

Leadership – Integrity

The dictionary defines “integrity” as “the state of being complete, unified.” When I have integrity, my words and my deeds match up. I am who I am, not matter where I am or who I am with. People with integrity are “whole” people; they can be identified by their single-mindedness. People with integrity have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Their lives are open books. V. Gilbert Beers says, “A person of integrity is one who has established a system of values against which all of life is judged.

Integrity is not what we do so much as who we are. And who we are, in turn, determines what we do. Our system of values is so much a part of us we cannot separate it from ourselves. It becomes the navigating system that guides us. It establishes priorities in our lives and judges what we will accept or reject.

There will be no discrepancy between what we appear to be and what our family knows we, whether in times of prosperity or adversity. Integrity allows us to predetermine what we will be regardless of circumstances, persons involved, or the places of our testing.

Eighty-nine percent of what people learn comes though visual stimulation, 10 percent through audible stimulation, and 1 percent through other senses. So it makes sense that the more followers see and hear their leader being consistent in action and word, the greater their consistency and loyalty. Let’s look at some reasons why integrity is so important.

1. Integrity builds trust

Dwight Eisenhower said: “In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, a man must have their confidence. Hence, the supreme quality for a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.

2. Integrity has high influence value

Emerson said, “Every great institution is the lengthened shadow of a single man. His character determines the character of the organization.” That statement “lines up” with the words of Will Roger who said, “People’s minds are changed through observation and not argument.” People do what people see.

Regrettably we tend to forget the high influence value of integrity in the home. R.C. Sproul in his book *Objections Answered*, tells about a young Jewish boy who grew up in Germany many years ago. The lad had a profound sense of admiration for his father, who saw to it that the life of the family revolved around the religious practices of their faith. The father led them to the synagogue faithfully.

In his teen years, however, the boy's family was forced to move to another town in Germany. This town had no synagogue, only a Lutheran church. The life of the community revolved around the Lutheran church; all the best people belonged to it. Suddenly, the father announced to the family that they were all going to abandon their Jewish tradition and join the Lutheran church. When the stunned family asked why, the father explained that it would be good for his business. The youngster was bewildered and confused. His deep disappointment soon gave way to anger and a kind of intense bitterness that plagued him throughout his life.

Later he left Germany and went to England to study. Each day found him at the British Museum formulating his ideas and composing a book. In that book he introduced a whole new worldview and conceived a movement that was designed to change the world. He described religion as the "opiate for the masses." He committed the people who followed him to a life without God. His ideas became the norm for the governments of almost half the world's people. His name? Karl Marx, the founder of the Communist movement. The history of the twentieth century, and perhaps beyond, was significantly affected because one father let his valued become distorted.

3. Integrity facilitates high standards

Leaders must live by higher standards than their followers. This insight is exactly opposite of most people's thoughts concerning leadership. In a world of perks and privileges that accompany the climb to success, little thought is given to the responsibilities of the upward journey. Leaders can give up anything except responsibility, either for themselves or their organizations. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., said, "I believe that every right implies responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty."

4. Integrity results in a solid reputation, not just image

Image is what people think we are. Integrity is what we really are.

Two old ladies were walking around a somewhat overcrowded English country churchyard and came upon a tombstone. The inscription said: "Here lies John Smith, a politician and an honest man."

"Good heavens!" said one lady to the other. "Isn't it awful that they put two people in the same grave!"

All of us have known those who were not the same on the outside as they were inside. Sadly, many who have worked harder on their images than on their integrity don't understand when they suddenly "fall." Even friends who thought they knew them are surprised.

Your answers to the following questions will determine if you are into image-building instead of integrity-building:

- Consistency: Are you the same person no matter who you are with? Yes or no.
- Choices: Do you make decisions that are best for others when another choice would benefit you? Yes or no.
- Credit: Are you quick to recognize others for their efforts and contributions to your success? Yes or no.

5. Integrity means living it myself before leading others

We cannot lead anyone else further than we have been ourselves. Too many times we are so concerned about the product we try to shortcut the process. There are no shortcuts when integrity is involved. Eventually truth will always be exposed.

Recently I heard of a man who interviewed a consultant to some of the largest U.S. companies about their quality control. The consultant said, "In quality control, we are concerned about the product. We are concerned about the process. If the process is right, the product is guaranteed." The same holds true for integrity; it guarantees credibility.

6. Integrity helps a leader be credible, not just clever

Leaders who are sincere don't have to advertise the fact. It's visible in everything they do and soon becomes common knowledge to everyone. Likewise, insincerity cannot be hidden, disguised, or covered up, no matter how competent a manager may otherwise be.

The only way to keep the goodwill and high esteem of the people you work with is to deserve it. No one can fool all of the people all of the time. Each of us, eventually, is recognized for exactly what we are – not what we try to appear to be.

7. Integrity is a hard-won achievement

Integrity is not a given factor in everyone's life. It is a result of self-discipline, inner trust, and a decision to be relentlessly honest in all situations in our lives. Unfortunately in today's world, strength of character is a rare commodity. As a result, we have few contemporary models of integrity. Our culture has produced few enduring heroes, few models of virtue. We have become a nation of imitators, but there few leaders worth imitating.

The above information comes from John Maxwell's book *Developing the Leader Within You*.