

What it means to me

Our guest blogger today is Dr. Matt Davidson from the Institute for Excellence and Ethics. You may also remember Dr. Davidson as a 2010 recipient of a Ray Pillar of Character award recipient.

Our Institute for Excellence & Ethics has had the privilege of working with Character Counts In Iowa for nearly a decade. We have worked with educators, coaches, and businesses across the state. We have worked with particular intensity the last three years on the development of our Power2Achieve programming, with input from Iowa businesses, including the Iowa Business Council, the Iowa Department of Education, and with direct input and field testing by Iowa educators, administrators, and students. It is in this context of these first hand experiences that I would assert that, for me, saying “Character counts in Iowa” means the following:

Moral character counts in Iowa. Civility, respect, integrity, decency are part and parcel of what I have experienced from Iowans. Iowans are willing to disagree—passionately, even vehemently, but generally with respect and civility. Iowans will look you in eye and speak their mind, and then shake your hand and thank you for your time. Carrying oneself with humility and decency, treating others with respect and care—this counts in Iowa.

Performance character counts in Iowa. Perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, and grit are at the core of what I think it means to say, “Character counts in Iowa.” Abraham Lincoln said, “Whatever you are, be a good one.” This is a sentiment expressed over and over to us from business owners, teachers, coaches, and parents in Iowa. Doing your work well, with craftsmanship, attention to detail, creativity, and ingenuity—this too counts in Iowa.

In our work in Iowa we are engaged in the collaborative development and implementation of research-based tools for measuring and developing character and culture. We are thrilled for the partnership and are striving to ensure that “character counts in Iowa” isn’t just an organization, or a slogan, but the lived experience of all Iowans.

Making sure that “character counts in Iowa means” intense and intentional efforts to ensure all Iowans are: developing positive and productive relationships; communicating and collaborating with efficiency and effectiveness; managing priorities and reducing stress; committing to high standards and continuous improvement; demonstrating emotional intelligence, integrity, and responsibility; exhibiting creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; leading and serving others; living a balanced, purposeful, and healthy life.

Cicero said, “Within the character of the citizen lies the welfare of the nation.” To say “character counts in Iowa” means to me that there is still a fundamental belief in the power of character. Economic and educational prosperity will require embracing new technologies, new ways of teaching and learning, and competing in a new world economy. However, it will also require recommitting to the age-old, time-tested, power of character, which has been a distinguishing mark of Iowans.