

How much integrity do you have?

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We often hear someone described as having “a lot of integrity,” but if you think about it, that’s impossible. Integrity is either something you have or don’t have. Author-poet-speaker Sid Madwed said, “Would you want to do business with someone 99 percent honest?”

Taking personal short-cuts for personal convenience is probably not an integrity violation unless you short-changed someone you made a promise to or agreement with that requires full measures be taken.

Typically integrity violations are tied to a concept called soul fragmentation, when the fabric of the purity of someone’s soul wears away due to conscious decisions they make that, if made known, would betray someone else’s trust. The husband who says he was at the office late when actually dining with a female colleague is no longer whole. Nor is the professional padding billable hours to the client for extra money or to impress the boss. Nor the woman returning for a full refund a dress she’s already worn (more than just trying on). Personal disintegration also comes wrapped in a few dollars, white lies, and one-night stands.

Once we compromise ourselves, forgiveness is available, but something

important is lost. Wise people, knowing they are fallible adhere to integrity as the compass that guides, the wall that protects, or the glue that binds. Wise people use their integrity to guide them in the decisions they make because in the end, they will feel better about themselves for having stayed the course that’s in line with their integrity.

The National Leadership Index report prepared by the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government reports that more than anything else, Americans want a leader to be upright with integrity. Ninety-four percent ranked “honesty and integrity” as “extremely” or “very” important, surpassing even a leader’s ability to speak, give orders, cooperate with others...or his or her intelligence, open-mindedness, vision, and decision-making.

In another survey, one thousand American investors were asked if they would choose a financial services company for strong ethics or higher returns. Only fifty people preferred higher returns.

If it’s all true, why does anyone guard so lightly one of life’s most precious commodities? How is it that in a matter of moments, reputations that took a lifetime to build are forever ruined?

At the University of Arizona’s Eller

College of Management, every student comes face-to-face with Karl Eller’s business philosophy cut in stone. (Karl Eller was a pioneer in the outdoor advertising business.) It reads:

“Without integrity, motivation is dangerous; without motivation, capacity is impotent; without capacity, understanding is limited; without understanding, knowledge is meaningless; without knowledge, experience is blind.

Experience is easy to provide and quickly put to good use by people with the other qualities. Make absolute integrity the compass that guides you in everything you do. And surround yourself only with people of flawless integrity.”

In his book, *Integrity Is All You’ve Got*, Eller says the ups and downs of his career made him realize one constant: “the pivotal role of integrity in people’s lives. Those who have it usually succeed; those who don’t have it usually fail.”

Integrity is not what we do when it serves us. It is who we are in the dark and how we treat people when it makes no difference to us. If forced to choose, I would hold integrity over intellect, wealth, talent, popularity, or any brand of success. And so should you!

Integrity can’t be taken from a person; it can only be given away.

~ The End ~