



President's Reflections

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Integrity – “doing the right thing when no one is watching”*

As my children reach particular milestones and passages in their lives, I try and seize the opportunity to reflect with them about their recent experiences. My daughter will be graduating from college in May and has had many and varied experiences with numerous organizations because of her work with non-profit organizations. Not all of the experiences were pleasant and she was somewhat dismayed at what she considered to be a lack of integrity or character on the part of some individuals she came across.

I tried to help her sort out some of her feelings and concerns when dealing with integrity issues. I know that sometimes her strong feeling of empathy for those in difficult circumstances further heightens her reaction to integrity issues. I encouraged her to reflect on what integrity really means and how she could use this reflection to improve her life.

The development of character and integrity is an inside job for all of us. One of the difficulties with integrity issues is that people tend to look outside themselves to blame, rationalize or explain any problems, difficulties or deficiencies in character. The answer really lies within you and your reaction to life's issues. It is developed and polished daily by our reaction to life's experiences; much like a sculptor molds and develops his or her masterpiece, we develop and shape our integrity.

1. Integrity is not determined by our circumstances or our environment. We make choices, good and bad, all on our own. Those choices we make determine our character not our environment or our upbringing. Our circumstances are as responsible for our character as a mirror is for your looks. Who you see only reflects who you are. Sometimes we are ashamed to look in the mirror and see who is looking back at us when we are really looking beyond the reflection and into our own character. (This is a good “reflective” practice in looking beyond the image in the mirror.)
2. Integrity is not based on credentials. We often see politicians with incredible resumes but the depth and circumstances that led them to those credentials are suspect and even deplorable when explored. We need to be introspective when examining integrity or character issues.
3. Integrity is not to be confused with reputation. While a good reputation is valuable, it only exists as a reflection of an individual's character. If a good reputation is like gold, then having integrity is like having the gold mine.

If you know what you stand for and act accordingly, people will trust you. You are a model of the character and consistency that other people admire and want to emulate. It will make the difference in all your relationships with others. It means that you have learned to do the right thing when no one is watching and that makes all the difference.

**Integrity and character are used interchangeably throughout this reflection.*