



# Act with integrity

*Be consistent in living up to your promises*

**ONCE UPON A TIME**, there was a country where courageous leaders acted with integrity in the best interest of their citizens. Once upon a time, there was a country that became a beacon of light for our world, extending its reach to help other countries in distress.

Once upon a time, there were leaders in corporations who aspired to make a differ-

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*"The supreme quality of leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is... on a football field, in an army or in an office."*

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

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ence in our world as well as make a profit for themselves.

Once upon a time...

Today, we are bombarded with one story after another about leaders who have forfeited their integrity for personal gain. The stories erode our faith and confidence in our leaders while at the same time, slowly normalizing destructive behaviors.

We are living during a time when we justify the behavior of leaders who lie and leaders who use their position of power to advance their personal agendas, often at the expense of others, suggesting that their words don't matter.

It is what they do.

Even as we witness the repeated distortion at the highest levels in our valued institutions,

there are leaders who give us reason to hope.

I am coaching a senior leader in a large Milwaukee corporation. I have had the privilege of coaching Diane for a number of months. The company has been going through rapid change initiatives and Diane's job is impacted, as are the jobs of hundreds of employees. The organizational structure has changed, new players have been hired and some employees have been let go.

Diane is now leading a new team. Tom, an employee Diane recruited to join the company and work on her team, is now without a job as a result of the organizational changes. He has responded to two job postings within the company. One is in Diane's new area, and one is in an area led by Diane's peer, who is actively competing for Tom.

While Diane would love to have Tom work in her new area, she believes it is in the best interest of Tom and the company for him to select the job with Diane's peer.

With her integrity intact and courage embraced, Diane met with her boss to share her beliefs. She set aside her own self-interest for the sake of the company. She set aside her self-interest because she believes that Tom has more to offer and more to learn by working in another area.

Diane's decision to quietly give voice to her belief was not an easy one. She is confident that her own team and her personal success would be enhanced by Tom's work with her. Yet she believes that his work with her peer's team will provide even more overall impact for the company.

So how does one decide to do what is in the best interest of the other or the company?

At the Center for Ethical Leadership, "Researchers suggest that one way we recognize integrity is when we see a person act in ways that are consistent with his or her promises. That means that integrity is not a single action, but a series of actions, a reputation for consistency that builds slowly over time. And

this insight helps us see integrity as something within reach by seeking small wins in our everyday encounters with others."

This definition is consistent with the feedback about Diane that I received from her leaders, peers and direct reports before we began our coaching engagement. The statements that colleagues used repeatedly to describe Diane's leadership were: "You can count on her to do what she says she will do." "Diane is thoughtful and strategic in her decision-making, always considering what is in the best interest of the company, stakeholders and employees."

I have witnessed Diane's confidence and influence growing. She is demonstrating to others the power of integrity and courage. Others are noticing. Others are joining.

In the not-too-distant future, I hope that someone will write: "The time has come: leaders are leading with integrity and courage." And our organizations, communities and our world will respond with gratitude.

Will you be a part of this new story? ■



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