

Who Are You When No One Is Watching?

In the building trades, integrity refers to the integration of the bricks, mortar, foundation, interlocking pieces and strength of materials. A building has integrity when it does not require propping up. It can weather almost any storm because it was built properly. Integrity in humans refers to how our personal life system is set up. It's our standards, our morals, and our personal ethical code. It's the rules we live by.

Like every building, every person has different integrity. Some people have set standards they adhere to without question. Others choose what they will do as the situation arises. Its called situational ethics. Either way, if we have low standards or low integrity, we spend much of our time propping ourselves up. This drains our energy and distracts us from more important things. When it comes to integrity, we all have to decide what works for us. And you never know when your integrity will be put to the test. It happened to me recently.

A friend asked if I would do a favor for her. She needed people to interview for a research survey. I said sure. After answering the questions, she told me I had to say I was between 30

and 40 years old when her client called to validate the information. She asked, "Was I O.K. with that?" I hesitated and said yes, because I didn't want to disappoint my friend. And I thought how important is this? Does it matter if I lie? I thought about it all day. It really bothered me. I was very uncomfortable, because I knew I was going to have to lie. And I didn't want to. I finally called back and requested that she disregard my interview.

I mentioned this situation to a friend, who said, "What's the big deal? It's not hurting anyone." Perhaps to my friend it wasn't a big deal, but to me it was. Being dishonest goes against my standards. And although no one else would have known that I lied, I would have known. I am the one who has to live with myself if I lie. When I am honest and above board, I am "in integrity." I have feelings of peace and well-being. When I'm "out of integrity," I lose those good feelings about myself. And I spend a lot of time propping myself up, so I can feel good again.

A Catholic friend of mine doesn't have to worry about her integrity. She's very clear about what's

right and wrong for her. She told me if she gets extra change at the supermarket she immediately returns it because it is stealing to keep it. If she didn't return it, she would have to go to confession and tell the priest that she stole money. Would you consider that stealing? Or would you think you got lucky? Would it be okay for you to keep it because it was a mistake? Would you rationalize that you didn't need to return it because the grocery store makes enough money? Whatever you would do, would you know whether your actions were in integrity for you?

My mother always said some things were "white lies." Is there such a thing? Is a lie a lie? If someone asks your opinion and you don't want to hurt his or her feelings, but you want to be honest what do you do? Is it okay to steal from big business because, "it won't hurt anyone?" Are you spending time with friends that you don't want to be with? Are you taking envelopes or office supplies home from your workplace? Are you misrepresenting yourself? Did you exaggerate on your resume? Are you giving an honest day's work or are you spending time on personal things when no one is around? If you're doing things

that are out of integrity for you, you may think you're not hurting anyone. But you're wrong. You're hurting yourself.

To be your best you must be responsible for all your actions, all the time. You must be true to your own standards. Of course, it's easier to be honest when someone is watching you—you have to be. But true integrity is being honest when you're the only one who knows what you're doing. Who are you when no one is watching?

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