

Integrity, Ethics and Character

The Wholeness of an Individual

by Jon Craighead

Integrity is a state of being whole and complete with no missing parts. It's not about right or wrong, good or bad; rather it is a description of an individual or a system being able and reliable to fulfill a particular intent or commitment. Operating with integrity is about one's speaking and actions being unquestionable and leaving no task undone without being accountable for your promises. Integrity is a system of honor that formulates trusted agreements, which bring certainty to life.

Trust is a significant dimension of the integrity equation that's based on your word as your bond. Before we became a litigious society, a hand shake was a binding agreement that was accepted and honored as such. When people experience your word as bankable, they have confidence and a sense of certainty that promotes dependability and trustfulness. In his book [The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything](#), Stephen Covey affirms that once trust is broken it is rarely ever fully recovered. We live in a world of pass codes and alarm systems. Therefore it is incumbent on each of us to develop an increasingly higher level of personal integrity with the intent of instilling a greater foundation of trust in each other.

Ethics are moral principles that govern behavior. It is often the difference between what you have a right to do and what the right thing to do is. A primary responsibility of any business is to be profitable; otherwise it won't remain viable. However, when businesses are not operated ethically, they inevitably cause great harm to themselves and others.

Often ethics are viewed from an inward-focused perspective without regard or concern for the wellbeing of others. In 2007 such irresponsible behavior of a relatively few brought down a world economy, ruined pensions, and caused business failures and loss of jobs and homes, many of which have yet to be fully recovered. It wasn't just illegal actions but mostly corrupt manipulations of the rules and regulations solely for self-serving profitability. This left innocents to pay a high price for these misdeeds.

With today's complex business exchanges and interdisciplinary activities it is far too easy to be focused on one's personal perspective and less focused on the concerns of others. This circumstance necessitates an imaginative and effective monitoring of all interrelationships between businesses and individuals, insuring that best practices are applied.

Character is the integral and ethical quality that distinguishes a person or system. A personality alone can formulate ideas, but only character can achieve them. In his book [The Road to Character](#), David Brooks studies the role that character plays in our lives. Through a series of studies of noted people he concludes that wealth, fame and fortune often failed to provide lasting happiness. His thesis is that one's character is the pathway to fulfillment. He makes reference to the book [The Lonely Man of Faith](#) by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik to provide examples of opposing sides of human nature. One side desires immediate rewards and is always a leap ahead but rarely satisfied. Simultaneously, another side can regularly experience deep satisfaction. One aims for happiness as the end game; the other knows that happiness alone is insufficient. We see manifestations of this emptiness in individuals with an insatiable and unfulfilled craving for recognition which results in their disillusionment and alienation from others.

The essence of Brook's book is that, even with worldly abundance, when there is a lack of character people are rarely at peace with themselves. Therefore, the attainment of absolute fulfillment is unsustainable by acquiring goods and fame alone. It takes the fundamentals of Integrity, ethics and character to build a complete and balanced life.

Finally, as human beings there are those things we can't escape or have little control over, such as heritage, aging, disasters and weather. Then there are areas where we have absolute control, such as our reputation for reliability, honesty, and fairness – the fundamental essences of who we are. These aspects of our being are direct reflections of our lives and how we represent ourselves in the world. When your handshake is sufficient and you are known as someone who is trustworthy, then you are a person of character.