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Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

Is Integrity the Most Important Building Block of Personal Development?

One only needs to flip through the business section of the newspaper to see that integrity in business is lacking. It seems that on a daily basis there are stories about Wall Street, real estate and precious metals swindles, bankruptcies caused by corrupt management, and worst of all, religious leaders who abandon biblical principles in the quest for power and fame.

A few years ago a major department store chain was investigated on charges that their automotive repair shops had been ripping off consumers for years by charging for work that was never done, making repairs that were not necessary, and for regularly overcharging customers.

A major automobile manufacturer demoted two high-ranking managers because they failed to detect a multi-million-dollar racketeering scam perpetrated by one of their dealers.

The FTC once filed charges against three major baby food manufacturers for price fixing antitrust violations.

A manager wrote in an employee's personnel file, *"he has a high sense of integrity, this sometimes gets in the way of his getting the job done."*

Sound ridiculous? Maybe, but stories like these are commonplace. Integrity seems to have disappeared from our business culture. How did this happen? How did we move from a society where people held to high standards of moral and ethical behavior in business, to buyer and everyone else beware? To be sure it did not happen overnight.

This kind of behavior is an insidious growth like cancer; by the time you discover it, it is very difficult to cut out of an organization. An organization with integrity is nothing more than the sum of the individuals who have integrity. Like yeast that leavens the whole lump, one individual without integrity has the power to destroy an otherwise sound organization.



Reviewing the state of society one can only conclude that there is a definite lack of moral principle, that the principles that do exist are not sound, or both.

The accounting firm of Touche Ross did a survey of nearly 1,100 business, college, and political leaders in which 73% of respondents said that the CEO of an organization set the moral tone for the company. Other respondents named the board of directors and one's supervisor. A Time magazine article "*Having It All, Then Throwing It Away*" puts the cost of white collar crime at \$40 billion a year! If CEOs and other managers are setting the tone for corporate ethics we must be seriously off-key!

The first biblical breach of integrity comes in Genesis 3:6 when Eve took the first bite of the apple, despite the fact that she knew God's commandment not to eat from the tree. Ever since that fateful day, sinful man has lived with lapses of integrity. Only Jesus lived a life of complete integrity. Every one of the rest of us has to struggle with it every day. One would hope that since we have the Bible, which provides many accounts of the results of man's lapses with integrity, that we would have learned something.

A 1987 Gallup poll reported that 42% of Americans doubt the honesty of some, if not most, appeals for religious donations. In another Gallup poll, 43% of those who don't attend religious services say they have taken home supplies from work. Sadly, so do 37% of churchgoers. Thirty-four percent of the unchurched report calling in to work sick when they weren't, as opposed to 27% of the churchd. Gallup goes on in situation after situation concluding that "*These findings...show little difference in the ethical behavior of the churchd and the unchurched.*"

If the churchd are only marginally more ethical in daily life than the unchurched, then we need to put on the breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14) and start living the life of integrity for which we have been set apart! According to Webster's dictionary, integrity is "*soundness of and adherence to moral principle and character; uprightness, honesty.*" The message is clear. Not only must there be adherence to moral principles, but the principles themselves must be sound.

Of the sixteen times that the word *integrity* is used in the Old Testament, we find a number of references to the heart, judgment that comes with a lack of integrity, uprightness, our walk with God, and the blessing that comes with a life of integrity.

Integral Integrity

The Old Testament refers to "*the integrity of heart*" three times (Gen 20:5, Gen 20:6, and 1 Kings 9:4). The principle in each of these references is that integrity is something that lives in our hearts, it is not something to be put on and taken off at will. Integrity of heart is something you either have or do not have.



A man with integrity holds it deep within his heart and as God said to Satan regarding Job “...*he still holds fast his integrity*” (Job 2:3). The implication from the Hebrew is that Job’s integrity is fastened to him and that it strengthens him. If a man has integrity, you can see it in his very nature. It is a part of the man that cannot be separated from him because he “holds fast his integrity.”

The Benefits of Integrity

In his book *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Richard Hughes notes five benefits of integrity: character, conscience, intimacy, elevation, and evangelism.

Character. Integrity builds character. Paul writing to the Philippians said, “*Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is anything of excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these*” (4:8 NAS). By focusing on thinking and doing what is right you will build character.

Conscience. “*He who walks with integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out*” (Proverbs 10:9). There is enough stress in life without adding the stress that comes from wondering whether we will ever get “caught.” A man with integrity will boldly hold to his principles despite the deceitful actions of those around him.

Intimacy. Integrity creates an opportunity for a growing, intimate relationship with God: “*Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being*” (Psalm 51:6 NAS). Having the desire to have a clean heart is a big step toward building an intimate relationship with God.

Elevation. A lack of integrity is like yeast that leavens the lump; it will eventually effect the entire organization. Likewise, a leader who is an outspoken proponent of integrity tends to build up those around him by developing their honesty and character. Psalm 78:72 speaks of Jacob as Israel’s shepherd, “*So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.*”

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 20:7, “*A righteous man walks in his integrity. How blessed are his sons after him.*” Your example of integrity will not only elevate your peers but will provide an example for those who will follow after you!

Evangelism. We are examples to the world. It is a sad commentary indeed that churchgoers are only slightly more honest than the unchurched. We have little hope of convincing others that there is something special about an intimate relationship with God if it doesn’t show in the way we lead our lives!



Getting Started

Ted Engstrom, in his book *Integrity*, provides many suggestions for building a life of integrity. The following eight ideas will help you build integrity in your organization:

Look for the good examples in others and follow it. Hebrews 11 is described as the hall of faith. If you want to see examples of the effect of integrity on people's lives read this chapter. You could do much worse than to model your integrity after these men and women.

Take care of what you're made of, people never forget. Remember the story of Abe Lincoln walking several miles to return some change to a woman? Do you suppose with a nickname like "Honest Abe" that Lincoln led a life of integrity? The example you provide to those around you will live on after you, whether good or bad. Do you want to be remembered as an "Honest Abe" or "Slimeball Sam"?

Live your life as though it were a tribute to someone else. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25b). A life of integrity is not only an example to the people around you, but is an example of your relationship with God.

Realize that others will stumble, so prepare yourself to help them. If you have ever stumbled, then you shouldn't be surprised when the people around you stumble. When the inevitable happens, be prepared to help by confronting the issue, and providing correction. If the individual listens to you, you have strengthened him. If the individual does not listen to your correction, then what began as a private matter of rebuke may become a more public matter of termination (See Mat 18:15-20).

Give of your best in the worst of times. Paul wrote to Timothy, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come" (2 Tim 3:1). Paul goes on to describe the people; lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient, ungrateful, unholy. Sound like today?

We live in difficult, troubled times. But it is precisely in times like these that we are called upon to be an example to the world by providing our best, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Look up to those beneath you. It is difficult to build up other people from the safety of an ivory tower. David Ogilvy, the founder of Ogilvy and Mathers, used to give five progressively smaller dolls to executives along with a note that read, "If each one of us hires people who are smaller than we are we will become a company of dwarfs. But if each of us hires people who are bigger



than we are we will become a company of giants.” Endeavor to hire giants and give them room to grow.

Stand up for your convictions. “*The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn away from the snares of death*” (Pro 13:14). A wise man knows when a matter of integrity is at stake and will have the courage to stand up to his convictions. Job was not being insubordinate when arguing with his friends, but rather, he was adhering to the principles that he held dear.

Develop the good habit of breaking bad ones. We all have bad habits. It is a fact that most New Year’s resolutions are long forgotten by February because we make too many resolutions that are too hard to maintain. Pick one “small” bad habit you want to break and work on it every day, day-to-day. When you have conquered the first bad habit you will have more confidence to take on the next, larger one.

One Final Thought

Ask yourself the question, “Where can I find people who are examples of a life of integrity?” Take a look at politicians, sports figures, musicians, entertainers, and business leaders. It’s hard isn’t it?

While there are many exceptional people in all of these fields that live their lives with integrity, it is easier for us to recall the politicians sleeping in the wrong beds or taking payoffs, sports figures convicted of illegal gambling or going through drug rehab programs, talented musicians who lost their lives to drugs, entertainers who tell big lies to gain publicity, and business leaders who manufacture products that they know are unsafe in plants that they know are hazardous to the health of workers.

Think for a moment about why these people compromised their integrity.

Was it for money, for power, for fame? If you want your organization to have integrity, then you must demonstrate integrity in your actions first. The organization will follow.

Every day is an opportunity to succeed or fail in your goal to live with integrity. Perhaps it will be of some encouragement to consider Job, who after losing his family, his possessions, his great wealth, and being stricken with painful disease said to his accusers “*...till I die I shall not put my integrity away from me*” (Job 27:5).