

Leadership Barometer 159 Integrity **Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD**



Most of my writing is about trust and high integrity, but this article is about low integrity. We know it exists because there are numerous examples in our daily life. They point to individuals doing something that they espouse as good but is really to advance their own purposes.

Low integrity is common

It is easy to detect some pockets of low integrity in the public institutions and the government. What constitutes low integrity versus gamesmanship is subject to interpretation and debate.

In reality, we exist in a sea of low integrity. Gallup reports that 74% of employees worldwide believe corruption is widespread among businesses in their country.

This article helps us sort through what is a problem with integrity and what was well-intended but flawed behavior. When we see flagrant violations of integrity, it is easy to determine that the person was duping the public. In the extreme, some people just do what benefits them regardless of who it hurts.

The other extreme exists as well

The other extreme is also easy to spot. In any community, you can find people who give amazing amounts of time and money to support causes. These people expect nothing in return.

The extremes are easy to identify. The majority of actions taken by people in routine business or personal decisions are somewhere between those extremes.

Where is the defining line?

At some point, you cross the moral line between high integrity and low integrity. It is not my desire to judge anyone in this article. I think each person has to decide on a case-by-case basis where the moral line exists. That

decision reveals a lot about the ethical fiber of the person. It is not so simple to decide which activities are OK and which ones have crossed the line.

For some people, anything short of saintly behavior is wrong. Others will draw the line between good and bad just short of something being illegal.

The heart of integrity is honesty

At its core, integrity is about honesty. To understand if an action is good or bad, we really need to dig deep into our psyche. For example, maybe we really did take that action to help reduce homelessness. The improvement in our status was simply a by-product we obtained by networking with many new people.

Most low integrity is hidden

We only observe a tiny fraction of the deceit that goes on. Most of it goes undetected because we are simply unaware that the person had an ulterior motive.

An even deeper question is how would the person himself come to grips with his own true intentions. Where is the line of demarcation between doing something for others and helping one's self?

We can go slowly insane trying to decipher motives. Nearly all of the time the true motivations are hidden from view. The "pay it forward" mindset is an approach to living that is highly appealing.

It is fun to help other people, even when you know there will be no direct payback. In fact, there is a payback, and it happens instantly. It is called satisfaction or self-esteem.

Conclusion

We need to realize that there is always a return for every good deed. It does not spell incorrect behavior to do good things simply for the joy it brings.

Each individual draws the line between high integrity and low integrity. It is based on a personal level of morality. My hope is that more people will examine their true intentions rather than rationalize behaviors.

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