

# Optical Engineering

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## **Personality and Character**

Ronald G. Driggers



## Personality and Character

This is such a great month for me! Ravi Athale is the new permanent electro-optics program officer at the Office of Naval Research (ONR), which means I get to work with him more often. I've known Ravi for the last 15 years or so, and when I talk with him, it's like talking to one of those brothers who you have not seen for a few years, but it feels like you just picked up from your previous discussion yesterday. Ravi started his career at the Naval Research Laboratory, then he was a professor at George Mason University, then he was at DARPA, then MITRE, and now he is back with the U.S. Navy.

Ravi and I were talking yesterday, and we were discussing personality and character. He told me that he had heard that personality is what we see in a person during the good times, and character is what we see in a person during bad or stressful times. Personality is related to how much charisma a person has, and it includes traits such as being funny, energetic, optimistic, and confident, as well as some undesirable

traits such as being negative, lazy, grumpy, rude, etc. Character is related to a person's belief system and what he or she believes is important. Traits like honesty, treating people the right way, keeping promises, helping others in need, and working through difficult issues are all related to character. Alex Lickerman (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201104/personality-vs-character>) states that we make mistakes in judgment about people because we confuse personality and character. We *like* outgoing people who are funny and positive and charismatic, and we want to be around them and trust that they will do the right thing when we need them. We are more likely to think that these people are honest and moral and kind. Lickerman states this problem of confusion occurs when we use personality to choose important people in our lives, such as employees, spouses, and friends. He also states that personality traits are largely hereditary, whereas character traits are not, and it is much more difficult to assess a person's character traits. This is one reason why prospective employers will call multiple references for important positions. Sometimes it takes many years and even longer to determine a person's true colors.

Ravi tells me that integrity is what someone does when no one else is looking. I have known Ravi long enough to know that he has great character, including integrity. I am really excited to work with him over the next few years. His office sign at ONR is now in the "open" position, and ONR supports research and development around the world, so stop by and see him if you have an innovative idea!

**Ronald G. Driggers**  
Editor