Leaders in human services have the opportunity to help shape the nature of society in the new millennium. The human service delivery sector is ideally situated to enrich society’s understanding and responsiveness to the complex and diverse experiences of being human. The actions and decisions of human service leaders and constituents convey a powerful message to society about the needs and well-being of those who seek services, as well as the responsibility and accountability of those who provide services. We are living in an age where people in need are quickly becoming commodities to be exploited—the means to a profit-oriented end—rather than as subjects who are ends in themselves, to be respected and empowered. Human service leaders who are ethical by intention can change that trend.

However, beyond opportunity, or possibility, or potential, there is a moral necessity to contribute to the common good through the social responsibility that is attached to leadership and to organizations as primary entities in society. The human services sector (public, non-profit, and for-profit organizations) contributes greatly to the primary values that are promoted through our culture. Within this sector, leaders influence the thinking and understanding of a variety of stakeholders—consumers of service, employees, community citizens, shareholders, and policymakers. Leaders also have a significant impact on the well-being of those same stakeholders. The activities and decisions that take place in the organization reflect the nature of the community where it is located. In turn, the community reflects the nature of its institutions and organizations. Thus, the organization, as a microcosm of society, acts as a fertile greenhouse where primary values such as democracy, empowerment, service, justice, and integrity can be nurtured and promoted.

Ethical leadership contributes to the common good in several ways—through political advocacy, social reconstruction, moral citizenship, empowerment of various constituencies, and development of community (internally and externally), to name just a few. These are discussed below. But first, a brief discussion of the common good is provided.
The Common Good

There have been frequent discussions and analyses in news columns, editorials, and professional articles on the social challenges confronting American society in recent years in reference to the materialism and greed that permeates our culture. As a result, well-known ethicists and other leaders have initiated a call for an emphasis on the ethic of the common good rather than the current prominence of the ethic of individual rights (Markula Center for Ethics, 2000). The common good simply means “certain general conditions that are . . . equally to everyone's advantage” (Markula, 2000, p. 1). The social systems, institutions, and environments that people depend on should work in a way that contributes to the benefit of all people, not just a select few (for a more detailed discussion, refer to Chapter 7). Lewis (1989) argues that ethical organizations will give precedence to the common good—even beyond consumers’ interests and needs. The challenge is to conceptualize service as an avenue to maximize the good of the community, not only to serve individual needs. In doing so, Lewis (1989) points out that altruism—“caring for one's own” (in this instance the larger community) is necessary. All human service organizations, public, non-profit and for-profit, have an obligation to contribute to the common good. For-profit organizations have a responsibility to promote the financial gain of their shareholders, but this does not prohibit, and should not be “detrimental to the common good” (Lewis, 1989, p. 9).

The notion of a common or collective good is complex, and few “purely public goods” exist (Howe, 1980, p. 181). However, services that are provided through human service organizations do benefit others, beyond the service recipient. Economists call this dynamic “externalities” (Howe, 1980, p. 181). For example, services, policy advocacy, and education efforts provided through domestic violence shelters and agencies not only benefit individual women and children, but also have a positive effect on the reduction of violence in the larger community. Values are communicated that have a shaping influence on the community culture about domestic violence. Further, feedback about the nature of the social problem impacts the understanding, and subsequently the activities, of policymakers and community citizens. The common good, then, is the ultimate concern of ethical leaders in human services. The common good is integrally connected to political action and advocacy.

Political Advocacy

A mission for leadership in the 21st century was created from the topics of concern expressed by social work leaders (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Four topics were accented: political advocacy, social reconstruction, vision, and professional identity. These topics resulted in the following mission statement for leadership. The mission states: “Articulate a vision to create processes of political advocacy in order to effect social reconstruction on behalf of those, who for various reasons, cannot participate in the economic prosperity of the global economy” (Rank & Hutchison, 2000, p. 502). This mission for leadership reflects a fundamental moral mandate for leaders to ac-
tively initiate and participate in social change efforts, thus contributing to the com-
mon good through their leadership.

Political advocacy, which was identified most often by social work leaders as
needed in leadership, is directly connected to the social responsibility for social and
economic justice—both which contribute to the common good. Leaders are chal-
lenged to pursue a fundamental impact on public policy and the decisions of poli-
cymakers, such that the impact enhances social and economic justice. The social
responsibility inherent in this theme is intimately connected to ethical leadership.
Leaders are policymakers. The policies regarding delivery of services and human
resources communicate underlying themes about distribution of power, choice, and
opportunity. In turn the actions and decisions of leaders have a profound influence
on policymakers at the community level. Ethical leaders are actively involved with
the key leaders and policymakers in their external environment. They have devel-
oped the necessary reputation and integrity to initiate and influence policies that
enhance the social and economic well-being of all citizens, particularly those most
in need.

Political advocacy is also directly related to the consensus of communities re-
garding social issues. As Hardin (1990, p. 539) argues, “If our ethical requirements are
largely determined by our roles in relevant institutions, then they are largely deter-
mined by political decisions about what those institutions should be and do . . . poli-
cies on welfare should be determined by the polity.” Thus, the larger society must be
influenced by feedback from institutions and institutional leaders, such that the needs,
conditions, and priorities of those who receive services are represented, and institu-
tional reforms are demanded and initiated by an informed community. A community
consensus concerning complex social problems can be developed only through an in-
formed public, thus the ethic of feedback through political advocacy is central to eth-
cical leadership and the common good. Motivating and mobilizing the community is
relevant to another theme of leadership identified by social work leaders—social
reconstruction.

Social Reconstruction and Social Change

The second important theme that is congruent with ethical leadership is social re-
construction—the promotion of “social change on a broad scale and the redistribution
of wealth” (p. 498). The policies and decisions made on a daily basis have an impact
on social change and social reconstruction, both internally and externally. Lewis
(1989) relates this idea to the altruism that underlies the commitment to the common
good of non-profit organizations. He argues that there are certain obligations and du-
ties that are an ethical commitment. They include the duty to make distributive deci-
sions that give precedence to the common good—assessing what will provide for the
least advantaged in a particular pool of consumers. In addition, quality-of-life deci-
sions should be considered and carry as much emphasis as other types of outcomes (fi-
nancial and clinical). These duties lead to social reconstruction at the organizational
level as well as within a particular community.
The decisions and activities that take place within an organization also contribute to social reconstruction. Leaders who design structures that promote the sharing of power in organizations and thus the participation of all stakeholders (for example, consumers) in meaningful ways are participating in social reconstruction. Leaders who emphasize ethical behaviors and decisions, who demonstrate a commitment to service and duty, and who act as a voice for the most vulnerable, are contributing to social change. Leaders who design and construct ethical organizational cultures that provide for feedback within the organization and to the larger community are promoting social reconstruction, starting at the level of the organization. The direction of social change or reconstruction rests on the moral vision of the leader and constituents.

**Moral Vision**

The above themes, connected to a moral mandate toward enhancing the common good, can be actualized only through a redefinition of social work leadership—leadership that is based on a foundation of moral and ethical will and directed by a moral vision. Only the moral nature, intentions, and contributions of the organization to the common good of society justify the survival of human service organizations. The moral intentions are articulated through the organizational mission. However, leaders also must articulate a moral vision that has the capacity for advocacy and action toward social reconstruction. Green (1987, p. 187) points out that the future tense of a vision is important in relation to the clarity of direction that is identified. He notes,

> The point is... having given us a vision, a glimpse of an alternative context for living and acting with its own resources, its own risks, its own advantages, they invite our entrance into that future now. Leaders without vision, without rootedness, and without imagination are dangerous or at best inept. Where would they lead us? Nowhere. Nowhere at least that anyone should want to go.

Moral vision then, must be a public vision, open to comment from stakeholders and the public, and in interaction with constituents’ aspirations.

The moral vision is about more than just the leader, though it must start with the leader. Leaders in human services must first of all develop a moral identity—their starting point that defines the moral direction of their personal and professional lives. The moral identity of the person walks hand in hand with the leader's professional identity and values. The moral vision that is enacted through leadership must be articulated internally and externally to all constituents, so that there is clarity in regard to the leader’s professional values and moral goals. The leader's moral vision is a starting point for a shared vision, whereby the vision reflects what is meaningful to all constituents.

Ethical leaders develop the leadership of constituents. As constituents identify with a mutual vision, the power to promote and fulfill the vision is exponential. The moral vision then is communicated through, and congruent with, all of the structures
and processes of the organization. The moral vision becomes the constitution for the organization’s contribution to constituents and to the common good.

Moral Citizenship: Values and Ethics in Action

Leaders must be proactive if they are to make a difference. The ability to be proactive was one of the five themes identified by Rank and Hutchison (2000) as critical to leadership. To be proactive is to be ethical by intention. The intentional activity that is essential to being proactive is the essence of moral citizenship (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). Leaders can develop organizational cultures that promote independent thinking and the responsibility to give feedback—within the organization and to the larger society. Employees, consumers, and other stakeholders who have the skills to think independently and take responsibility for their own and others’ actions are improving their abilities to act as a citizen, both in the institution and in the community. This, in turn, contributes to the common good.

Communication is the critical ingredient to moral citizenship through participation and feedback. An organization and a society that accentuate moral citizenship and “loyal opposition” have created a strong system of self-regulation, such that the moral nature of everyone is enhanced and embraced. Loyal opposition requires leaders and constituents to speak out when confronted with potential or actual unethical policies and practices. The underlying motivation for doing so is to help the organization, as well as those affected by the unethical behaviors. Organizations that are aware of unethical policies and practices have the opportunity and responsibility to change them. The numerous examples in the media regarding Enron and other corporations engaged in illegal or unethical practices, and the failures within the bureaucracy of the FBI and other federal agencies, portray the results of closed ethical systems and cultures. The resulting damage to these entities and to the general public conveys the importance, morally as well as practically, for constituents to give feedback, and for leaders to insist on it.

Therefore, leaders at all levels of the organization (board, administrative, managerial, supervisory, and so forth) must nurture and structure opportunities for participation, particularly in the form of feedback about moral and ethical practices and policies. This is the political nature of ethics. Leaders and constituents must give feedback and participate in the resolution of ethical challenges, even when there is great risk to their own economic or psychological well-being. A leader who is unable or unwilling to model that level of participation will engender constituents who do the same. The result of an avoidance of ethical and moral issues is the propagation of alienation, a withdrawal from the moral aspects of life, which has negative effects on constituents, the organization, and the common good.

Leaders must design processes and structures for feedback, and assess the organizational structure for barriers and impediments to ethical action. As Christensen (1995, p. 226) notes, “Enumerating ethical principles and good practices is not enough to help us identify those organizations that are best suited to promote the provision of ... care in an atmosphere relatively untainted by financial conflicts of
interest... Structure determines in large part the nature of the conflicts providers have to face, and it can also impact the quality of the care delivered.”

Leaders as architects can make the structural difference in designs that enhance rather than impede ethical service delivery.

Empowerment and the Common Good

Empowerment of constituents—consumers of service, providers of service, other employees, board members, and community citizens is a necessary part of ethical leadership. The sharing of power creates power toward accomplishing the moral vision and developing the skills of constituents that are necessary for organizational success. Constituents that are empowered to participate, to give feedback, and to take responsibility for ethical issues are developing their skills for citizenship in the community. Thus, empowerment is directly associated with the common good.

Leaders can influence characteristics of their organizations that facilitate empowerment of constituents. Research on empowering community settings produced four characteristics (Maton & Salem, 1995). First, it is important to have a belief system that inspires growth, is strength-based, and focused beyond the individual self. This characteristic connects with the necessity of a moral vision that is meaningful to constituents; a vision that allows them to contribute to the fulfillment of the vision with their own unique strengths and contributions. Second, there are role structures that create opportunities for growth and development as well as participation and skill building. The authors note that these role structures should be pervasive, highly accessible, and multi-functional. Thus, the opportunities for empowerment are also the same opportunities that have been discussed as necessary for ethical actions and behaviors for individuals and organizations.

The third characteristic that facilitates empowerment is a support system that is encompassing, peer-based, and provides a sense of community. The support system that is in place is critical to constituents’ and leaders’ willingness to take risks and give feedback. Further, support systems generate interaction and involvement, which in turn help to identify potential ethical challenges, as well as provide the support necessary to resolve them. Empowerment leads to increased motivation and a sense of community.

The final characteristic is leadership—leadership that is inspiring, talented, shared, and committed to both the organization and the constituents. Leaders who role model the behaviors that are empowering to others—risk-taking, integrity, competency, responsibility, and action—help to teach and support those same behaviors in constituents. Leaders who share their power with constituents provide the opportunities for constituents to make mistakes, take risks, accept responsibility, and contribute on many levels to the ethical performance of the organization. Sharing of power leads to more democratic actions within the system, and contributes to furthering democracy in the community. Empowered constituents are empowered citizens; increased citizenship contributes greatly to the common good. Empowerment
of constituents leads to increased motivation to do the right thing and contributes to an individual’s sense of belonging to a community.

Developing Community

Leaders should help to develop a sense of community within the organization and within the external environment in order to promote an ethical workplace. A community, from the perspective of organizations, is “a framework of shared beliefs, interests, and commitments uniting a set of varied groups and activities . . . that establish a common faith or fate, a personal identity, a sense of belonging, and a supportive structure of activities and relationships” (Selznick, 1992, pp. 358–359). The experience of community provides the context for moral action to take place, and for the commitment necessary to stay the course in response to what are perceived as intractable moral and ethical problems.

The motivations of the diverse stakeholders involved in organizations to take moral action are complex and varied. Wheatley (1988) argues that the emphasis on self-actualization in organizations has been misdirected. Instead, the meaning of work, and making a contribution through work, motivates people. People must experience a connectedness to a greater whole, something beyond them that has meaning. The meaning they construct, in collaboration with others, provides the inspiration to strive toward higher ethical goals. The existence of a sense of community, then, provides a medium to “view ourselves as part of something beyond ourselves . . . The very act of meaning making, of assuming responsibility for making choices about one’s behavior, is motivating. Ethical inquiry, then, is a strong motivator” (Wheatley, 1988, p. 141).

Developing community in organizations provides the opportunity to practice the ethics of intimates as opposed to the ethics of strangers (as discussed in Chapter 3). The fast pace of our information society promotes doing more and doing it faster. Wheatley (2001) argues that organizations and society are on a destructive path where working 24/7 is seen as a benefit and the time for relationships is being eroded. The time of friendships and relationships must be reclaimed (Wheatley, 2001). Relationships and dialogue are critical to the effective solution of ethical dilemmas. The interactions of the people involved—with one another, with their professions, and with their personal lives bring forward the answers to complex dilemmas (Wheatley, 1988). Constituents and leaders cannot fully understand the nature of moral and ethical issues without reflection and discussion with others. Developing a sense of community in organizations provides a venue where trust and collaboration support the necessary reflection and interaction.

Leaders in organizations that visualize the organization as part of a larger community will consider the impact of decisions in relation to the larger community. Myopic and narrow ethical analysis and problem solving can be replaced with a broader vision. Analysis of the impact of policies and decisions with ethical implications must be sensitive to the repercussions of time, complexity, and impact on other
systems and constituencies. The sensitivity of leaders to organizations’ social responsibility to the community promotes an attention to the common good.

Conclusion

Ethical leadership in human services must be based on the values of a “helping profession.” Wheatley (2001) notes that “a leader is someone who feels called to serve.” Ethical leaders are not value neutral, but value promoting. The nature of those values must be clear in every action. The essence of ethical leadership is enacting professional values through every decision and action—values that contribute to the common good. As Bertha Reynolds (1963, pp. 283–284) articulated the following so well:

The way we do our professional work contributes inescapably to the outcome of that struggle. If we think social work is not a force in the battle of ideas, the enemies of the people know better. Either we serve the people’s need or we evade them. Either we make democracy real or we reduce it to an abstraction, which the foes of democracy do not object to at all. Either we use all that science can teach to help people to build a genuinely good life for themselves, or we build a professional cult that takes the place of interrelation with other advances in human knowledge.

This is the nature of ethical leadership; either we mean it or we don’t. Ethical leaders and constituents have the power to transform both the organization and their communities. The values that are conveyed through each action and interaction can lead to a moral and ethical workplace, and contribute to a moral and ethical society.

Leaders, to provide ethical leadership, must see their role beyond the individual accomplishment of role responsibilities and organizational objectives. They must consider the theories that inform their leadership and what is conveyed through underlying values and assumptions. Transformational leadership (discussed in Chapter 3) provides a paradigm that incorporates ethics and moral action into the day-to-day leadership responsibilities. Ethical action must include more than the leader. Constituents and stakeholders are important to the development of ethical cultures and structures.

Ethical leaders will act as an architect, designing and shaping the structures and processes of the organization in ways that enhance and promote a moral vision and ethical action. Ethical leaders will view ethics as the essence of their leadership; as the heart of the matter, as the nature of leading, as a permanent fixture, as the utmost importance, and as a motivator for new energy and contributions. Ethics as the essence of leadership will be evident in the daily activities and decisions. As Chekov noted, “Any idiot can handle a crisis; it’s this day-to-day living that wears you down” (Curtain, 2000, p. 58). The ethical dilemmas of daily practice are not in the headlines, but “. . . do constitute the fabric of our daily lives. . . .” (Curtain, 2000, p. 58). Ethical leadership is concerned with the weaving and re-weaving of that fabric, with the ongoing and ultimate goal of adding to the common good of our world community.