

Integrity & Relationships: Mantra for Success

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“The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible.”

-Dwight D. Eisenhower

Introduction

We are in a highly competitive economy with international mantra being cost, quality & service for success of any company. But given the important role today’s managers play in getting outstanding performance from their associates, the responsibility of directing the associates in desired direction and inspiring & motivating them assumes added importance. Then naturally a question arises as to what is that a manager or leader needs to do to succeed in corporate life. In other words, are there any traits/qualities one must imbibe/inculcate to succeed in life? In my view two qualities are of paramount importance for someone’s success namely *integrity & relationships*. Let’s briefly look at them, their importance & how they hold a person in high esteem.

Integrity & its Importance

Having honesty and integrity in the workplace is one of the most important qualities of great leadership in business. They are the foundations of leadership and leaders need to stand up for what they believe in. Jon Huntsman Sr, a multibillionaire from scratch, sharing his experiences in his book **Winners Never Cheat** says that integrity is the reason that he has been as successful as he is. According to him,

there are, basically **three kinds of people**, the unsuccessful, the temporarily successful, and those who become and remain successful. And the difference between them is character.”

Great Leaders Never Compromise

There is a saying that one can fool all sometimes, some all the times but not all the people all the times. We have seen many examples of temporary winners who won by cheating. For instance, Enron was cited as one of America’s most innovating and daring companies. And the CEO of the company knew the most important people in the country, including the President of the United States. But what happened in the end? Enron’s success was built on lies and the “winners” who headed the company are case studies in lack of integrity. Integrity means doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. And that’s what makes success.

What People with Integrity Do?

They keep their promises. Most importantly, they give promises carefully, sometimes reluctantly, but once given they follow through on that promise without fail. They always tell the truth and Jack Welch calls it “candor.” He believes that if you are afraid of candor, then you don’t have the guts to be an effective leader.

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You are going to surround yourself with yes people who will say what you want to hear instead of saying the truth.

Leaders with integrity *are not afraid to face the truth*. This is called the reality principle or “seeing the world as it really is, not as one wishes it to be.” Many companies and organizations fail because they don’t follow the reality principle.

Integrity: Top Leadership Attribute

According to a survey by **Robert Half Management Resources** (of over 1,000 office employees and more than 2,200 chief financial officers), a greater percentage of employees considered integrity as the top quality in an executive. David M. Long, Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Mason School of Business at the College of William & Mary says, there are just **three key pillars of a leader’s trustworthiness** - and **integrity is one of the three**. According to Long, followers determine how trustworthy a leader is based on their ability, their benevolence and their integrity.

The link between integrity and trust cannot be overestimated in the leader-employee relationship. At the end of the day, Long says executive leaders are judged on character and competence. For creating trust in his associates, a leader has to display trust in terms of his communication, ability to keep up the promises he made(contractual) and being able to guide & resolve issues if any of his associates(competency).

They lead from front

Leaders need to model and then actively, visibly, reinforce integrity for everyone in the organization. And this is true for executive leaders and leaders at every level of the

organization. Every leader must be responsible for modeling integrity, regardless of his job description or title. However, since executive leaders(Managers) are the most visible members of the organization and have the potential to cause the most reputational damage, it’s crucial for them to support compliance, accountability and ethical behavior. Needless to say, *“If they are modeling behavior that lacks integrity, what message is that they will be sending to their employees about what is acceptable behavior?”*

Are there any ways leaders can develop/display integrity? Yes. Here are the ***few ways one can develop and display integrity***.

- Be honest, and treat people well. Don’t exaggerate successes, and be quick to praise others’ contributions.
- Be accountable not only to your superiors but also to your peers and staff.
- Treat everyone fairly, regardless of one’s standing in the organization.
- Look for the attributes for which you admire others. If you are lacking in an area, work on them.
- Find out how others view you. This helps to improve yourself.
- Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable with your staff. If you make a mistake, say so and do all you can to fix it. Keep it in your mind that your employees don’t expect you to be perfect.

Another quality for success is building, nurturing & sustaining relationships.

Building Relationships

Jacob Moreno, one of the 20th century’s foremost advocates of human interaction, defined his fellow human beings as “relational

beings". The quality of relationships we build and foster matters much. And more so for Managers & Leaders. People are at the center of all leadership efforts & Leaders cannot lead unless they understand the people they are leading. One way to look at leadership is that the function of a leader is to lead and guide people who will follow with the same values. Thus, an effective leader must be able to build relationships. In both maintaining and strengthening relationships, it is important to value people for who they are. Ask questions, really listen, and develop a mutual commitment. Encouraging others to take a chance, going along with them even when you don't know what the outcomes will be, and having the courage to support their decisions, is something you can do to help lead.

Relationships define us, give us cause to live and help us become who we are meant to be. Sometime back we had been to tour of Andhra Pradesh & while driving to the resort, our car broke down and we were not able to move it. Within no time villagers came to our rescue, took us to their Sarpanch for resting. During the conversation, Village Sarpanch came to know that I taught his niece, who is in a good position in the corporate. Thereafter he took utmost care of us including assistance in getting the car repaired. So, whether it is in the context of an organization or in one's personal life, investment in relationships is like investing in an **'emotional bank.'** The army has a saying 'if you invest in people in peace time, you bleed less in war time.'

Fostering relationships

As existential philosophers say 'there is only one life that each of us has, and if I cannot or do not live it to its full, when I depart I would have left all those I could have impacted poorer.' A friend of mine shared his story with

me about his mother, who had passed away recently. He lost his father at an early age and not wanting to deprive her son of a decent education, his mother took up employment simultaneously in 4 homes where she would go to wash vessels, sweep and clean their floors. Through sheer hard work she could send her son first to school, later to college and finally to one of the country's best known institute of higher studies. When my friend was about 27 years old she even arranged his marriage with an equally successful woman. Soon, owing to the acquired wealth, the family settled into a wealthy residential locality.

My friend's mother passed away when he turned 60. At the condolence meeting he organized in memory of his mother were present families of her former employers. The number of families she had served in her life as a 'maid' exceeded 10 and they were all there. In his speech my friend said these words as an offering to his mother, "As I stand before you I feel a sense of sadness, for instead of parading my mother I have hidden her all these years. My mother toiled as a maid to feed and educate me but I neglected her. She often used to tell me that when she died she would ask God one question: 'Why oh! Lord, have you made so many religions? Would not just one have been enough to bind us to you?' Now my mother has passed away and what remains with me is her unfulfilled wish."

After the speech all of us left the hall with tears in our eyes. In life and in organizations we sometimes trample on people on our way up, even if we do it without awareness. Yet it is these same people that we meet as we spiral down. Hence it is very important to remember all those who have helped and supported us as we climb the ladder of success for when we

hurtle down they will be there to cradle and support us.

Let me share few tips which can help to preserve and enhance our relationships:

- Recognize that conflict is rooted in unmet needs.
- Make the first move. Don't wait for the other person.
- Restoring broken relationships is important.
- Sympathize with their feelings. Always begin with sympathy and not with solutions.
- Admit your mistakes. Confession is a powerful tool for reconciliation.
- Attack the problem not the person. Managers while sharing feedback shouldn't blame the person, but his that particular behavior.
- Emphasize reconciliation, not resolution.

Lastly, let me share a **Six World Relationship Model**, which will help us a lot in building, improving & sustaining our relationships:

Start saying, we instead of I.

Say **Thank you** when someone obliges /helps you.

While seeking favor/ help say **Could You Please.**

While offering help to your associates, not sounding to be Micro manager, say **May I help you.**

Appreciate good work by your people saying **You Did a Great Job.**

Admit, without any hesitation, your mistakes by saying **I admit that I did a mistake.**

Conclusion

Every Manager, leader wishes to succeed and to become an effective Manager/ leader, one must take note of the opportunities around him

and reach out to others. When you purposefully work towards building relationships and creating communities, you'll become an effective leader—both for yourself and for others. We can establish a relationship even if we are unable to resolve our differences. Sheryl Sandberg, in her phenomenal book '**Option B**' says 'death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship. 'And coming to the importance of character/integrity, it can only be said that if money is lost nothing is lost as always one can earn; if health is lost something is lost as one can't recoup completely but if character is lost everything is lost. Rajat Gupta was the first Indian to head the consultancy firm Mckinsey & Company globally. He served on the boards of Goldman Sachs & Proctor & Gamble and was an adviser to non-profits such as the Bill & Melinda Foundation and cofounded the Indian School of Business. But his glittering career collapsed after he was convicted on charges of insider trading in collusion with billionaire hedge fund manager Rajaratnam. This should be an eye opener for the youngsters for not deviating from the right path while moving ahead in their career path.

Dharmo Rakshathi Rakshitaha

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