You would not hire a heart surgeon just because they are kind and trustworthy.

But here is what most organizations miss: while competence sets the floor, character determines the ceiling. The data are striking. Nobel laureate James Heckman proved that noncognitive factors such as character better predict academic, job, and personal success than cognitive factors such as standardized tests (7). West Point's Mike Matthews found something even more compelling: analyzing a century of research, he discovered that only 25% of performance variance comes from cognitive skills. The other 75%? Answer: character- related traits (8).

When character is neglected, the consequences are devastating. A study following 20,000 employees across 18 months revealed that 46% left their organizations—and remarkably 89% of these departures weren't due to incompetence. Here's the kicker: 89% of these departures were not due to lack of competence - they were character issues such as poor teamwork, being uncoachable, self-absorbed, and unreliable. Each departure costs roughly a third of the position's salary, not counting the hidden costs of damaged morale and lost productivity (9).

Think about that. Organizations spend enormous resources assessing competence during hiring, yet most failures stem from character deficits. It is like carefully measuring someone's technical ability to climb a mountain while ignoring whether they have the perseverance to reach the summit.
The solution is not complicated, but it requires flipping our traditional hiring model to hire for character, train for competence.

Here are illustrative stories.

The Cleveland Guardians compete in Major League Baseball (MLB) with one-third the budget of teams like the New York Mets. MLB teams retain their local media market revenue, which gives large-market teams a permanent financial advantage. While wealthy teams can afford established, expensive players, the Guardians must rely on developing young talent. How have the Guardians competed despite being under sourced? In the last 12 years, only the Dodgers and Yankees won more games than the Guardians. Despite having a smaller payroll than two-thirds of MLB teams, the Guardians outperformed twenty-seven teams over a dozen years (10).

In modern baseball, technology tracks and stores every player's movement in unprecedented detail. Yet the Guardians have found that in this data-driven landscape, team culture and character offer a competitive edge. Qualities like empathy, humility, and understanding have become as valuable as statistical performance. The future of player development requires balancing technological analysis with human connections, understanding not just what players do, but who they are. The result is increased resilience and grit, which are also performance amplifiers (11).

Pairing 2: Circumstances Matter. Response to Circumstances Matter More.

Holocaust survivor, Edie Eger, cautions us to be wary of asking "Why me?" She says that "Why me?" is the question of a victim. Instead, she suggests that we ask, "What's next?" the question of the liberated (12).

It may be surprising to learn that most people become resilient or grow after a traumatic event. About one-third or less are suspectable to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), about one-third stretch like elastic and return to normal after the band snaps back, and about one-third emerge stronger - more empathetic, purposeful, and alive than before. People are not necessarily cured, but the trauma and subsequent healing yields a wiser, braver, and more caring person.

At West Point, 97% of cadets knew about PTSD, while only 10% had heard of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). Recognizing PTG and conditions that foster it matters because our expectations shape our reality. Here is what is less known: in a study of 100,000 soldiers, 83% showed few or no PTSD symptoms after deployment. The key difference? Human connection. Veterans with strong social support were 2.5 times less likely to develop PTSD than those without it. In fact, social connection predicts recovery better than the severity of the trauma itself.

It is understood that people experiencing PTSD should receive all the help they need. Furthermore, PTG is not about sugarcoating suffering. It is about what happens when people feel safe enough to rebuild; they develop deeper relationships, find new purpose, and gain an urgent appreciation for creating a meaningful life (2). As Viktor Frankl observed, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves (13)."

Pairing 3: Metrics Matter. Relationships and Purpose Matter More.

A story about collegiate women's basketball demonstrates how relationships matter more than metrics as drivers of high performance. When Cheri Harrer took over Baldwin Wallace University's (BW) women's basketball program, they had not posted a winning season. Today, she is the conference's all-time winningest coach - men's or women's - with over 700 victories at a single school. Her teams have claimed eight Conference Championships, made 18 NCAA Tournament appearances, and reached three Elite Eights (14).

But the secret to her success is not hidden in playbooks or practice drills. It is written in six words that echo through every practice and game: "Whatever it takes; for each other." One of the authors has worked with BW's women's basketball team to integrate character into the program and to guide the team's creation of this purpose statement.

Coach Harrer understood something profound; championships are not won by assembling the most talented players. They are won by building the strongest relationships. Of course, she is skilled at the threshold skill to coach basketball. The performance amplifier is building a program founded on character and connection.

The scoreboard matters, of course. But BW aligns with the idea outcomes are for amateurs, professionals focus on character and process. The real victories happen in daily moments of

teammates pushing each other, supporting each other, growing together. When players internalize "Whatever it takes; for each other," wins follow.

In reversing the traditional sports formula - putting relationships before results - Coach Harrer did not just build a winning program. She created a legacy of leaders who understand how we achieve matters as much as what we achieve. This is not just a basketball story. It is a blueprint for any organization that wants to build sustainable success. Start with character, cultivate relationships, and let the metrics follow.

Consider another story about how culture anchored in the seven classic virtues drives performance. Picture two restaurants on the same street. Both use sophisticated systems to track sales, inventory, and wait times. Both owners obsess over metrics. Yet one thrives while the other struggles. The difference lies in their cultures; in the successful restaurant, staff help each other, communicate respectfully, and treat mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures.

Research confirms the crucial role of culture across industries. Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that 70% of a company's return on investment stems from leadership and teamwork, not strategy (15). Gallup data show that that 70% of workers are disengaged, with their direct leader accounting for 70% of this variance (16). Even in education, Cambridge University showed that developing self-awareness and purpose can improve academic performance by two grade levels (17).

Think of organizational culture as soil: rich soil helps even average seeds flourish, while poor soil stunts even the finest ones. Culture eat strategy for breakfast, process for lunch, teamwork for an appetizer and structure for dinner. Core virtues like trust, compassion, courage, and wisdom are not just cultural elements—they are the foundation everything else builds upon.

While metrics and key performance indicators matter, they are like taking your organization's temperature; they reveal problems but don't solve them. True performance improvement comes from how people treat each other daily. Better relationships and culture lead to better numbers, not the other way around. The order matters, just like hiring for character and training for competence.

Pairing 4: Pay/Extrinsic Motivation Matters. Intrinsic Motivation Matters More.

A key driver of high performance is intrinsic motivation, not extrinsic rewards. Consider the story of the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine.

Extrinsic motivators include pay, status, grades, and class rank. Cleveland Clinic's Lerner College of Medicine (CCLCM) takes an unconventional approach to medical education (18). After screening academic competence through test scores and grade point averages, the medical school prioritizes character traits like curiosity, resilience, teamwork, and intrinsic motivation. Self-reflection is an explicit competency that the school seeks and cultivates. Instead of grades and rankings, student progress is measured through Targeted Areas for Improvement (TAFIs) across clinical competency, research, and professionalism. This individualized system encourages students to focus on personal growth rather than competing with peers. Faculty serve

as coaches, helping students develop through their own motivation to be their best selves rather than through external pressures like test scores, class rank, etc.

Does this unconventional approach hurt students' career prospects? Quite the opposite. Lerner College of Medicine graduates consistently secure positions at the most selective residency programs nationwide. While other schools may emphasize academic ranking, Lerner produces doctors who excel at teamwork and patient-centered care—qualities increasingly valued in modern medicine. CCLCM graduates are not just technically proficient; they are prepared to excel as both physicians and human beings.

Further evidence supports the idea that while pay matters, intrinsic motivation matters more. Fair compensation is essential because job satisfaction alone does not pay bills. Yet, pay is often more a source of dissatisfaction than satisfaction rather than an enduring motivator. If money were the key to workplace fulfillment, well-funded organizations would have solved the engagement puzzle long ago.

Consider supportive evidence. Gallup's "Blind Spots" study of five million people worldwide revealed that only 20% were thriving at work in that they enjoyed what they did and who they worked with and appreciated being encouraged to use their strengths. Feeling indifferent, 62% of the population felt detached from their jobs. The remaining 18% were miserable and resentful that their needs were not being met. As GDP founder Simon Kuznets noted in 1934, "The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income (19)."

When it comes to health, former two-time U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy prescribed community as essential for health. Strong relationships and serving others reduce risks of conditions like heart disease and depression, while building resilience. His message was clear: real health starts with connection, not isolation. We are more fragile when we are self-absorbed. We are more resilient when we are more other-focused. Murthy reports that patients at life's end never discuss their bank accounts or accomplishments - only the people they loved, served, and impacted (20).

Pairing 5: Talent Matters. Deliberate Practice Matters More.

A growth mindset (21)– the notion that one can improve through deliberate practice - is another dimension of having character. As demonstrated by the Navy SEALs, talent matters but deliberate practice matters more.

The Special Warfare insignia, commonly called the "SEAL Trident" or "Budweiser" within Navy circles, identifies sailors who have successfully completed Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training and SEAL Qualification Training (SQT), and have been designated as a U.S. Navy SEAL. While SEALs are known for exceptional physical and mental toughness, their true strength lies in teamwork. As one retired SEAL put it: "We are not super soldiers. We are super teams. We will out team you." A SEAL candidate, interviewed before and after earning his Trident, shared three key lessons: learning to earn others' trust, pivoting to problem-solving when things go wrong instead of placing blame, and being a good teammate because no one succeeds alone.

Buddy breathing is one of many examples to teach SEALs to be "other-focused." Two swimmers must share one regulator underwater while trainers' pound on them to disrupt their breathing. The lesson: focusing on yourself, your struggles exhaust you. Focusing on your partner's needs helps you relax, conserve energy, and succeed. The takeaway is that every organization can benefit when people strive to earn each other's trust, when blame is replaced with problem-solving, and focus on others when things go wrong.

As supportive by science, in 1985, Alan Bloom studied 120 elite performers. He found that except in sports, where physical attributes matter, extraordinary talent could not be predicted early (22). Decades of research confirm that expertise comes from deliberate practice—years of focused effort to build strengths and address weaknesses more than innate ability (23).
This path to mastery is challenging. In the 1930s, Hans Selye noted that steel becomes stronger under pressure and humans can grow through stress too (24). Yerkes and Dodson's 1908 research showed that performance follows a parabolic curve: too little stress breeds complacency and too much stress impairs performance (25). Success comes from pushing past discomfort to reach new levels. In other words, stress is our response to an event; it is not the event itself.

Good coaching plays a crucial role in navigating pressure and performance. The best coaches challenge people to set ambitious standards. They also build strong relationships, knowing that a solid support system helps buffer stress. Constructive criticism is not about hollow praise or dishing out harsh feedback; rather, good coaching is about offering actionable insights that show belief in someone's capacity to improve. People are not problems to solve; they are potential to develop. Effective coaching is not about fixing people but connecting with them.

How to Assess Character

While character is less tangible than competence (Table 1), character can be assessed. An inventory of metrics about the five pairings can help.

Pairing 1 – <u>Competence Matters. Character Matters More.</u>
Here are sample questions to assess character:

1. Describe a personal experience that has deepened your humility, and the impact of learning on how you look at your work.
2. Who do you aspire to be as a leader and as a teammate?
3. What habits do you want to use more?
4. What habits do you want to use less?

Pairing 2 – <u>Circumstances Matter. Response to Circumstances Matter More.</u>
All of us might confront circumstances that can crush us. And, yet humans are remarkably resilient bouncing back from setbacks. When we are knocked on our knees, perhaps humility will cultivate learning and growth.

Ask candidates to describe a significant personal challenge they faced that helped shape who they have become. Examples may include an ethical dilemma, a situation of personal adversity, or a hurdle in life that they worked hard to overcome. (Follow-ups questions include: How did

you respond? What did you learn from the experience? How did you grow?) Tell us about a time you had difficulty working with someone (can be a coworker, classmate, or client). Why was this person difficult to work with for you? (Follow-up questions: What steps did you take to resolve the problem? What was the outcome? What could you have done differently? Can we speak to the other person to learn their perspective?).

Pairing 3- Metrics Matter. Relationships and Purpose Matter More.
Tell us about a time when your behavior had a positive impact on your team's performance. (Follow-up questions: What was your primary goal and why? How did your teammates respond? How do you see yourself contributing to teamwork if you join our organization?)

Tell us about a time when you effectively managed your team to achieve a key performance indicator. What did your approach look like? (Follow-up questions: What were your targets, and how did you meet them as an individual and as a team? How did you adapt your leadership approach to different individuals? What was the key takeaway from that specific situation?)

Tell us about a person who had a significant positive impact on you. (Follow-up questions: What did that person teach you? How did they help you grow?).

Often people who are takers are better at sharing stories about their success and are less able to discuss a team's success. Takers are more likely to use personal pronouns such as I and me. Givers are more likely to use pronouns such as we and us.

Pairing 4 – Pay Matters. Intrinsic Motivation Matters More.
Does the person do their job for fun in their spare time? Are they mastering their craft?

If someone asked you for the three words that would sum up your reputation, what would you say? How would people describe your judgment, your knowledge, your behaviors, in different situations?

(Follow-up questions: When members of your team were struggling to get back up after getting knocked down, how did you help the team focus on what they needed to learn to get better?)

The kind of person you want to hire will not answer this question with how much money they make or want. They will share stories about purpose, passion, and teamwork.

Pairing 5 – Talent Matters. Deliberate Practice Matters More.

1. Define a skill that you excel at. How did you get better over time?
2. Did you have a formal or informal coach or mentor?
3. How did you define and weaken forces that restrained you from reaching your goal?
4. Potential – what is the gap between your current competencies and character that will be required in this position? How will you close this gap?

Conclusion
This inventory of questions focuses on evidence-based character criteria that impact performance. Assessing intangible dimensions of a potential colleague's candidacy is difficult and far from perfect, but it is much better than traditional selection procedures that focus primarily on competence. Depending on the job, writing samples and work samples can surface what someone can do, not just what someone says they can do. Interviews are more likely to be valid when standardized character-related questions are asked by a diverse interview team. The hiring team reviews candidate responses together to help reduce factors such as confirmation bias.

Transparency is paramount to making sound selection decisions. The organization needs to understand a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The goal is not to ask "gotcha" questions. The goal is to understand the gap between the person's current character and competence and what it will take to be successful. In turn, the selection process is not about sugarcoating the demands and challenges of the job. Organizational transparency is essential to helping the candidate understand what they are getting themselves into.

After someone is hired or promoted, the on-boarding process is critical, yet this step is not always well developed. The purpose of on-boarding is to be proactive in anticipating how to support the person's success. Here are questions that increase the odds that a candidate is set up for success:

- Conduct a pre-mortem – "if this person fails…. What happened and how can we prevent failure?"
- Have we helped the candidate understand the situation they are entering? Is there anything they need to know ahead of time, i.e., budget strengths and weaknesses, areas to invest and divest, relationships with key partners, talent retention, and development issues.
- Make clear the people whose support and collaboration will be critical to their effectiveness in this role.

It turns out that these "soft" skills related to character are the very foundation for the "hard" results we seek. This is not just philosophy. This is practical, evidence-based wisdom that has stood the test of time. Think of hiring for character and training for competence as a formula:

High Character (non-negotiable) x Competence (at least threshold skill) = High Performance.

Simply put - when we get better at who we are, we get better at what we do.

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Table 1. The Pairings of Tangible and Intangible Factors Regarding Performance

Tangible Factor	Intangible Factor
Competence	Character
Circumstances	Response to circumstances
Metrics	Relationships
Pay/extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Talent	Deliberate practice and growth mindset

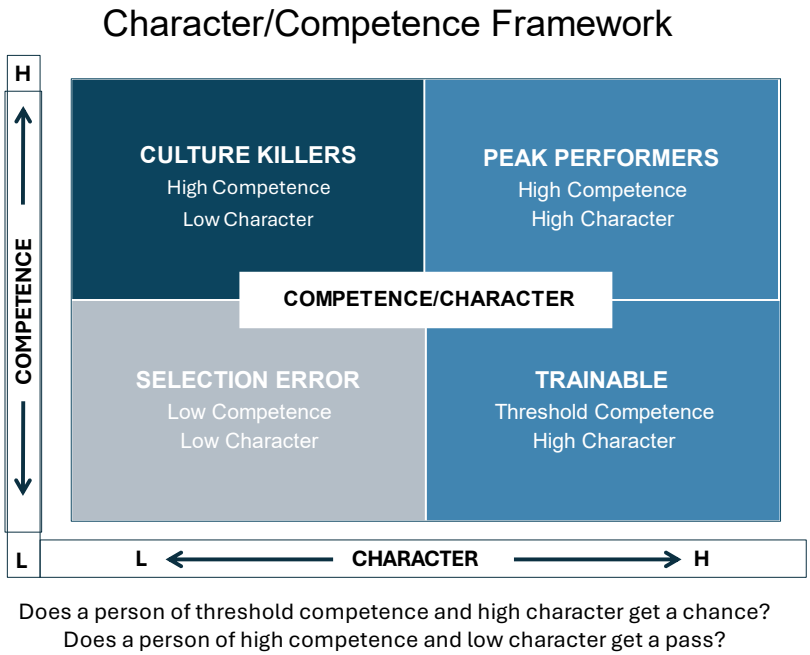

Figure 1. The Character/Competence Framework
Legend: H – High, L- Low