

Authentic Leadership and Integrity

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

There is no real excellence in the world that can be separated from right living.

David Starr Jordan

Not long ago, I started coaching a senior executive who was recently promoted to lead a large office in his firm. He approached me for coaching to help him be accountable for living with greater integrity. When I asked him what this meant, he said:

"Reflecting on the leadership responsibility I now face made me take a careful inventory of my life. I realized that in my efforts to advance in the business, I have been neglecting my health, my spiritual life, and my relationships with my family. Because I lack the discipline to live a life aligned with what matters, I don't have the integrity, self-respect and credibility to influence people in the way I need to now. I want you to help hold me accountable for living in accord with my values."

This executive gets it: integrity means being an integrated human being, and from that integration comes self-respect, credibility, and the power of sustained leadership presence. You will never get this kind of power from your position or your title.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "A person cannot do right in one department of life while attempting to do wrong in another department. Life is one indivisible whole." A leader will never be able to have the strength to impact others if their life is fragmented or lacking wholeness. Integrity comes from the word "integer," which means wholeness, integration, and completeness. Great leadership cannot be reduced to technique; great leadership comes from the identity and integrity of the leader. This is why leadership is ultimately about *presence*, not position.

This executive's clarity, wisdom, and courage, reminds me of a story that illustrates the power of integrity in leadership. During the time Gandhi was in office, a troubled mother had a daughter who was addicted to sugar. One day she approached Gandhi, explaining the problem and asking if he would talk to the young girl. Gandhi replied, "Bring your daughter to me in three weeks' time and I will speak to her." After three weeks, the mother brought her daughter to Gandhi. He took the young girl aside and spoke to her about the harmful effects of eating sweets excessively and urged her to abandon her bad habit. The mother thanked Gandhi for this advice and then asked him, "But why didn't you speak to her three weeks ago?" Gandhi replied, "Because three weeks ago, I was still addicted to sweets."¹

With integrity comes a guarantee, the guarantee of *success beyond success*: the inner sense of peace, self-respect, and credibility that comes from acting in full alignment of one's values. There is no success without peace of mind, and there is no real credibility with others until we have credibility with one's self.

Here are three calls to action for you to consider:

1. What is *your* experience of the impact of integrity on leadership and its effect on your self-respect, credibility, and ability to influence others? Reflect on this statement: "Others will only be able to count on you to the degree that you can count on yourself."
2. Take an Integrity Assessment™: List your top five core values in order of priority. Then ask yourself how would you rate your life (on a scale from 1-10) in each of these areas. Finally, note where you are living your life in alignment with your values and where your life is out of alignment, and begin tracking the effect of both in your life.
3. Choose one area in your life that needs attention, and start following through on the promises you make, either to yourself or others. Notice the subsequent credibility that flows when you live with more integrity.

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. David is the best selling author of five books. His most recent book is *Bridges Of Trust: Making Accountability Authentic*. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact david@davidirvine.com or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).

¹ For a more detailed discussion about leadership and integrity, see David Irvine and Jim Reger's book, *The Authentic Leader: It's About PRESENCE, Not Position*, published by DC Press, 2006, pp. 127-133.