

## Does Integrity Exclude Bad Behavior?

How many of my readers have value statements for their organization, claiming “Integrity” as one of its characteristics? What does integrity mean to you and how do you want your clients to perceive integrity as an expression of your brand experience?

Wikipedia describes integrity as *a concept regarding perceived consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes*. The more colloquial definition is that stakeholders want to see you walk your talk. Instead of identifying integrity with lofty ideals, it’s actually rather down-to-earth. Let me give you an example: “*This call may be monitored or recorded for quality purposes. Your call is very important to us so please stay on the line.*” Okay, they say you are important and they seem to care about the quality of their level of service but how long do you need to wait, can you actually speak to a human being and do you get your question answered or your problem solved to your satisfaction?

Having integrity implies that what you get is what they mean to give you; the amount of money, time, effort and care they are willing to invest in serving you as a customer. Why do we as consumers need to jump through hoops in order to get a rebate? If they mean to give us a discount than why don’t they just do that? Instead, they count on a certain percentage of people to forget or not wanting to bother mailing in coupons and barcodes. Think how much it must cost to administer such a program!

Integrity goes to the core of strategic planning and branding. In building your organization you want to start with the end in mind. On an **operational** level the services provided to clients must support the objectives on the **tactical** level and in turn, these processes must support the objectives and goals on the **strategic** level. The strategic plan must be a reflection of the mission statement, the vision statement and ultimately of the purpose. That’s what integrity means, *perceived consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes*.

Consequently, integrity is not a judgment call; approving or condemning a certain type of behavior. It simply is a measurement of congruency. So, if you only care about money and your behavior shows a tenacious determination to achieve your goal whatever it takes, by hook or by crook, you still act in integrity and you are even successful! The real issue surrounding the discussion about integrity is not so much your demonstrated behavior as it is your choice of purpose; how you want to contribute to the world. Do you want to rise to significance through violence, crime or fraud or by improving quality of life through your own creativity and ingenuity? As you give so you receive!

