



WHAT ETHICAL LEADERS BELIEVE

THE LEADING IN CONTEXT MANIFESTO

# Aristotle said “We are what we repeatedly do.” He was right.

**Our daily choices define us.** They show just how far beyond ourselves we’re thinking, how broadly we imagine our constituents, and how we see ourselves in the world.

As we navigate the turbulence of today’s workplace, there is power in asking ourselves, “What is it that I repeatedly do?” It gets us thinking about other important questions like:

- Would someone shadowing me on a busy day at work be able to tell that I am trying to be an ethical leader?
- Do I demonstrate an awareness of the ripple effect that my choices generate?
- Do my choices—both big and small—show a sense of moral commitment to thinking beyond myself?

**There is power in asking ourselves “What is it that I repeatedly do? “**

# What Drives Our Thinking?

Are we being dragged through the day reacting to the chaos, or are we making intentional, values-based choices? Are we the sum of our challenges, or of our choices?

## **Are We Our Challenges?**

TIME PRESSURE

MONEY PRE\$\$URE

COMPLIANCE

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

STRESS

RISK

## **Or Our Choices?**

RESPECT AND CARE FOR OTHERS

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

COMMUNITY SERVICE

FOLLOWING LAWS

PROTECTING FUTURE GENERATIONS

RESPONSIBLE PROFITABILITY

We would like to think that we are making the most responsible choices that we can under the circumstances. But in a typical, challenging, chaotic day, what really determines what we do?

# Ethical Thinking is Intentional

Our brains take shortcuts to save us time. We know this happens. If it didn't, we'd have to re-learn to drive every time we left for work. But, how can we be sure that we're thinking things through carefully and not just reacting on autopilot to the crisis of the moment?

## **Is our thinking on autopilot? Is that autopilot programmed to make ethical decisions?**

In the process of writing my new leadership book, *7 Lenses: Learning the Principles and Practices of Ethical Leadership*, I created a clear framework for learning to be an ethical leader. This framework replaces our autopilot (that will take us “who-knows-where”) with an intentional values-based thinking process. It is based on some powerful ideas and unanswered questions that will change how you think about leadership and learning.

Why do even ethics experts disagree about what ethical leadership means?

What is the bigger picture that we should be using as our leadership road map?

What are the business benefits of intentionally using high-level ethical leadership?

The leadership described in the answers to these questions is not oversimplified or one-dimensional. It is the multidimensional leadership we need for successful organizations, thriving communities and a better world.

How many different ways do we need to think about ethical responsibility? These 7 dimensions give us the full spectrum of what thinking beyond ourselves means in a global society.

### **The 7 Dimensions of Ethical Responsibility:**

1. **Profit:** Making money responsibly.
2. **Law:** Complying with laws and regulations.
3. **Character:** Staying grounded in integrity and moral values.
4. **People:** Respecting and caring about people.
5. **Communities:** Building thriving communities.
6. **Planet:** Respecting nature and leading sustainably.
7. **Greater Good:** Making the world better for future generations.

We must think beyond ourselves in all of these dimensions to make intentional, ethical choices.

# Ethical Thinking is a Belief System

What are the deep beliefs that will help us think beyond ourselves?

## **10 Things Ethical Leaders Believe:**

1. Our purpose is to create value for others.
2. How we treat people matters.
3. Our moral grounding is more important than our goals and opinions.
4. Everything we do has a ripple effect, and that ripple is global.
5. We must take responsibility.
6. We need to be proactive.
7. We should serve as positive role models.
8. We will embrace the learning journey.
9. We will enjoy a competitive advantage.
10. We will build a better world.

How will leading with those beliefs drive our leadership success in a connected global economy? Let's briefly unpack each one of those 10 things.

## **1. Our purpose is to create value for others.**

When we reflect sincerely on our purpose as leaders, we come to a profound realization: as leaders, we are not the center of the universe. It's not about us.

*Leadership is about creating value for others.*

We are here to create shared value that benefits multiple constituents. We do that with people and communities, and seek plans and solutions that are a mutual win.

## **2. How we treat people matters.**

How we treat people matters. We need to work together with our people in the spirit of understanding.

*Leading with respect, care, service, and inclusion is transformational.*

When they know we care and that they can count on us, they can really get to work, bringing their best skills and talents to the tasks at hand. With regards to people, winning means building high-trust relationships.

### **3. Our moral grounding is more important than our goals and opinions.**

When we let our goals and opinions drive our thinking, we begin to believe that “anything goes” in the quest to meet those goals or defend those opinions. When our moral compass drives our thinking, we will question any goals that benefit us at the expense of others.

*Everything we do needs to be morally grounded.*

We need to assume that every issue is an ethical issue and approach it accordingly.

### **4. Everything we do has a ripple effect, and that ripple is global.**

Because we are a globally connected village, we need to remember that our choices are not isolated. They have a powerful ripple effect, and that ripple is global.

*We need to avoid harm and think long-term.*

*“Because we are a globally connected village, we need to remember that our choices are not isolated. They have a powerful ripple effect, and that ripple is global.”*

We need to consider the effect of our choices on silent stakeholders, including the environment and future generations.

## **5. We must take responsibility.**

The world is changing. There is a powerful responsibility movement going on. We know more about what leaders should be doing, and we know more about what responsible leadership looks like. People need to be able to count on us to take responsibility.

*Everyone is counting on us to take responsibility.*

Taking responsibility for using ethical thinking and behavior will not only change everything we do, it will earn the respect of others, and change how we feel about ourselves.

## **6. We need to be proactive.**

We need to take the initiative. We can't wait to make mistakes and appear in the news. We can't wait for someone to tell us what to do. At that point any initiative we take will look forced, reactionary, and insincere.

*We expect and reward ethical behavior.*

Being proactive about ethical leadership means taking the initiative to learn; weighing our choices carefully; and creating a culture where ethical behavior is expected and rewarded. If done well, and proactively, these actions will be rewarded with the loyalty of conscientious customers.

## **7. We should serve as positive role models.**

We model ethical leadership through our character, integrity, behavior, and choices. Our role is to listen, learn and improve, serving as a role model for what ethical behavior looks like.

*We model the ethical behavior we ask of others.*

We realize that we can only bring out the best in those we lead when we demonstrate our commitment to ethics and show them the way.

## **8. We embrace the learning journey.**

There is no check-box for ethical leadership. It is an ongoing individual and organizational journey. We will never know everything that there is to know.

*We never arrive.*

We understand. We struggle. We grow. We realize what we don't know. We get past ultimatums and boxes on charts and work to be better leaders every day.

## **9. We will enjoy a competitive advantage.**

Ethical leadership is not just “the right thing” to do; it’s also a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

It unleashes the potential in our people, our organizations, our planet, our communities and our world.

*Proactive ethical leadership “powers up” organizational success.*

Why is Proactive Ethical Leadership so Powerful? It simultaneously:

- Builds trust and creates great places to work.
- Engages employees and customers.
- Makes work meaningful and improves lives.
- Drives business metrics including employee engagement, customer retention, and innovation.
- Transforms profits, people, the planet, communities, and the world.
- Gives our companies staying power in a global marketplace.

## 10. We will build a better world.

When we think of the term “stakeholder” in its broadest interpretation, and lead with care, our proactive ethical leadership generates ripples of trust.

*We make a difference.*

When we seek a simultaneous win for many stakeholders, we:

- Create a better future for the organization, it’s customers and employees.
- Support healthy communities.
- Make a difference in the world.

These deep beliefs help us create the leadership we need.

*“There is no check-box for ethical leadership.  
It is an ongoing individual and organizational journey.  
We will never know everything that there is to know.*

Now, let's spread the word...

## The Leading in Context Manifesto

We are here to focus on what's right and what's possible, not on what's historical or convenient.

We are here to serve others, not to profit from their vulnerabilities.

We are here to make a positive difference, through intentional leadership and responsible choices.

**Imagine The Potential.** What could we accomplish if we proactively developed ethical leaders and an ethical culture? Could we unleash the untapped performance potential of our people? Transform our organizations? Improve lives and communities?

Could we change the world?

**Take On The Mindset.** We believe that: Ethical leadership drives business metrics including employee engagement, customer retention, and innovation. Ethical leadership creates great places to work, and gives us staying power in a global marketplace. Ethical leadership transforms profits, people, the planet, communities, and the world. Ethical leadership is not something on our to do list that we can check off as completed. It is an ongoing individual and organizational journey. This learning journey will bring out the best in all of us.

**We Improve Lives and Organizations.** We understand that interpersonal ethical leadership is fueled by respect, care, service, and inclusion, and that those things transform our organizations. We know that our role as leaders is to bring out the best in a connected group of unique individuals working toward a shared vision. We honor and respect people, and lead without blaming, controlling or judging. We provide opportunities for each individual to use their natural talents and learn skills in pursuit of our mission. We unleash the positive potential in our people through our daily choices, words, and actions. We treat everyone with respect and care.

**We Model Ethical Leadership and Behavior.** We realize that we can only bring out the best in those we lead when we embrace continuous learning. We know that our role is to listen, learn, and improve, serving as a role model for what ethical behavior looks like. We learn just as much as we teach. We listen deeply to others, not sharing our own thinking without regard for theirs. We model ethical leadership, with our thoughts, words, and deeds in full alignment. We are open to learning, and model the ethical behavior we ask of others.

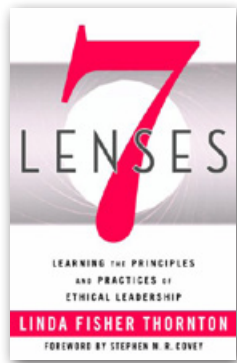
*“We understand. We struggle. We grow. We realize what we don’t know.”*

**We Make a Difference in the World.** We realize that the planet, our communities, and the long-term good of our world are also our constituents. We know that our role is to think and act in ways that honor our planet, our communities, and our world. We do good without doing harm. We demonstrate care and concern for all of our constituents, and think on a global scale. We consider the needs of multiple stakeholders when making even routine decisions. We include the planet, communities, and our global society among our stakeholders.

**We Unleash the Potential of People and Organizations.** We know that ethical leadership is not just the “right thing” to do, it’s also a competitive advantage in the global marketplace. It unleashes the potential in our people, our organizations, our planet, our communities, and our world. We intentionally lead in ways that bring out the positive potential of people and organizations. We lead to bring out their best every day. Leading ethically is the most powerful way to bring out the best in people and organizations.

**We are, as Aristotle said, what we repeatedly do. And ethically-engaged people and organizations don’t just perform better—they are changing the world. 🌍**

# Info



**BUY THE BOOK** | Get more details or buy a copy of [7 Lenses](#).

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Linda Fisher Thornton is CEO of Leading in Context LLC, a leadership development consultancy. She is leading a global movement to bring out the best in people and organizations through ethical leadership. An award-winning former Chief Learning Officer and recognized authority on the future of ethical leadership, she was selected by Trust Across America as one of the 2013 Top 100 Thought Leaders in Trustworthy Business Behavior. In addition to speaking, consulting and writing, she teaches leadership as Adjunct Assistant Professor for the University of Richmond School of Professional and Continuing Studies.

To learn more, visit [leadingincontext.com](http://leadingincontext.com).

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