

Integrity—# 2 of Eight Keys

Integrity is the state of authenticity when our values and behavior are aligned. Integrity happens when ‘what we value’ is evident in our actions.

It is amazing how we can often feel from a person that this person has integrity. It is something in the way they speak. Sometimes it is in the way they hold themselves. We often speak 80% of our meaning through body language (UCLA study.) However, all of us, at one time or another, are fooled by someone with regard to their integrity. Sometimes we elect a politician based on the feeling we get as they deliver their platform. When they get into office, for whatever reason, something else happens from what they promised. This is too often true.

In business, if your company doesn't practise integrity, your customers will catch on and soon disappear. The most important person in your office is the one who answers the phone. If that person doesn't handle each contact with dignity and respect, then you will lose a possible client before you even get started. It all depends on how the person who answers the phone makes the other person feel with the sound of the language used. We have phone courses to teach people how to answer the phone in order to sound and be welcoming. It is not enough to just sound good; you must also put across a feeling of “Integrity.” You can't fake it for long; you must in fact have integrity.

If I ask any group of people about their experiences with “used car salesmen,” people will talk for hours about their negative experiences and not the ones that worked out well. Things have changed dramatically because of this awareness in business. First of all, salesmen are referred to as salespersons; and the former used cars are now referred to as pre-owned vehicles. “Image is everything” is the expression that is tossed around loosely. I would argue that “Integrity” is everything. If you want longevity in business, you must first deal with this issue of integrity around whatever product you are promoting or selling.



Let me redefine “Integrity” as having two components. It is about both “values” and “behavior.” Here is an example from my childhood.

When I was thirteen years old my father passed away. There were five boys in my family, the oldest being sixteen and the youngest being five. My mother had not worked outside the house, did not have a driver’s license; and, as kids, we were outside playing all the time with few responsibilities. My mother took quick action, got her driver’s license, took typing courses at night so she could present some skills and get a job. Meanwhile the Childrens’ Aid Society investigated children running through the neighbourhood (my brothers and me) to find there was little parent supervision. My mother took them to court and won back the right to keep her children. I learned a great deal from her about the value and behavior related to hard work and the importance of family.

In the meantime, my oldest brother thought that he would be the dad in the family. He was going to be the leader and take care of the siblings. This is a commendable value orientation; however...

One day he said to me, “Kid, whatever you do, don’t smoke!” Now, he was smoking as he said it, trying to act and be older than sixteen. From my perspective, what I saw was someone coughing, smoking and telling me not to smoke. His value was excellent. He cared enough to tell me not to smoke. Don’t smoke was the message. However, his behavior, on the other hand, was that of a smoker. His values and his behavior did not match. Therefore there was no integrity on the issue of smoking. So I tried it; decided for myself that I didn’t like it and haven’t smoked since.

The key of “Integrity” is that the “value” must match the “behavior.” In business, we must be more conscious of this fact and act out the values that we profess. Quite simply it means that we must:

1. Say what we mean;
2. Mean what we say; and
3. Do what we say we are going to do.



It sounds simple; however, there is a lot of gray between black and white.

It is most difficult today to act on our values. There are so many tempting short cuts to doing effective business. Many companies have been downsized and outsourced so much that many employees don't know what the other employees are doing and it becomes more and more difficult to deliver "just-in-time" service. Everyone is working harder, meaner and leaner. Sometimes when the service becomes less effective, then the product appears somehow deficient. Integrity comes when we are able to deliver on our promises.

IBM was finding that there was too much discrepancy in what they were advertising and marketing world wide and their customers were complaining about not receiving what they asked for. There was too much variety in approaches and it was confusing for the customers. The customers of IBM were saying they would prefer one universal branding world-wide. IBM fired 56 ad agencies to go with one company to do all the advertising and marketing. IBM changed to "Brand Stewardship" with Ogilvy and Mather. All of their branding became universal. This change was quite dramatic; however, it was the best approach for the company. It had to do with listening to the customer and making the tough decision for the benefit of the company and its employees. IBM needed to communicate one message effectively so that the customer received what they asked for and could once again depend on the company as having integrity.

When we can deliver on what we promise in a timely fashion, then we become authentic and others will then see us as having integrity. We will, as a result, get and keep the right employees and we will get and keep the best customers with a sense of loyalty to our service. Research has shown that, "once you have a customer, it is, in fact, harder to lose them." They will defer to you rather than seek out an alternative.

Integrity requires effort and it must permeate all aspects of your company and personnel. This integrity will guarantee longevity in the market



place. And, you will be better able to sleep at night. This is the “Integrity Key” for true success in life.

This is the second of “Eight Keys For Success In Life.”

