



Is Integrity Under-Rated?

I would like to return to one of my favourite topics. I visited the concept of integrity back in February 2011 and I touched on it in May 2012 in the context of business culture. The prompt for this piece is the stark juxtaposition between the frequency with which I hear “integrity” being quoted as an important value and the frequency with which “integrity” has failed dismally in reality (eg Barclays UK; Reserve Bank).

My theory is that everyone nods enthusiastically when the question of integrity arises – but rarely is it given serious thought. Perhaps it is too provocative to ask the question? Well, I’m going to take the risk and invite you to review how integrity plays out in your business. These scenarios may appear trivial but what I do know is that how people behave in apparently minor situations provides great insight into how they behave in more material situations....

1. How often do you think “something” about a client and not actually tell them? Eg They are spending too much; Their goals are unrealistic; They are not taking your advice; They don’t respect your junior staff.

If you need help with this question, ask your team what you said immediately after the meeting in respect of a few representative clients.

2. How often do you say one thing to your clients and actually do something else? Eg “I am available for all of my clients”; “Everyone receives a face-to-face review at least once each year”; “All our fees are transparent”.

If you need help with this question, invite a new team member to review your website and brochures to check for gaps with their observations.

3. How often do you make excuses or blame others? Eg “Sorry I’m late but the traffic was bad...” – when it was poor planning; “Tell them I’m in a meeting” – when you’re not. “It’s still with the underwriters” – when you had sat on it.

If you need help with this question, ask someone you trust about the frequency of your excuses.

4. How often do you say one thing to one person and something completely different to another person? Eg “ You have a great future with this business” v “She may not be up to an advice role”; “We enjoy working with you” v “They are a pain in the bum”; “We will certainly be happy to refer our clients to you” v “I’m not sure those lawyers really know their stuff”.



If you need help with this question, sorry, I don't think anyone else can help you. It's up to you to honestly reflect on the consistency of your messages.

If you're still not confident about your self-assessment, you may obtain some clues in the behaviour of your team. If you complain about what they say or do (or don't say or do) it may be that you are their role model.

It is at about this time that readers may fall into one of four groups:

"I'm confident in my own integrity and that of my team" – Congratulations, well done, it may not be as common as you think.

"Hmmm, there are a few things to think about there" – I think so too and the good news is that you can improve with some care and attention.

"I'm not worried, she'll be right, we're honest when it counts" - Good luck with that.

"Who do you think you are you to question my integrity?" – Sorry, I apologise, I'm out of line. I'm not perfect and I've still got some work to do.

These are the best of times to heighten your awareness of the many little challenges to the critical value of integrity – before it is seriously questioned.