
Integrity—Public or Private, Personal or Professional: A Symposium

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The issue of integrity is an old one, which stretches into every dimension of life. Heraclitus said: “The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts. Think only on those things that are in the line with your principles and can bear the full light of day. The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you choose, what you think and what you do is who you become. Integrity is your destiny...it is the light that guides your way” (Cited in Bernfield et.al., 2001, p. 51). Seneca, for his part, reminds us that Diogenes walked the streets of Athens with a lantern, looking for an honest face, suggesting thereby that honest faces were in far less supply than was desirable. Given the economic turmoil caused in the last several years by dishonest faces, the ancient question of finding honest faces is no less important.

The issues raised in this symposium touch upon some of the concerns associated with honest faces. In the first article, Don Schley argues that the ancient world had a hold on integrity which has since been lost, in that anciently a much more holistic vision of life prevailed, and people saw themselves connected to cosmic concerns and accountabilities in ways that modern secularism denies. He notes, for example, that many corporations and government agencies and associations seek to set behavioral standards by imposing codes of ethics upon memberships, a phenomenon which carries within its own momentum the potential seeds of its own destruction, for codes of ethics by definition are external impositions which control behavior, but not internal motivations which affect desires and motives. Moreover, by connecting motives and desires to behavior, the ancient holism from which we have largely parted brought into clear focus *why* men and women should manifest integrity, as opposed to the external *how* people should behave so easily defined by codes of ethics. His point is that when *why* fuels *how*, meaning governs, and people thus have deeper purpose in what they do; when *how* governs *why*,

people easily excuse themselves from moral accountability. In our modern secular society, we have even constructed reinforcement mechanisms, which include educational awards and degrees, which at their heart are but reinforcements of the very separation of people from greater cosmic and natural accountabilities which so contribute to the lack of integrity in the first place.

McConkie and Boss, in a qualitative piece that reports the results of 51 interviews conducted with executives defined by their peers as both successful and as being “high integrity people,” find that such executives share in common with their ancient counterparts, at least as described by Schley, some striking and common characteristics. They believe, for instance, in the existence of truth, in the fact that it is discernable, and that the pursuit of truth is far more noble than the pursuit of economic advantage. They seem to see high integrity people as governed by internal controls—beliefs, convictions, ideas and ideals—which are more important to them than making money or achieving some other success in life. Moreover, people of integrity, according to the data here assembled, are reluctant to make the distinctions between “the public self” and “the private self” which have become so much a part of the excuse-making mechanism of those who have failed to sustain the demands of integrity. The McConkie-Boss piece is a work that merits continuation: would a sample of women, a sample of African Americans, a sample of Hispanics, for example, yield the same results? While those and similar questions remain as yet unanswered, their initial findings suggest that the honest faces of the ancient world would find happy companionship in the honest faces of the modern world.

Four empirical pieces begin to test elements of the conceptual definitions suggested by Schley, McConkie and Boss. In the first Tsahuridu and Perryer push at the conceptual boundaries of what integrity means in an operational setting by examining what certain Australian companies do in their hiring practices. They find that where organizations have cultivated a positive reputation, that reputation plays a positive role in attracting high quality employees to work. Unfortunately, far too few are the numbers of organizations which seek to attract the more ethically grounded employees by living and broadcasting messages which reflect the importance of integrity.

In a second empirical piece, Simon Albrecht presents data which point to integrity and trust in senior management as precursors to the amount of cynicism which precedes change efforts in organization life. His

data further suggest that honest faces are every bit as important as competent ones; indeed, he observes that “contrary to expectations, employee perceptions of the competence of senior management did not have a direct influence on trust nor on cynicism toward change.” This points to the centrality of integrity in implementing change, a fact long underscored in the organization change and development literature.

In another change related paper, Elliott and McConkie gather data from sex offenders, who, during the rehabilitative processes of character reconstruction are required to undergo polygraph (“lie detector”) examinations. They report that where the rehabilitative process helps offenders to act and speak with integrity, it facilitates the rehabilitation; where it does not, the healing processes cannot genuinely go forward. Two polygraph usage models are compared. In the first, a polygrapher works alone with an offender; in the second, a multidisciplinary team collaborates in the polygraph process. The results suggest this second model more powerful in helping sex offenders recognize and tell the truth, and thus place themselves on the road to rehabilitation. One important implication from this research is that among this particular population, the external pressure of working with multiple helpers contributed to the ability to change behavior.

Perryer and Jordan point to additional variables which impact the degree of integrity which people exhibit. Comparing results from samples drawn in Singapore and Australia, they found that, after controlling for cultural background, gender, age, and home/work environment were significant predictors of ethical behavior.

References:

Bernfield, Gary A., Jennings, Vickie, and Corriveau, Alain (2001). “The Road Less Traveled in Community Corrections: Intensive Ecological Approaches and the Struggle for Treatment Integrity,” *The ICAA Journal on Community Corrections*, pp. 51-65, (November, 2001).