

How to succeed with integrity

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First of all, what is integrity? The dictionary defines it as “the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards.” A mentor of mine told me that people who are not ashamed of their reflection are people with integrity. Many leadership consultants will tell you integrity is doing the right thing, even if there is no chance you will get caught doing the wrong thing. Whichever definition you buy into, one thing is for certain: a person without integrity will eventually struggle, probably even fail in the majority of their endeavors or relationships.

Having integrity isn’t always easy. Everyone wrestles with it at one time or another. Integrity is usually lost in small choices, the ones that seem insignificant at the time. Most people do not make a conscious decision to sacrifice their integrity by making one big, bad mistake. It is the accumulation of bad choices, all of which seem minor, that leads to the next bad choice.

It’s like the story of how to boil a frog. If you throw a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will leap out immediately because it realizes the danger and knows it does not want to be in the boiling

water. Yet, if you put the same frog in a pot of cold water and slowly turn up the heat, the frog will never realize the subtle changes in temperature and will remain in the pot until it reaches 212 degrees. The frog boils to death before realizing its doomed outcome. And that’s how integrity is lost: one degree of dishonesty (or deceit) at a time.

I learned a valuable lesson once about how careless thinking could have impacted my integrity. When I was superintendent of a community college, I almost made a bad decision concerning free samplings of headache medicine we received as part of an Alka Seltzer promotional campaign. Instead of giving the medicine away to staff members, I suggested we let the college’s private organization sell it as a fund-raiser. After all, we’d make 100% profit because we didn’t pay a dime for the product.

Good idea, right? Wrong. The college vice president overheard my suggestion and immediately set me straight on the matter. He explained why we couldn’t sell it--that it wasn’t purposed for that. He was right, indeed. I imagined giving away a pair of my Buffalo Bills season tickets to someone to use to only find out later they sold them for \$100 each. I would certainly question the integrity of

the person I gave those tickets to.

In order to succeed with integrity, it’s important to know the characteristics of people with real integrity--people who can be trusted when they give their word about something. If you want to make integrity a staple in your life, do the following:

- 1) Establish integrity as a top priority. It should be the cornerstone of your actions and decisions.

- 2) Have clear, uncompromising values and communicate them without hesitation.

- 3) Do what is right and ethical regardless of the circumstances--no hidden agendas, no games, and no regrets.

- 4) Never compromise your integrity by rationalizing a situation as “an isolated incident.” There are no “isolated incidents.” Decide where your integrity boundaries exist and stay within them.

- 5) Never allow achieving results to become more important than the means to your achievement. How you win is just as important as winning.

- 6) Do what you say you will. Your integrity is judged every time you say you make a commitment, regardless of its significance.

~ The End ~