

This issue

Personal Integrity:

- How others judge your integrity
- Factors that can jeopardize your integrity
- Strategies to safeguard yours

LIFE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Preserving Personal Integrity

As company budgets get tighter and the stakes get higher, apathy is winning out over integrity. Today's workplace has become a breeding ground for indifference; employees compromising their values by making excuses for inappropriate behavior or simply looking the other way. They convince themselves that it's okay because everyone is doing it or no one really cares.

This meltdown of integrity is not limited to the workplace; it can be found in our personal lives too. We say that our family is our first priority, but we put our careers first. We say that our health is important, however, we do little to live a healthy lifestyle. We say we want to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, but we're preoccupied with material possessions.

Personal integrity is living up to the values we establish for ourselves. In other words, "walking the talk" (See Figure 1). Consequently, our integrity is judged on how closely our perceived values line up with the way we think, communicate and conduct ourselves. Any inconsistencies can put our integrity into question.



Figure 1. Our personal integrity is judged on how closely our perceived values line up with the way we think, communicate and conduct ourselves.

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Personal integrity is a vital asset and one you will want to maintain throughout your life. To safeguard yours, here are four proven strategies.

Re-examine your values – Our values shape our behaviors and ultimately the strength of our integrity. Think about your values and make a list. Review the list carefully and consider the source of each value (e.g. family, religion, society, culture). Odds are good that many of your values stem from "shared" or "universal" values. These are common values that are held by a group such as a family, community, organization or society (See Figure 2). It's important to remember that we sometimes, out of a sense of obligation or fear, hold on to values that no longer represent what is important to us. We also adopt some values to conform to societal or organizational standards. You may want to periodically review your list and make any modifications. Our core values typically remain the same throughout most of our lives, but maturity can give us increased clarity and insight.

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Examples of Shared/Universal Values

Compassion	Gratitude	Love	Responsibility
Cooperation	Health	Loyalty	Security
Courage	Honesty	Peace	Self-control
Fairness	Hope	Recognition	Status
Faith	Kindness	Respect	Trustworthiness

Figure 2. Odds are good that many of your values stem from “shared” or “universal” values. These are common values that are held by a group such as a family, community, organization or society.

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Review your relationships – This includes your family, friends, business associates, and organizations (e.g. employer, professional associations, social clubs, religious and community groups). Consider how closely their values are aligned with yours. Ask yourself, “What values am I endorsing by participating in the relationship?” and “Can this relationship in any way jeopardize my integrity?” Consider how much you’re willing to compromise your values for the relationship and what the ultimate consequence of that decision will be. And lastly, assess your willingness to terminate the relationship if necessary.

Communicate your values – It’s important that you make your values clear, especially at the beginning of a relationship (business or personal). It may be tempting to conceal your values in order to gain acceptance or to avoid being scrutinized. However, open and honest disclosure enables everyone involved to preserve his/her individual integrity and assess the relationship more accurately. Communicating values is particularly critical when entering into long-term relationships (e.g. business partnership, employee/ employer, marriage).

Consider your legacy – Our values are passed on to future generations through those we influence during our life, and the reminders that we leave behind (e.g. traditions, literature, music, philanthropic endeavors). Others are constantly observing how we invest our time, talent and financial resources. Our actions give clues about our value system. Think about how your values influence your family, friends, workplace, community and the world. Consider how the values you promote daily will help shape our future.



Preserving personal integrity should be on everyone’s agenda. When we compromise our values, we shortchange the organizations we serve, our communities, our families, and ourselves. This is too hefty a price to pay for simply looking the other way.



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