



Leadership Essentials

Integrity

Authentic leaders know their inner values and act in accordance with them



“The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.” Dwight D. Eisenhower, American army general and statesman who served as the 34th president of the United States from 1953 to 1961.

Integrity is associated with other words such as ‘honest’, ‘decent’, ‘ethical’ and ‘moral’. Leaders with integrity bring their values into the workplace and into their relationships with their employees and other stakeholders.

If you have integrity, you are **congruent**, that is, your actions do not contradict your values. You ‘walk the talk’. You do not say one thing with your words and another with your body language or actions.

You cannot be an authentic leader without having a clear understanding of your own values, or without acting in accordance with them and keeping your promises. Please refer to “Leadership Essentials No. 6 Aligning Values” for further information.

Personal Mission Statements

1	What are you proud of in your life, and what is important to you? What successes have you had that seem really meaningful to you?
2	When people talk about you in the future, what would you like them to say about you? Include the behaviours, personality traits and values you’d like to be admired for.
3	Who do you admire, and what do you admire them for?
4	Identify your goals in life, things you would be proud of achieving, and perhaps also things that you think could make the world a better place. (At the very least ensure your plans will not be disadvantaging anyone else!)

Writing a ‘personal mission statement’ gives you something to return to when work throws you off balance, or you have a difficult decision to make. Repeat it to yourself often enough, and it will soon become so much a part of you that you will stick to it without having to think about it. Your team and other stakeholders at work will soon get to know that they can trust you to do what you think is right.

There are a few simple steps to take in writing a personal mission statement, which mainly involve you asking and answering certain questions about yourself.

A typical personal mission statement is two or three sentences and often follows a pattern like the following:

“I value ...[choose one to three values or beliefs]... **because** ...[reasons why these values and beliefs are important to you]. **So, at work and in the rest of my life, I will** ...[what you can do to live by these values and beliefs].”

This pattern is only a guide. Oprah Winfrey, the world renowned TV host and actress, originally wrote her personal mission statement as **“To be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be.” Winfrey (2009)**

Remember your personal mission statement is not set in stone. It will change and evolve as you do.

Walking the Talk

Walking the talk means doing what you said you could do, or would do, not just making empty promises. It’s an important part of having integrity.

It is also necessary to be consistent; nothing will alienate your staff, your colleagues and other stakeholders more than leaders who preach their values to their employees and then fail to live up to them.

Remember also that many people will stop trusting leaders whose personal lives fail to live up to the values those leaders claim for themselves, however much they walk the talk at work. Employees who do not trust you will not do their best work for you.

Moral Courage

Of course, it might be that you personally have values that the majority of people would disapprove of, or dislike. If we just define integrity as ‘acting according to your values’ then Hitler had integrity! This is why part of creating your personal mission statement involves ensuring that by following your values you will do no harm.

Sometimes, moral integrity requires courage. It means doing the right thing even at the risk of inconvenience, ridicule, punishment, loss of job or security or social status. Sometimes **not doing the right thing** may not lead to serious consequences. But usually **not doing the right thing** means that you are actually **doing the wrong thing**, and even something that seems relatively unimportant can escalate.

Letting a team member or a colleague get away with banter that is disrespectful or offensive to women, to a particular ethnicity, to a disabled person, for example, can escalate into a more significant issue. Moral courage means calling it out as wrong immediately, and in public, otherwise you are giving tacit permission for insensitivity and prejudice to carry on.

Blanchard (2013) cited six principles which will boost your moral integrity.

1	Keep confidences
2	Admit when you’re wrong
3	Be sincere
4	Avoid talking behind people’s backs
5	Be non-judgemental, but do be discerning (e.g. Don’t say bluntly to someone “You’re wrong”, but do say “These are the problems with that approach”. Don’t say “You did a bad thing” but do say “These are the consequences of your actions”)
6	Show respect for others

Office politics is all about jostling for power within the organisation, and power can be achieved with or without getting promoted! In fact, it is well known in many organisations that someone like the office receptionist can be quite a powerful person in the organisation, either because of what they know about people, or through their role as ‘gatekeeper’.

Although most people say they don’t get involved in office politics, or don’t want to, such politics will always be there and, as a leader you do have to learn to handle that with moral integrity. Blanchard’s six principles will help you with this.

Furthermore, never forget that your own behaviour sets the tone for your team, who will do as you do, not as you say!

Integrity Top Tips

- Clarify your values for yourself
- Draw up a personal mission statement based on your values and doing no harm to anyone else
- Link those values to how you behave at work. Walk the talk
- Be courageous. Step up to the mark, and always do the right thing
- Avoid the worst aspects of office politics by following Blanchard's six principles

References

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