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By Jim Mathis

INTEGRITY: THE ART OF BEING ONE, BEING WHOLE

It has some time since I wrote about integrity and its importance for the workplace. Integrity comes from the same root word as “integer” or “integral,” meaning one or whole. One way to describe a person with integrity is someone who is the same at all times. Oswald Chambers expressed it up well when he said, “Sincerity means that the appearance and the reality are exactly the same.”

The opposite of integrity would be “two-faced” or a hypocrite, an actor wearing a mask or playing a part. What you see is not necessarily what you get. We know this often exists in the realm of politics, but it also manifests itself in other areas of life, including the business and professional world, where people often do whatever is necessary to land a contract or close a sale. Even if this requires false representation.

Integrity has many aspects. Sincerity, as Chambers observed, is one element of it. So is honesty; but there are many more aspects to it. When I started my own business 44 years ago, the first thing I did was develop and print a price list. I wanted to charge everyone the same price for the same service or product, regardless of who they were. To me, consistent pricing is a basic part of integrity in business.

Another aspect is holding tightly to a moral code. In my seasonal role as a tax professional helping people to prepare their income taxes, we are held to a high standard. In fact, it is illegal to prepare, file, or sign a tax return if we suspect any part of it is not 100 percent accurate for any reason. If I suspect a

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client is not providing accurate income or expense information, I can refuse to do a return and have assurance that the company will back me up.

I know of many people that work for private or public organizations, or even government entities, who are asked to do things that are not in the best interests of their clients, customers, or public in general. Issues of this type seem to be in the news quite a bit. Personally, I would immediately resign from a job that insisted that I go against my integrity or character in any way.

We find the Bible placing much emphasis on the importance of integrity. The book of Proverbs alone presents numerous passages about virtues like integrity and honesty. Here are some examples:

The security of integrity. Living and working with integrity provide safeguards against consequences of acting wrongly. *“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out” (Proverbs 10:9). “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (Proverbs 11:3). “Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner” (Proverbs 13:6).*

The strong foundation of integrity. As a solid foundation stabilizes a house, integrity serves as a strong foundation for a business – and also for individual lives. *“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment” (Proverbs 12:19). “By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down” (Proverbs 29:4).*

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Each of us needs to lead examined lives – ones in which we are open and honest with ourselves, and others – and be conscious of how we want to act and what kind of legacy we want to leave. My goal is to be the same all the time, to present the same face to everyone in every situation: A person of integrity.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. How would you define integrity?
2. Can you think of a time when someone demonstrated great integrity even when circumstances could have dictated that they act differently?
3. What about a time when you observed someone who clearly lacked integrity: What were the circumstances? What was the outcome? What were your lasting impressions of this?
4. When it seems integrity offers so many benefits, including a clear conscience, why do you think the absence of integrity so often seems absent in today's workplace?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:1, 12:22, 13:17, 16:11, 19:5,9, 20:14,17,25, 21:6, 29:10

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