



A Rose by Any Other Name

What Is Integrity?

by Kenneth O. Gangel

The scenario is played out far too often. The board chair with too little accountability and too much authority decides that the source of his frustration about the school must be the increasingly successful principal he hired. The sense of diminished importance and waning popularity that the board chair feels compels him to assemble the school's board swiftly and secretly, and the principal is dismissed immediately without warning or cause. Which of the following choices best describes the deficiency and failure in that board chair's life and style of leadership?

- A. He lacks integrity.
- B. He lacks honor.
- C. He lacks morality.
- D. He lacks rectitude.

I'll bury the answer in the next paragraph just in case you tried to sneak a glance at it while you were coming down the list. Meanwhile, let me tell you that *integrity* has a number of antonyms—words such as *deception*, *dishonesty*, *falseness*, and *pretense*. In my writing, I use *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. This 2,140-page tome tells us that the word *integrity* comes from the

Latin *integer* and connotatively means soundness, wholeness, or completeness. For definitions the lexicographers have chosen the following:

- steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code
- the state of being unimpaired
- the quality or condition of being whole or undivided

Let's get back to the quiz. If you selected all four, you have the right answer. In *Roget's Thesaurus* the word *integrity* does not appear, but it does show up as the first synonym for *honesty*, to which Roget adds other synonyms such as *probity*, *rectitude*, *veracity*, *honor*, and *morality*.

We talk so much about integrity that you would think that it would be found in every book of the Bible and every chapter of leadership or management books. But even if you passed the quiz above, you would be wrong.

Let's quickly summarize instead of getting bogged down in details. The NIV (the translation quoted in this article) uses the word *integrity* in 22 passages, 19 of them in the Old Testament. The translators chose different Greek and Hebrew words where they thought *integrity* represented the best dynamic equivalence of the passage. Though neither

Roget nor *The American Heritage Dictionary* chose *faithful*, it is commonly used in other translations of the Bible as synonymous with *integrity*. So let's raise the question this way: In what way should Christian school educators at any level demonstrate integrity (veracity, honor, steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code, and a quality of being whole or undivided)? Clearly we should be people

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who display purity of motive, demonstrating that we are not fighting with the weapons of the world and have not been infected by the evil pathology and erroneous theology of false teachers.

Integrity Is Rooted in Righteousness

The book of Proverbs alone among all the books of the Bible uses the word *integrity* (as translated in the NIV) five times. Proverbs 13:6 tells us that "righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner." We find similar words in Proverbs 11:3: "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity." Now here we have a word we can get our hands on. *Duplicity* clearly means deliberately saying one thing to one person and something quite different to another. It is deceptiveness, or double dealing, and it literally comes from the old Latin word *duplex*, which we still commonly use today. A two-faced person, whose heart is not rooted in righteousness, will eventually show his true persona by demonstrating a self in whom two separate houses have been built.

Such behavior renders that person duplicitous and destroys his integrity. Hans Finzel (1998, 45) puts it this

Integrity Is a Quality of Teaching

The appearance of the word *adialeiptos* in Titus 2 is very much contextually interpreted. This is a teaching chapter, and verses seven and eight could not be more clear: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us." These imperatives are a direct challenge to Titus himself, and they have to do with the way he demonstrated leadership with integrity through teaching. How frequently in the pastoral Epistles we see this kind of warning! Who could forget the beginning words of the fourth chapter of Paul's second letter to Timothy (vv. 1–2):

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word [teach]; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

Integrity May Be Lost

The greatest warning comes from the oldest book of the Bible. No, not Genesis—Job. Nor do the words appear from the mouths of phony counselors whose words take a huge portion of the book. Here God speaks, and He speaks to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason" (Job 2:3). Job probably did not hear that conversation, but he certainly knew the principle, for he says to Eliphaz in 6:29, "Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake."

Clearly, integrity may be lost. One might start out in Christian school ministry with a pure heart and great honesty, displaying to all an undivided spirit. But somewhere

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way: "Don't say yes to something when in reality you have no intentions of doing it, when you have no authority or ability to do it, when you may change your mind and are not really committed to following through, or when the time and resources at your disposal will not allow you to do it." *Integrity rooted in righteousness can be quickly destroyed through dishonesty.*

along the line, he or she changes paths and becomes a duplicitous and deceptive person. How can that happen? In a dozen ways: suffering (as in the case of Job), defensiveness against the attacks of another, failure to walk carefully with the Lord in prayer and in His Word, a prideful attempt to advance oneself in position (and perhaps salary), anger, contempt, pride, and many more.

Or perhaps the threat comes from without. That's why Proverbs 29:10 says, "Bloodthirsty men hate a man of

integrity and seek to kill the upright.” Make no mistake about it—Christian ministry is dangerous business, and one of the dangers is that you might lose your integrity either from failures of your own or from attacks on your person or work directed at you by Satan through another person.

One way to protect yourself from losing integrity is to constantly remember and act on the fact that *Christian ministry is not a solo act*. Your competence and cooperation with other leaders can protect you in times of crisis, times when your credibility is challenged.

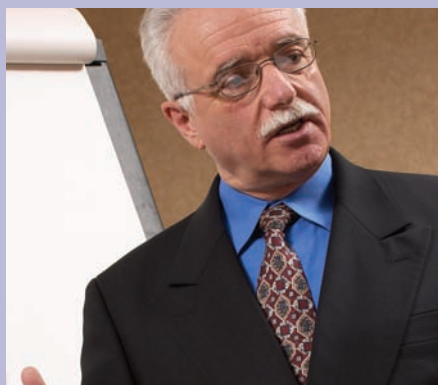
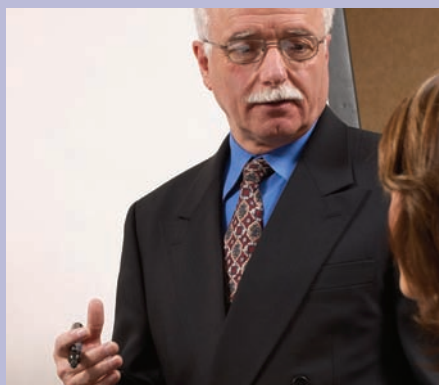
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three increasingly duplicitous patriarchs (Jacob was the all-time king of swindlers), Joseph finds himself quite happily serving Potiphar in Egypt. When Potiphar’s wife propositions him, he reminds her of his absolute duty and fidelity to his master but then tells her his real motive for rejecting her: “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9).

We are reminded also of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego facing the blazing furnace and saying, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:17–18).

Bobby Clinton calls this “the integrity check” (1988, 58):

At the heart of any assessment of biblical qualifications for leadership lies the concept of integrity—that uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic, or other values that reveals itself in sincerity, honesty, and candor and avoids deception or artificiality.... The God-given capacity to



Integrity Is Expected and Rewarded by God

Write the following verse on your heart, and you may even want to hang it on your wall:

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. (Proverbs 11:3)

David put it in the words of a brief and simple prayer: “May integrity and uprightness protect me” (Psalm 25:21). Did you know that David once wrote a song for his director of music? He did. And he ended it with these two verses: “In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever. Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen” (Psalm 41:12–13).

We see God’s careful and protecting hand in the lives of others who desperately wanted to keep their integrity in difficult situations. Joseph jumps quickly to mind; God had blessed before and would bless again, but at one particular moment Joseph’s integrity was on the line, and keeping it would cost him. Following in the lineage of

lead has two parts: giftedness and character. Integrity is the heart of character.

An emerging leader becomes aware of the importance of integrity through integrity checks. An integrity check is a test that God uses to evaluate intentions in order to shape character. This check is a springboard to an expanded sphere of influence. There are three parts to an integrity check: the challenge to consistency with inner convictions, the response to the challenge, and the resulting expansion of ministry.

Some years ago it was my privilege to participate in a *Festschrift* prepared by members of the faculty at Dallas Seminary to celebrate the retirement of Dr. Don Campbell as president. Dr. Campbell was one of the godliest men I have known and one of the best servant leaders I have ever worked with. Consequently, I entitled my selection “Learning to Lead like the Lord.” One paragraph looks like this: “Success in ministry comes not with self-advancement and high visibility, but through patient service to others. Christian leaders can face whatever comes

their way if they lay hold of the central truths that God has chosen them for ministry; that he loves and delights in them and their service; and that he will provide the power of his Spirit to fulfill any assignment” (1994, 265).

different ways to run a business. The internal resolution of these competing beliefs is what leads to personal integrity...

There is no well-cut path to the future, only wilderness. Strongly held beliefs compel leaders to take a stand and go

“Success in ministry comes not with self-advancement and high visibility, but through patient service to others.”

In the rare treatment of integrity in the premier magazine *Leader to Leader*, one particular piece stands out, an article by Stratford Sherman entitled “Rethinking Integrity,” the only article in nine years of that publication to carry *integrity* in its title. In an understatement following several pages of lexicographical handling of the word through history, Sherman (2003, 42) says, “Pop culture helps blur our concept of integrity. We’re all familiar with the shift from news to infotainment, and the antisocial behavior in TV ‘reality’ programs and confessional talk shows. Subtle evidence of the change in attitude is everywhere: On the New York subway, a poster with the headline ‘Use Your Sick Days Wisely’ caught my eye. It featured an all-smiles photo of a mother and daughter on an amusement park ride. The ad’s copy explained NJ Transit’s offering: a discount package of admission to Six Flags Great Adventure and Wild Safari, plus round-trip transportation. It sounded like a good deal and the ride looked fun; but I couldn’t help wondering why New Jersey’s state-owned transportation authority would promote the fraudulent use of sick days to attend amusement parks.” Sherman (p. 45) goes on to identify “Eight Steps Toward Integrity,” and I offer these as a diving board for readers to plunge into the next article, carefully crafted by my college classmate and longtime friend Jay Kesler:

- doing what we say we will do
- doing the right thing
- taking responsibility
- supporting our own weight
- holistic thinking
- respecting others
- checking the mirror
- defining the rules and values

In the secular genre of leadership literature, no book treats the issue of integrity more thoroughly and carefully than *Credibility* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (1993). They address many of the issues covered by the book in an article that appeared in *Business Credit*, and I close with a quotation from that article, which was entitled “The Credibility Factor: What Followers Expect From Their Leaders.”

With knowledge of the inner and outer worlds comes an awareness of competing value systems, and of the many

out in front. If, as a leader, you are to have the self-confidence needed to step out into the unknown, you might begin each day by looking in the mirror and asking “Just what do I stand for?” (1990, 28)

As a leader of teachers or as a leader of students, just what do you stand for?

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