

DEFINING EXCELLENCE

He who merely knows right principles is not equal to him who loves them. —Confucius

Principles are the rules that guide human behavior. Concepts like fairness, integrity, and truth are generally accepted and shared by all people. They are not tied to time or culture or history—they are objective, not subjective.

Principles define the culture of any group—family, school, club, company. They lay the groundwork for personal excellence and align groups on agreed behavior. People who are aware of their shared principles and uphold them know what to expect from one another. They experience a higher level of trust, more teamwork, and ultimately, greater success.

If you have ever belonged to a group that shared your principles, you may have noticed the feeling of teamwork, the spirit of the group, and the way all members pulled together to achieve a common goal. Shared principles create this type of environment. Working together, people are more fulfilled, willing to learn and do, and enthusiastic about things to come. In such a culture, excellence thrives and success is a natural outcome.

With this in mind, Quantum Learning Network developed the 8 Keys of Excellence many years ago by studying people who had achieved great success while maintaining personal *excellence*. The traits and principles they shared were identified and those that came up most often became the 8 Keys. They include generally accepted concepts like integrity, commitment, and responsibility.

As principles, the 8 Keys of Excellence do more than create a more positive environment—they change lives. Becoming aware of these eight principles and committing to them is both exciting and challenging, pushing us to strive for excellence and positively impacting the world we live in. For as we learn to model our beliefs, other people in our lives are influenced by our behavior and often follow the examples we set. Like falling dominoes, the process continues, each person affecting the next.

Let's look for a moment at the meaning of *excellence* and its impact on our lives and on our world. Excellence is defined as *the quality of excelling, greatness, value, worth*—and when we excel we *do extremely well, we shine, we stand out*. Aristotle gives us a little more insight in our understanding of this powerful word ...

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. —Aristotle

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In light of Aristotle's thoughts, we can consider the principles of the 8 Keys of Excellence as our guide to "act rightly"—if we make each of the 8 Keys a habit, make them part of who we are, they will lead us to excellence. If we "live" the 8 Keys of Excellence—in our homes, in our schools, in our organizations—we will truly excel!

[Excerpt from *The 8 Keys of Excellence: Principles to Live By*, by Bobbi DePorter]