

Renewing Our Public Life

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Denver Rotary Club

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“...I think it’s fair to say that we’ve got two big problems. The first is a problem of leadership in all our public institutions, not just business and religion. The second is a much deeper problem in American culture at large, a crisis in personal moral character at the grassroots level.

Let’s talk about leadership first. What makes a good leader? Two things: character and competence. You need the professional skills necessary to the task; that’s competence. And you need the moral conscience to use those skills properly; that’s character.

A good leader creates a vision that other people can believe in and build together. And a good leader always acts honestly...I’ve seen again and again that people will accept almost any hardship or bad news if they know you’re being straight with them.

Even more importantly, a good leader will put the needs of his people before his own....That’s what a real leader looks like. And I think we don’t see enough of that anywhere today in American public life.

The flaw in American leadership...is that, too often, it’s disconnected from the people it serves, focused on short-term gain, and blind to the links between public behavior and personal moral integrity.

...Our lives matter. We’re here for a reason. One life, lived well, can begin to change the world.

So lead well, with honesty and vision and moral character and unselfishness. Lead well, not only with what you say, but with what you do—and in your example, that’s where the renewal of American public life will begin.”