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INTEGRITY

In this age of seemingly any behavior is acceptable as long as the person can rationalize it convincingly, who cares what you do or say, how you act, or how you treat other people? You should. And if leadership is a goal, then you must develop a keen sense of honesty and fairness in your personality. The big kahuna, the granddaddy of them all when speaking of character, is personal integrity. At your age you are already far along this path of possessing personal integrity, somewhere on a scale from low to high, whether you know it or not. These character traits are part of what make you the unique person that you are. If your integrity quotient is on the low end of the scale, your chances of being an effective leader will be torpedoed.

What is integrity? The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition states, “adherence to a code of values: utter sincerity, honesty and candor.” Basically your actions follow your words. Maintaining integrity is an active choice. When faced with a situation that is unethical or falls somewhere in the gray areas of life, you will have to decide how you will respond. Responding with integrity will many times not be the easier

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choice. However, As Confucius so sagely points out, “To see what is right and not do it is cowardice.”

I was recently cleaning out some boxes in my office and found an envelope. Inside was \$80 and a note that said “deposit for Atlanta trip,” apparently from a student who had taken a trip with our group three years ago. How it got there, I don’t know. But I looked at that \$80, knowing that this could be “found” money. I could have put that in my wallet and nobody except me would have ever known about it, and I would have been \$80 ahead. But I knew that money belonged in the college account, so I went to the bursar’s office and deposited it. Did I think about keeping the money? Obviously I did or I wouldn’t be writing about it. I’m not looking for a pat on the back for taking the right action, but illustrating one of the temptations we will have to overcome if we are to lead our lives with integrity. Temptations of all sorts confront us every day. How we choose to respond is what counts. Integrity is “doing right” when no one else is around.

No one acts with one-hundred percent integrity in every situation, but we certainly can find people who have high standards and seek to live their lives according to those standards. The little voice in your head, your conscience, is generally telling you what is right. Shakespeare’s “To thine own self be true,” comes to mind. Whether you choose to follow that moral compass will be up to you and will contin-

SO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER?

ually shape who you are. Work on maintaining high standards in the little decisions and that will help you tremendously when facing the larger ethical dilemmas.

Lastly, when you're leading others, you should realize that you have accepted a responsibility to do what is in their best interest. Leadership should be humbling in the sense that others have entrusted themselves to your care. Possessing integrity will go far in ensuring that trust in you will not be violated.

Motivation is a fire from within. If someone else tries to light that fire under you, chances are it will burn very briefly.

—Stephen R. Covey

YOU ARE WHOM YOU ASSOCIATE WITH

Did you ever hear your mother say, “I do not want you hanging around him or that crowd”? Wasn't that a pain? But she knew a basic truth. You become like the people with whom you “hang.” That is a fact. Thus, you need to choose your friends wisely. Your mom was “right on” in this case because she was aware of the powerful influence others can exert on us. I was reading an interview focusing on a juvenile detention officer