

## **Integrity: Living by your values**

The word *integrity* evolved from the Latin adjective *integer*, meaning *whole* or *complete*. It is defined as ‘an undivided or unbroken completeness’, or ‘a state of being complete or whole’.

When used to describe a person, it refers to the concept of living by one’s values and principles. In this sense, ‘completeness’ is a comprehensive framework of beliefs, moral principles, ethics and standards - a worldview - which guides every decision and action. Living with integrity means being true and authentic to our code of beliefs or worldview. It means that others can rely on us to act consistently and honestly, in accordance with this code.

To live with integrity requires us to have a clear understanding of what we want to achieve, and what we hold as most important, and to maintain harmony between these objectives and values, and our decisions and actions.

This commitment will be challenged, often. All of us are prone to act in the moment and to maximise short term benefits, to make choices based on emotion rather than rational consideration, to ignore little concerns when the overall proposition is attractive.

Living with integrity will often require us to choose the more difficult path, in the short-term, in order to get to where we really want to be in the longer term. We may have to turn down attractive opportunities because accepting them would compromise our values and principles. And we’ll very likely have to dig deep for the strength to stick to our code when under considerable family, work, societal or financial pressure to simply compromise.

As tempting as it might be to make small compromises here and there, we need to remember that these will often lead us into bigger compromises, that seemingly minor diversions will take us further from our goals, and the disconnection between who we are and who we want to be will be increasingly hard to fix.

*New York Times* writer David Brooks sums up the risks as follows:

*“If you live for external achievement, years pass and the deepest parts of you go unexplored and unstructured... It is easy to slip into a self-satisfied moral mediocrity. You grade yourself on a forgiving curve. You figure as long as you are not obviously hurting anybody and people seem to like you, you must be OK. But you live with an unconscious boredom, separated from the deepest meaning of life and the highest moral joys. Gradually, a humiliating gap opens between your actual self and your desired self, between you and those incandescent souls you sometimes meet.”*

Living with integrity doesn’t guarantee illumination, of course. But you’re certainly far more likely to feel passionate about your work, and to tackle challenges with energy and fortitude, if your actions are in line with your deepest-held values and beliefs, and your efforts are directed toward something you truly believe in.