

Relationships – Integrity

By Andrew Fuller, John Hendry & Neil Hawkes

The third quality in the Relationship Quotient (RQ) that creates quality relationships is integrity. The establishment of trust builds relationships, the way mistakes are forgiven cements it and when people act with integrity they build new pathways.



Wisdom is knowing what path to take, integrity is taking it.

Integrity essentially is being who we say we are and doing what we say we will do. It is about being authentic.

People seek out integrity. They want ideas, people and actions on which they can meaningfully rely. They want to relate to people they can believe in. Integrity is the quality that answers the question, "can I rely on you to do the right thing?"

People also want to act with integrity and often feel ashamed when their actions don't match their words or ideals. The times when we lose integrity are often the times that haunt us later on with regrets. Pausing to think before taking an action helps us to maintain our integrity.

Reputations are often ruined when people lose integrity by not acting honestly in accordance with their expressed beliefs.

In relationships, integrity means that each person gives by behaving morally. When mistakes are made these are acknowledged and accepted and the people involved move to repair the relationship through forgiveness.

Integrity is important because it is understood that the intention of each person is to do the right thing. When integrity is lost, trust is broken. It is replaced by suspicion, wariness and anxiety. These are the signs of fear. There are times in all our lives when fear is an ally. It can save our lives. However when it dominates in a relationship fear saps trust and confidence.

Guarded, distant or distrustful relationships bring us no joy or nourishment. These are relationships that either need to be changed or left.

Upstanders and Bystanders

Having integrity is not walking past when things are wrong. We don't allow people to be mistreated or bullied. It involves standing up for what we believe in and acting in accordance with those beliefs, even when it is difficult to do so. We do not stand by.

Acting with integrity is doing what we can within our power to stop people being hurt without doing harm yourself. If we do not have sufficient power, we notify those who do have the power to stop people being hurt. When we have integrity we show leadership and true friendship.

Integrity and Bullying

Bullying is always a dislocation of relationships. What it takes for bullying to stop and for relationships to be reconnected is integrity. This is where people become upstanders and treat other people in the way they would like to be treated and are willing to stop cruelty and bullying where it occurs.

Organisational cultures based on integrity, connection and empowerment will lessen bullying. To remove bullying we need to help organisations to shift from punishment to focusing on relationships and forgiveness.

Punishment does not improve behaviour. Punishment consolidates toxic behaviours and shame. Instead we develop forgiveness and integrity as ways to strengthen upstanding and relationships.

People who are punished or blamed may be regretful in the short term but eventually they feel shame. Shame is toxic. It also amplifies and becomes more poisonous with repeated shaming. The next time a shamed person feels threatened or challenged, their level of shame makes them more likely to revert and retaliate or attack.

In that moment they react. There is no time to consider consequences. In fact the punishments they may have received in the past make them more likely to see retaliation as the only viable response to feeling threatened.

This is why punishment and deterrence do not change behaviour.

If people bully other people we need to give them a powerful message that "It is wrong. No one should be harmed, shamed or bullied. That includes you. No one, including you, needs to do this. You are better than this".

Integrity and Leadership

Integrity calls us to be upstanders rather than bystanders, to act rather than to stand by. Integrity creates leadership. When combined with trust, forgiveness, hope and compassion, integrity creates powerful leadership and the confidence to lead and to be led.

When we act with integrity we get to know the best of ourselves. Johann van Goethe once said:

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of being".

This is true and it is also true that when we seek out the best person that we could become, we help ourselves to be that person.

Most acts of great heroism and integrity don't occur because of an appraisal that the risks are low or that now is an opportune moment. Most acts of integrity occur because the person thought to themselves this is the right thing to do.

You are empowered not because of circumstances but because you have become acquainted with that part of yourself that can act to make a difference in the world, to do what is right.

When we lose integrity and act in ways that do not reflect the best of ourselves we tend to rationalise and justify our actions. We might publicly appear to defend our actions but secretly we feel disappointed in ourselves. We then have a choice to either continue to defend our actions or blame others or circumstances or to return to acting with integrity, to doing the right thing.

People not only want to be inspired by the integrity they see in leaders, they want to be inspired by the leadership they begin to see in themselves.

The way to do this is to bring the values in the Relationship Quotient (RQ) to the forefront of our thinking. This enables us to apply the wisdom cycle to our lives: think, reflect and then if appropriate to do so, act.