



## Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

### Episode 8 Transcript

#### *The Truth About Honesty and Integrity*

Over the past decade, I have asked thousands of the professional leaders I've worked with the following question: How many of you believe *honesty* and *integrity* in the workplace are the same thing? Without fail, an overwhelming majority of respondents quickly acknowledge their belief that the two concepts are essentially one and the same. But are they really? If we were to depend solely on the definitions offered in Mr. Webster's dictionary, one might assume so.

**Honesty:** a: Fairness and straightforwardness of conduct, b: adherence to the facts. Honesty implies a refusal to lie, steal, or deceive in any way. **Synonym:** integrity

**Integrity:** a: An unimpaired condition, b: firm adherence to a code of moral or artistic values. Integrity implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility or pledge. **Synonym:** honesty.

These definitions, though lacking in practical application, would lead most of us to believe that by being *honest*, we are also acting in an *integrity*-based manner. But, the truly good leaders have learned that assumptions need verification before action is taken. Though closely related – even first cousins in a vocabulary sense – I suggest there exists a significant difference between honesty and integrity of which every leader should be aware.

If honesty is a simple adherence to the facts, then we might think of it as the Joe Friday Approach: *"The facts ma'am, nothing but the facts."* However, when dealing solely in facts, too often we overlook the potential, long term impact the unvarnished acknowledgement of those facts might have on our followers. Assume for a moment that one of your followers calls you over to his work area. As you approach, he excitedly thrusts a fist full of pictures at you while exclaiming, "This is my new baby/grandbaby. Isn't she beautiful?!" As you look over the photos, the honest truth becomes painfully evident. This is the single ugliest baby you have ever seen! Now what? Will you be completely *honest* (straightforward; adhering to the facts) in your response to your employee's question? Or is there another more appropriate option to be considered?

Consider this offering from Van Hooser's ever growing leadership dictionary: *Integrity: Doing the right thing, because it's the right thing to do. Never because it's the easy, popular, or politically correct thing to do. Always because it's the right thing to do.* In the illustration above, a thoughtful, compassionate leader would

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pause to consider carefully the potential negative impact of any totally honest response before offering one. Instead of calling attention to the child's lack of attractiveness (in his/her eyes), the leader might opt for the following encouraging response. "The innocence and potential of a baby is always beautiful to me." The chances are good that the proud relative will walk away happy because of the wisdom shown by his leader. In other words, the leader did the right thing.

As leaders, we need to handle those situations which call for brutal honesty ever so carefully. Too often, a few careless words, pronounced with apparent indifference, at an inappropriate time or place, can mark the fault line in an otherwise promising relationship between leader and follower. Each of us needs to carefully weigh the right thing to say and do. Why? Because it's a good policy. Honest!