

Integrity: The All-Encompassing Virtue

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A common misconception is that *integrity* is just a synonym for *honesty*. While honesty makes up one of the many aspects of integrity, there is so much more to the definition. Kang defines it as “consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcomes... the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one’s actions.” (Kang 2016). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines integrity as “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: incorruptability” and “the quality or state of being complete or undivided: completeness”. This wholeness explains why integrity encompasses so many characteristics like fairness, respect, conscientiousness, self-motivation, moral courage, diligence, self-discipline, responsibility, and trust (Noelliste, 2013). One who practices integrity clearly strives to maintain a collectivity of character.

As one of said people, I find that working toward being a person of integrity is an incredibly challenging yet worthwhile endeavor. In both my personal and professional life, I revel in the fact that my consistency in timeliness, honesty, follow-through on commitments, dedication, and optimistic attitude are rewarded with trust, admiration, and respect.

Unlike my co-workers who will clock out early or fail to mention mistakes in payroll, I am the type of worker who stays until all tasks are completed and speaks up when I’m being compensated for work I haven’t done. Such behavior has granted me job security when it came time for the company to downsize and put me in a favorable position with my superiors. I am also entrusted with sensitive information and given the opportunity to spearhead projects because I show a passion and dedication to the work that my employers greatly appreciate.

As for personal relationships, I try my best to be there for everyone and keep my commitments. In a social climate where it is all too common for someone to cancel in favor of a better option, I choose to stick to previous engagements. My word is my bond. Due to this reliability, family and friends tend to trust me with their innermost thoughts and secrets and count on me to be there for them in their times of need. I am usually the first phone call when there is news of a new baby, death in the family, or need for advice. It is a role I relish.

Integrity is arguably the most important virtue because it is comprised of nearly all the other virtues (e.g. honesty, temperance, faithfulness, wisdom, righteousness, love). Although love seems out of place, think of it this way: to exercise consistency in character, self-control, and honesty... why else hold oneself to such high standards if not out of love for others and to make the world a better place?

The current social climate of our country is in desperate need of people with integrity. We are constantly hearing salacious rumors about our leaders and find ourselves at a loss for who to trust. When one practices integrity, one's work speaks for itself and hypocrisy is absent.

Of course, the virtue of integrity is not easily attainable nor maintainable. To attain integrity is to devote a lot of time and energy to upholding one's values and proving your dedication and consistency. However, maintenance poses the largest difficulty.

It is especially tough to treat everyone with the same level of respect and love, especially when some people are more frustrating than others. Also, because of this consistency in dealing with others, gauging differences in others' needs is a quite problematic. For example, as an honest person I am not one to sugar coat or tell people what they want to hear. Some of the people in my life want that kind of sweetness so when they do not receive special consideration,

they become hurt and angry.

Another obstacle in maintaining one's integrity is the disappointment one encounters when encountering peers who lack integrity. When holding oneself to incredibly high standards, one finds oneself saddened, isolated, and frustrated when others fail to live up to those high standards. This is not to say that a person of integrity is snobby in any way; rather they are burdened with the weight of others on their shoulders and feel that there is no one of integrity to turn to when they themselves need someone.

Thankfully my faith helps to keep me humble. Biblically our deeds are all "dirty rags" in the eyes of God, and we all fall short. The goal of life is to work toward perfection while accepting the never-ending need for improvement.

As Sternberg says, "decide what's important to you, and then be true to it" (Sternberg, 2017). It is important to me to help others improve their own lives, and being a guide for them is all I desire. If all of my efforts inspire others to be the best they can be, it's all worth it.

In a time when technology makes it easy to avoid commitment and divorce rates are on the rise, it is a refreshing reprieve to encounter someone who knows what they want out of life and does not have an ulterior motive. A little more integrity in the world would go a long way.

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