

## Taking The Lead: Leading with Integrity

### What's in a Word

*Wikipedia opens its discussion of “integrity” as follows: Integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards.*

*In ethics, integrity is regarded by many people as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one’s actions.... The word “integrity” evolved from the Latin adjective “integer,” meaning “whole” or “complete.” In this context, integrity is the inner sense of “wholeness” deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. As such, one may judge that others “have integrity” to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold.*



by Karen MacKay, MBA, CHIC  
President



Merriam-Webster online further clarifies and differentiates a number of words associated with the concept of integrity:

*Honesty, honor, integrity, [and] probity mean uprightness of character or action. Honesty implies a refusal to lie, steal, or deceive in any way. Honor suggests an active or anxious regard for the standards of one’s profession, calling, or position. Integrity implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge. Probity implies tried and proven honesty or integrity.*

### Why This? Why Now?

You might ask, Why do I bring this up? Globally, we live in a world of political, economic and environmental uncertainty. Within this context integrity is more important than ever. Integrity is the foundation of earning trust. It is critical to earning respect and necessary at all levels in your firm if you are to succeed now and in the future.

If having integrity is about acting in accordance with your values, beliefs and principles, what are they? Can you articulate your values clearly? When was the last time you explored the values of your firm?

If having integrity is consistency of character or uprightness of character, what are the questions you can ask the person in the mirror? In 2006 Stephen M. R. Covey published *The Speed of Trust* in which he identified the behaviors of trusted leaders. Character behaviors Covey identified are these:

- Talking straight.
- Demonstrating respect.
- Creating transparency.
- Righting wrongs.
- Showing loyalty.

Under pressure and change, character can be tested. In times of stress it can be difficult to talk straight because straight talk can lead to conflict, and many of us are not comfortable with conflict. Advocating for clients is one thing; conflict with our partners is quite another. How do you behave under pressure?

Transparency is necessary for partners to make informed decisions. Transparency can be time-consuming but, without it, trust erodes.

Righting wrongs often means we park our egos at the door, confront and own our mistakes and take responsibility for them. Without these critical steps, ego rules the day and a firm is destined for mediocrity. To right wrongs, you have to own them without casting blame or calling them fake news. When was the last time you acknowledged a mistake, owned it and took public steps to right the situation?

### **Integrity within the Practice**

Integrity and honor suggest an active regard for the standards of one's profession. One can practice in ways that are efficient and at the highest of professional standards—it's not an either/or situation. Change requires more conscious effort and will require more energy but quality cannot slip because the cost structure has changed.

If you're not moving forward, you're falling behind. There is no standing still. Moving forward is about continually developing your skills and getting better at your craft. In mentoring your associate talent, it's about being available and accessible. It's about clarifying expectations and giving honest, timely and actionable feedback. It's about working as a team to deliver results for your clients and for your firm. Integrity occurs when both the client and the firm are well served by your efforts.

**If you're not moving forward, you're falling behind. There is no standing still.**

Moving forward is also about confronting the realities that are impacting your practice and embracing change. Embracing change requires openness with clients and a keen interest in their business realities. When you take the time to listen and not sell, you can work with your clients to develop solutions that are relevant to them. Embracing change will be the difference between winners and losers — be they individuals, groups or the firm as a whole.

### **Grace under Pressure**

Leaders with integrity have the moral courage to present a compelling vision of the future and a road map to get there. These leaders have the unique ability to facilitate a conversation within their firms and pinpoint the steps required.

For these leaders, there are no sacred cows in their firm first mission. They are also compassionate supporters of their colleagues and empathetic believers in the ability of smart, capable professionals to change. Resistance to this level of leadership is futile.



This article originally appeared in the May/June 2017 edition of [Law Practice](#) magazine, a publication of the [American Bar Association](#). Copyright © Phoenix Legal

[Print PDF Version](#)