

SELF MANAGEMENT

INTEGRITY: The Primary Sales Tool

by Jeffrey P. Davidson

In a hospital operating room a nurse on her first day of full responsibility said to the surgeon, "You've removed eleven sponges, doctor. We used twelve."

"I've removed them all," the doctor declared. "we'll close the incision now." "No," the nurse objected. "We used twelve."

"I'll take the responsibility," the surgeon said grimly. "Suture!"

"You can't do that!" blazed the nurse. "Think of the patient!"

The doctor smiled, lifted his foot, and showed the nurse the twelfth sponge. "You'll do," he said.

This story, originally told by editor and author Arthur Gordon, illustrates a key component of integrity: having the courage of your convictions.

No one lives a life of absolute integrity. It is an ideal to work toward and is difficult to define. We know integrity when we see it but we may have trouble explaining it. There is an illusive nature to integrity. We know that integrity actually makes life easier, happier, and more productive.

Historian Arnold Toynbee observes that of 21 notable civilizations 19 perished "not from external conquest but from the evaporation of belief within."

In his address to the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce, Charles H. Brower remarked that "today our country still has a choice. I believe it has begun to make that choice. I believe it is going back to its old beliefs—such things as ideals, pride, patriotism, loyalty, devotion and even hard work." Though those words were spoken 23 years ago, we are listening to their ring of truth again today.

Emily Carruthers was a teacher in an elementary school in Spokane. A dispute between the school administration and the teacher's union surfaced. At a union meeting the teachers discussed striking. After the vote to strike, Ms. Carruthers got up and voiced her opinion. She knew her opinion would be unpopular and she knew that she would alienate people because of it. Nevertheless she told the teachers that she would cross the picket line because she deplored strikes.

The courts can judge legality but who can judge integrity? There is a private, quiet, simple nature to integrity.

What is integrity?

No single synonym is sufficient to describe integrity: trustworthiness, loyalty, virtue, sincerity, candor, uprightness, honesty. It is also the avoidance of deception and the avoidance of expediency. It is being complete and undivided.



"Integrity is missing when the concern of how to get quickly from A to B replaces how to be of service to humanity, how to contribute to society."

Integrity communicates to others immediately. It is being the same person to everyone. It's not noble; it's not altruistic; but a practical vehicle for living effectively—for making life work. It is maintaining values steadfastly and focusing on what you believe is right.

Integrity is an achievement, not a gift. It is not the characteristic that determines decisions. It is the sum of decisions we make. Author Ayn Rand put it simply as "adherence to one's convictions."

Who Has Integrity?

The immediate answer is those who demonstrate it, and those who keep making the choice; integrity is not something to be mastered and put on the shelf. It is an active, living virtue which must be displayed again and again in order to remain intact.

The tension of the moment or focus on material rewards can leave the concept of integrity on shaky ground. It has been said that there are less and less penalties for not having integrity.

Integrity is missing in society when the "you versus me" notion prevails. Obsession with success and the predominance of materialistic images from Madison Avenue and Hollywood invading our living rooms usher in a contagious, downward cycle. With a far greater portion of society

living in urban or suburban settings, and increased competition among baby boomers for jobs, housing, mates, etc., there is a need for quick approval, a scramble for positioning, a "security of appearance" that seemingly becomes more important than homage to lofty virtue.

Integrity is missing when the concern of how to get quickly from A to B replaces how to be of service to humanity, how to contribute to society.

Some lose integrity by believing it must be ideal or total and, recognizing that they can't live up to such standards, rationalize and give up. (The loss of integrity begins with self-talk such as "no one will know," "why bother?" or "just this one time.") Integrity is absent when we focus on tangible losses instead of internal gains. We lose integrity by giving in to social pressure ("what a square"), by moving to a less supportive environment, by blaming outside factors and by simply not noticing that integrity is absent.

A life of integrity is a goal or ideal to aim for, but there will always be lapses. Improving upon our integrity means pursuing the truth wherever and whenever we find it, standing our ground even if no one else follows. It means not accepting the status quo, avoiding the small lie, not repeating the "unsubstantiated rumor."

The quest to improve our integrity is a quest for appropriate expression in society. It means giving anonymously, making and keeping commitments, accepting responsibility and continuously asking the question "how can I improve upon my integrity?"

A young woman in London was told by another to walk two blocks to the right and then take a left to reach a museum. Several minutes after she had set out, she was surprised to hear the second woman calling. She turned around and saw her approaching. "I told you wrong," said the second woman, panting to catch her breath. "I ran because I didn't want you to get lost."

Improving upon our integrity means making the call we have been avoiding, striving for fidelity in relationships, and associating with others who have it.

Integrity gives meaning and purpose to life and conveys enduring values that transcend contemporary fads and follies. Integrity allows for boldness and decisiveness of action and helps to eliminate self-doubt and muted self-expression.

A junior high school student had survived all the preliminary rounds of a national spelling bee contest. With the tensions high, in the final round she misspelled a word. The judges, however, did not hear correctly and gave her the go ahead. When the contestant realized she had misspelled the word, she eliminated herself from the competition.

The display of integrity within one individual inspires others around him or her. Raising our children in the spirit of integrity helps them to function adequately in society. Integrity in our profession leads to prosperity. (We go back to the store or the person who gave us a fair deal.)

People who display integrity inspire trust, respect, and peace of mind. Integrity creates a context in which all things are possible. [PS]