

IntegrityWorks: Tools and Skills to Build Integrity Introduction. Why Integrity?

“Integrity isn’t just doing the right thing when no one is looking. Integrity is doing the unpopular but right thing when the pressure is on and everyone is looking.” —Gerry Zack, SCCE & HCCA CEO

“Somebody once said that in looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if you don't have the first, the other two will kill you. You think about it; it's true. If you hire somebody without [integrity], you really want them to be dumb and lazy.”^[1] —Warren E. Buffett, Berkshire Hathaway CEO

Could you believe in a leader with unlimited charisma but who never keeps her word? Would you question the work of an employee who’s known to tell many small, somewhat harmless lies? Or could you trust the advice of a friend who doesn’t critically question the information he reads? Each of these circumstances brings up the question of a person’s integrity—being honest, measured and fair in thought, and true to one’s personal values. If you don’t act with integrity, you will have trouble getting people to believe in you. Few people with integrity will follow or trust you. And you will never be an effective leader, reliable friend, or trusted advisor. It simply kills your character and reputation.

Every person encounters situations both professionally and personally that test their integrity. It’s inevitable, and it will undoubtedly happen throughout your lifetime. It’s something I’ve experienced and seen happen to many compliance and ethics professionals—people who dedicate their careers to promoting and defending ethical behavior. On a daily basis, for example, they have to assess whether or not an accusation against an employee has merit and needs to be investigated, or if it’s just some form of character assassination. And if an accusation does end up being true, they need to have the courage to confront the situation head-on for the benefit of the company as a whole. They have to make ethical decisions like these, even if powerful people’s reputations will be damaged. Compliance and ethics professionals do this often in their careers, but these kinds of ethical situations come up in every organization and in every field, and we all confront difficult circumstances like these in our daily lives.

Roy-ism: Every human needs a little compliance and ethics professional in them.

Acting according to your beliefs may not always be the easiest choice to make, and it may make you a few enemies too. But if you want to be trusted, respected, and believed, acting with integrity is the only choice you have. It’s critical in business decisions, and it’s vital within personal relationships.

Defining Integrity

Let’s get into the right mindset for understanding what integrity is all about. I looked

everywhere for help defining integrity. Nothing seemed to be laser-focused. Descriptions often drifted into how to think socially, politically, or managerially. Oddly I found *Merriam-Webster's* lists of “integrity” synonyms, related words, and antonyms to be the most helpful. They include the following.

DEFINING INTEGRITY

Synonyms	Related Words	Antonyms
character	appropriateness	badness
decency	correctness	evil
goodness	decorousness	evildoing
honesty	decorum	immorality
morality	ethics	iniquity
probity	etiquette	sin
rectitude	fitness	villainy
righteousness	high-mindedness	wickedness
rightness	honor	
uprightness	incorruptibility	
virtue	irreproachability	
virtuousness	irreproachableness	
	morals	
	propriety	
	right-mindedness	
	scrupulosity	
	scrupulousness	
	seemliness	

Some of the words are dated or a bit odd, I know. These words will help you avoid the trap that many people fall into when they say: “Think like me politically, socially, and managerially and you will have integrity too.” When someone talks about integrity in a similar way, or you are tempted to use a similar approach, think back to these words . . . none of which exhibit such personal views. Originally, I told my editor, Karen, that I was going to delete the odd ones. She asked, “So you are going to biasedly pick the ones that serve your purpose and leave out the ones that don’t?” *I put all the words in the book.* Bias is everywhere . . . even in a book about integrity.

What Compliance and Ethics Taught Me

I ended up devoting the better part of my career to promoting honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior in one form or another with the Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics & Health Care Compliance Association (SCCE & HCCA), the organizations I cofounded and then ran as CEO for many years.

The SCCE & HCCA hold around 100 conferences each year all over the world. While selecting speakers and attending those conferences for the past 23 years, I've learned about doing the right thing from the best and the brightest in the field. The real learning took place in discussions and debates in hallways and breakrooms, and during meals. And I wrote hundreds of posts and articles about preventing, finding, and fixing ethical and regulatory problems . . . most of them triggered by ideas generated from my colleagues.

I've had many opportunities to promote business and employee compliance and ethics as CEO. I was asked to gather some fellow compliance colleagues to travel to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and help evaluate their compliance and ethics program. A colleague and I spoke at the National Security Agency on compliance and ethics during a difficult time period related to their surveillance techniques. And some of the most rewarding experiences I've had were when I represented SCCE at ethics and compliance conferences in Sarajevo and Panama, in efforts to help their businesses battle corruption. These important experiences have taught me invaluable lessons about honesty and ethical behavior and this book is an outcome of them all.

Testing My Integrity

One of the first situations that tested my integrity happened when I was around 10 years old . . . as best as I can remember anyway. I was in Southdale Center, a shopping mall in Edina, Minnesota, with the distinction of being the first indoor mall in the United States. Prior to that moment, the most dishonest thing I had done was search my father's pockets for spare change, which I figured he didn't need or wouldn't miss.

That moment at Southdale made an impression on me. I'll never forget it. My friend and I were into building model cars at the time, and for whatever reason, we decided to steal from the hobby store. I shoved some paint brushes up my coat sleeve. I do not recall what my buddy took, but I do remember watching an adult catch him doing it. So I did what any good friend with stolen merchandise up his sleeve would do . . . *I quickly left the store.*

I waited outside for what seemed like an eternity. There is no peace of mind during moments like that one . . . and it still haunts me 54 years later. I think it bothers me more that I walked out on my buddy than the fact that I stole something. My friend finally came out and told me the employee said he had to wait for the manager, but the manager never came and my friend was let go.

And that was the brilliance of the employee: *there was no manager coming.* The guy wanted to leave an impression on a 10-year-old boy. He could have called his parents and ensured more suffering, but the man thought the torture of waiting would be enough. He was right. Not only did it work for my friend, it worked for another 10-year-old thief waiting just outside the store—me.

We all have lapses in judgment, and my conscience haunts me mercilessly after my lapses in judgment. This event is a good example of that. *Your conscience is one of the best guardians of your integrity.*

Growing Your Integrity

So how do you act with integrity? And how do you help it grow? We can learn about having integrity from observing how our family, friends, and colleagues act. But the real journey begins within, by understanding what your personal values are, how you process information, and how you can have the courage to act in accordance with your beliefs. And you need to view it as a process, something you have to work on daily in order to maintain. It's not just in the actions you learn to take, it's in the convictions you hold for your entire life.

Thoughts on Integrity: Barack Obama

In an October 2019 Obama Foundation Summit panel discussion, President Barack Obama described his personal journey to becoming the person he wanted to become—someone who could effect change in society—and having integrity was an important part of that journey:

For me, at least, it was not a straight line . . . it was an evolution that took place over time as I tried to align what I believed most deeply with what I saw around me and with my own actions. . . . [it] was this long process for me of aligning what I said I believed in with my behavior and then testing what I could change so that the world would align better with what I believed in and my values.

So the first stage is just kind of figuring out—alright, what do you really believe? What's really important to you? Not what you pretend is important to you, but what is really important to you? And what are you willing to risk or sacrifice for it? The next phase is then you test that against the world, and the world kicks you in the teeth, and says: "You may think this is important, but you know what? We've got other ideas. And who are you? And you can't change nothing." And then you get through a phase of trying to develop skills and courage and resilience and you try to fit your actions to the scale of whatever influence you have . . . and that gives you the power to then analyze and say here's what worked, here's what didn't, here's what I need more of in order to achieve the vision and the goals that I have.^[2]

Authenticity, honesty, truth, critical thinking, and bias—these are just some aspects of integrity I discuss in the chapters of this book that can give you the tools to make better, more measured decisions. You'll see that by talking with experts, sharing experiences, practicing honest self-reflection, and applying new skills to new contexts, you can build personal, team, and organizational integrity. Through quotes, definitions, and charts, you'll get a better understanding of what the somewhat enigmatic concept of "integrity" really means. And through "Now You Try" workshop exercises, you can put some of these ideas into practice to see what works or doesn't work for you.

Also in each chapter, you'll find an interview with someone I consider to be an ethical superstar—Joel A. Rogers, Gerry Zack, Dan Roach, and Margaret Hambleton. Most are responsible for the ethics of a very large organization with tens of thousands of employees or members. They each contribute a unique and different perspective to the chapter's topic. I believe other people can help you on this journey, which I learned from my mentor, Marc Dettmann. Consulting people who have been through what you are going through is one of the best habits you can develop to grow both personally and professionally.

Building your integrity is not an easy process—it's complicated and sometimes difficult. In order to succeed, you need to value it more than almost anything else—more than power, recognition, and money. You have to be in it for the long haul, but it's entirely possible and entirely worth the work. This book can help you do that work in different ways. Use it to start ethics discussions with friends or employees. Try it in a mentor-mentee relationship to spark meaningful conversations. Use the exercises in workshops to start conquering biases and

thinking critically when making decisions. This book is just a starting point—try some skills and tools I suggest and then develop your own. So let's get started by working on personal honesty—a quality to build a strong foundation of integrity upon.

1 Marcel Schwantes, “Warren Buffett Says Integrity Is the Most Important Trait to Hire For. Ask These 12 Questions to Find It,” *Inc.*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/first-90-days-warren-buffetts-advice-for-hiring-based-on-3-traits.html>.

2 Barack Obama, “President Obama in conversation with Yara Shahidi and Obama Foundation Program Participants,” Obama Foundation, YouTube video, October 30, 2019, 16:42–20:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ioz96L5xASK>.

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