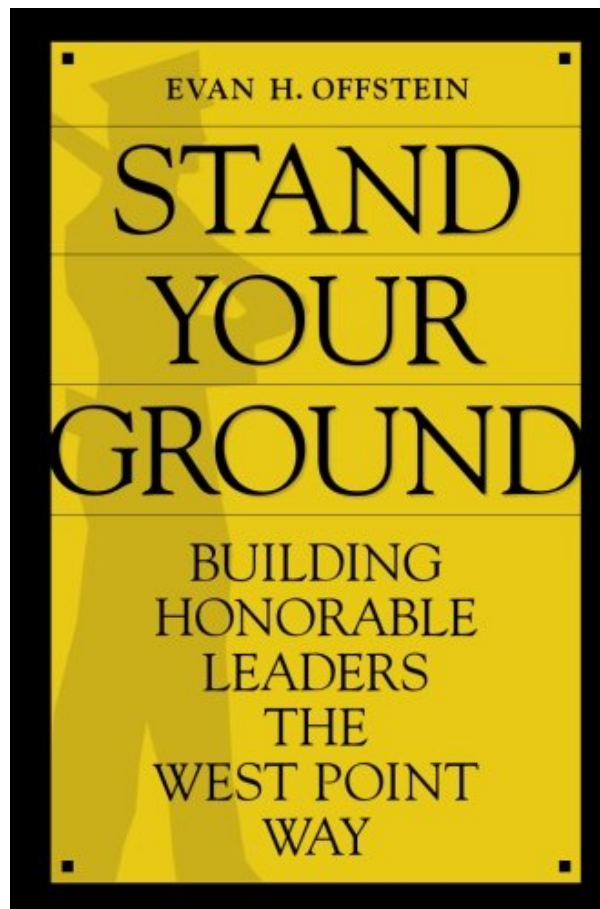
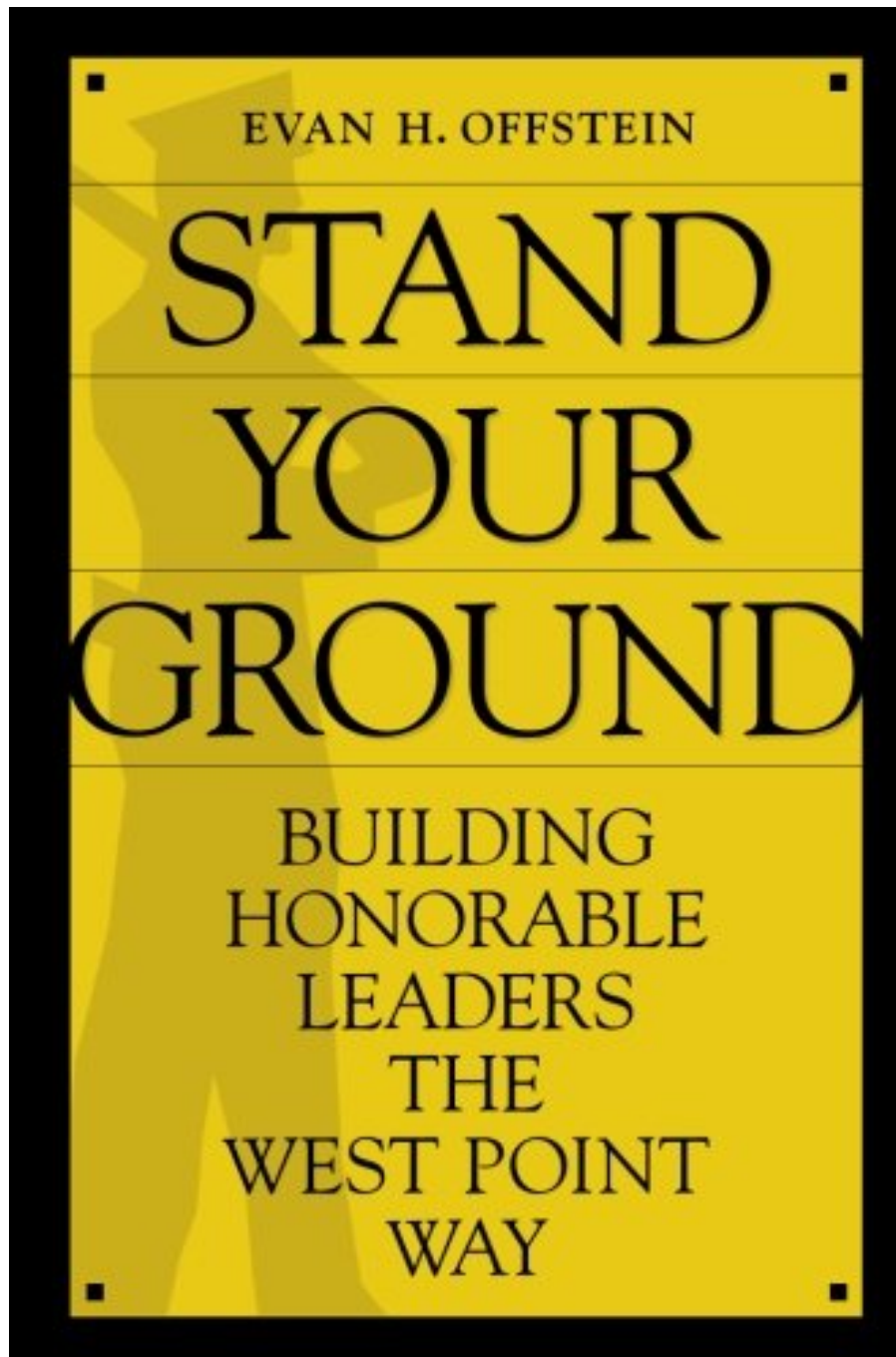


**STAND YOUR GROUND: BUILDING  
HONORABLE LEADERS THE WEST POINT  
WAY BY EVAN H. OFFSTEIN**



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West Point is the ideal laboratory for studying the dynamics of character, honor, and leadership: first, it operates a comprehensive honor education and enforcement program that has been subjected to rigorous Congressional scrutiny; second, it builds all of its academic, athletic, and military programs on this bedrock of honor. As a result, West Point invests heavily in mentoring, training, and evaluation to ensure the leadership and character development of its 4,000 cadets. From Civil War General Robert E. Lee to astronaut Edwin E. Buzz Aldrin to basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski, West Point has groomed leaders whose contributions far exceed the successful management of their immediate charges. By illuminating the principles by which West Point teaches leadership, *Stand Your Ground* not only provides a unique tour behind the scenes at this revered institution, but, more generally, imparts lessons of honor and character-building that can be adopted by any aspiring leader.

Management professor and West Point graduate Evan Offstein approached leaders at the U.S. Military Academy and the Department of the Army with two primary questions: (1) How does West Point develop its leaders?; (2) Can other individuals and organizations apply these methods effectively? Two years later, after conducting extensive on-site research at West Point and with business leaders in a variety of industries, he offers unprecedented access to the process of leadership development at West Point, and practical insights that can, indeed, be applied in any type of organization that strives to operate on the principle of integrity.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Challenging and inspiring

By Bill Pinches

In keeping with one of the themes of this book -- being big about small things -- I feel a need to be completely honest about four things: (1) Evan Offstein is a friend of mine, (2) if Evan Offstein hadn't been a friend of mine, I'm not sure I would have made it into the heart of the book, (3) if I hadn't made it into the heart of the book, I would not have had the opportunity of being deeply challenged about some tendencies in my own leadership style that probably needed to be challenged, and (4) if I hadn't had the opportunity of being deeply challenged, I wouldn't have grown. I did get into the heart of the book, I was deeply challenged . . . and I did grow.

There are two reasons why I almost didn't make it into the heart of the book. I found myself, first of all, struck by the degree to which Offstein sounds, at the beginning of the book, as if West Point is the greatest institution that has ever existed. Offstein is talking in this book about the importance of honor in leadership, and offers example after example of how West Point models and promotes a kind of honor that Offstein wants to commend to a wider world. In so doing, he sometimes sounds like a poster child for West Point, such as when (in the first chapter) he describes West Point as standing both geographically and metaphorically "on high ground." I came to learn, later on in the book, about the ethical standards at West Point, about the West Point Code of Honor, about the "Spirit of the Code," and about West Point's "Three Rules of Thumb" -- all of which illustrate the picture of the "high ground" that Offstein paints in the first

chapter. In the heart of the book, he offers example after example of how these values are put into actual practice at West Point, in some truly impressive ways. But when I read the first chapter, and heard about this metaphorical "high ground" that West Point sits on, I wasn't convinced. I became convinced later on.

The second reason why I almost didn't make it into the heart of the book was because I also found myself struck by Offstein's fairly critical comments about leadership books, seminars, and pundits. Offstein suggests, for example, that the pundits "are emphasizing motivation rather than morals" and "communication rather than conscience" and "influencing others instead of integrity." He also states that "most leadership books propose quick fixes to serious and complex problems." I haven't canvassed the literature the way Offstein has (he has canvassed over 140 leadership books published over the last 20 years!), but the handful of leadership books I have found myself reading and wanting to digest don't fall into those categories. (Maybe that's because I just happen to be reading the good ones!) The tone of these comments sounded a tad on the arrogant side, as if Offstein was saying, "all those other books are wrong, and I'm right." I found that off-putting.

So by the time I had finished the introduction and the first chapter, I was feeling somewhat skeptical -- despite some tantalizing hints of good things to come. But then -- somewhere around page 28 or 29 -- the book really started to come alive for me.

The heart of Offstein's book is a wholesale proposal for leaders to not only act with honor (and, I would add, integrity), but to be people of honor (and integrity) in every facet of their lives. Offstein boldly discusses the ways in which we (dishonorably) tend to rationalize less-than-honorable actions. He points to the West Point Code of Honor ("A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do") as the "backbone" of a character-building program that West Point promotes which is intended to create (and, apparently, succeeds in creating) leaders with honor. This, Offstein argues, is what is desperately missing in our contemporary culture: leaders with honor. Offstein utilizes a seemingly endless supply of examples and anecdotes to demonstrate how the "backbone" is fleshed out in a wide variety of situations. The results, I must say, are truly impressive.

Personally, I found the central chapters in the book to be deeply challenging. Offstein presses his points firmly and aggressively. If other readers are anything like me, they will find their own honor being tested (and, hopefully, refined) through the process of reading this book. There came a point at which Offstein's comments struck home. Instead of thinking about leadership in general, I found myself suddenly thinking about me. I found myself wondering about specific behavior practices that I engage in, both consciously and unconsciously. I found myself wondering to what degree I truly seek the high ground to the extent that I could. I discovered, in the process, that I have a ways to go in my own efforts to lead with integrity.

Offstein writes in the preface about what a humbling experience it was to write this book. "In the writing of this book," he says, "I was slowly becoming a subject matter expert in the field of honorable leadership while simultaneously coming to grips with my own limitations as a leader." He says, "there have been times, quite frankly, that I missed the mark, meaning that I've not always led from the high ground. . . . Very plainly, while I'm on the right track to reach the high ground, when I look in the mirror, I still realize that I've got a ways to go. The journey, as it is for many, is on-going." The beauty of Offstein's book is that it, itself, serves as a mirror for the reader who seeks to lead honorably. It provides something of a "measuring stick" by which the rest of us are invited (encouraged? forced?) to take a good, hard look at ourselves, and at the degree to which we actually lead with honor. This book did that for me -- and a clear result is a renewed commitment on my part to make a more diligent effort to secure the high ground.

Thank you, Evan. I needed this book. And I think the world does too.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Offstein Just Nails It

By Joshua Kennedy

Quite simply, Evan Offstein just nails his thesis: truly successful individuals, leaders, and their organizations are based on a deep reservoir of moral/ethical grounding that help them to make the right decisions every single day. His numerous, down-to-earth examples hammer it home from multiple angles, and you can't help but be convinced that he's on to something here. Dr. Offstein has a gift for writing prose that is personable and easy to read. It's as if he's talking straight to you through the pages of his book much the same way he might deliver a lecture at his university.

Perhaps my favorite lesson from his book is the chapter on lifelong preparations for a MOMENT (heck, multiple MOMENTS). It reminds me of what one Army General said one time: "Your integrity will be challenged in small ways every day." It has proven absolutely true over the years, and the daily struggle continues to make sure we do the right thing by our coworkers, our kids, our wives, our friends, etc. Those who can make the RIGHT ethical choices on a day-to-day basis will be slowly building the bedrock of their organizations to guard against the Enrons, Tycos, NCAA scandals, etc. of the world.

Most of the so-called "leadership" or "management" books you'll find wasting shelf-space at Barnes & Nobles or Book-a-Million wish they could lash onto some of the truths that Dr. Offstein lays out in his concise book. Highly recommended!

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Finally--a leadership book that explains how to BE a good leader!

By Juan Colorado

I first approached this book with a bit of skepticism, as I thought its focus would be upon the "grandiose" merits of the West Point experience (which I shared elbow-to-elbow with the author, my classmate). I was greatly relieved to discover that this work is actually a testimonial to the necessity to BE a good person and leader, so important (and foreign) in a day and age where corrupt individuals realize incredible personal gains while simply paying lip service to such lofty ideals as honor. This book explains both the origin of corporate corruption and the way a leader SHOULD behave to ensure that this phenomenon does not continue to grow in scope.

I was happy to see that Dr. Evan Offstein was able to distance himself from our shared Cadet experiences and approach the book in an organized, thoughtful, and systematic fashion. He explains that good leadership begins with an honorable character and THEN extends into the leader's expertise and skill sets. I always struggled to quantify the almost intangible quality which caused me and my West Point classmates to react in horrified disbelief when we encountered corrupt individuals with an almost limitless propensity to harm and defraud employees and stakeholders. Evan has finally defined this lineament: honor, and the overwhelming need for an individual to BE a good person, rather than simply KNOW the "acceptable" or "expert" manner in which to proceed and to "DO" only what needs to be done to temporarily satisfy personal and shareholder demands.

The book is straightforward, easy to read, and informative without possessing an air of pretense or superior knowledge. I am firmly convinced that if leaders the world over would read this tome and apply its principles, corporate scandal would disappear, replaced by increased levels of profit, worker motivation, and customer/shareholder satisfaction. PLEASE READ THIS BOOK!!!!!!

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