Executive Insights on Leader Integrity: The Credibility Challenge

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Abstract
Both anecdotal and empirical evidence points to the clear connection between leaders’ integrity and organizational success. However, numerous studies that address integrity demonstrate the confusion surrounding the many facets of that concept. Palanski and Yammarino, for instance, surveyed considerable literature and concluded: “Everyone seems to want integrity from their leaders, but … there appears to be great confusion about what it is or how to foster it.”1 They point out that progress in understanding how to promote leader integrity has been hindered by “too many definitions, too little theory, and too few rigorous studies.”2 They illustrate no fewer than ten distinct meanings that have been ascribed to the word “integrity,” and then propose a solution to best advance our practical and theoretical understanding of this important leader characteristic. They suggest that we consider integrity as alignment between words and actions—that is, promise-keeping and enactment of espoused values. This notion of integrity is one of an “adjunctive virtue,” one that, like courage, is not inherently morally good or bad. To take a negative example, one can show integrity by promising great harm and then delivering on that promise. However, like courage, integrity is necessary for the achievement of “moral uprightness,” which is why we usually think of these two attributes in a positive way.

Keywords
leadership, integrity, role models, accountability

Disciplines
Hospitality Administration and Management | Leadership Studies

Comments
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of leader integrity cannot be overstated, given the clear benefits of integrity for a company and its employees. It can be challenging for a leader to be viewed as having high integrity, however, in part because observers differ in their definitions and understandings of integrity. In this report, five hospitality industry leaders explain experiences of leader integrity that help us better understand this critical leadership attribute. At root, integrity means that organization members can always count on a leader to enunciate planned actions and then fulfill those promises. Taking this another step farther, however, integrity stretches throughout the organization in the form of demonstrated leadership trust in all participants. Other elements include appropriate sharing of information throughout the organization and clearly setting an example for all participants. The report includes observations by Kurt Schnaubelt of Alix Partners, John Longstreet of Hospitality Leaders Group, Michele Sarkisian of P3 Advisors, Heather Allen of the WOW Factor, and Charles Feltman of Insight Coaching.
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Both anecdotal and empirical evidence points to the clear connection between leaders’ integrity and organizational success. However, numerous studies that address integrity demonstrate the confusion surrounding the many facets of that concept. Palanski and Yammarino, for instance, surveyed considerable literature and concluded: “Everyone seems to want integrity from their leaders, but…there appears to be great confusion about what it is or how to foster it.”1 They point out that progress in understanding how to promote leader integrity has been hindered by “too many definitions, too little theory, and too few rigorous studies.”2


**2 Ibid.**

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**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Tony Simons**, Ph.D., is an associate professor of management and organizational behavior at the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration. His research focuses on trust, credibility, integrity, and conflict in executive groups and between employees and management. He speaks, trains, consults, and designs surveys for organizations both within and beyond the hospitality industry. The author of numerous articles on corporate integrity, he is the author of The Integrity Dividend: Leading by the Power of Your Word (tony.simons@cornell.edu).

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**John Longstreet** is president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging Association, and a principal with Hospitality Leaders Group. A graduate of the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration, he has been CEO of Quaker Steak & Lube, executive vice president of ClubCorp USA, senior vice president at Bristol Hotels & Resorts, and vice president of InterContinental Hotels Group. (jlongstreet@HLGAdvisors.com).

**Michele Sarkisian** is president of P3 Advisors, a company she founded after spending nearly 30 years helping dozens of Fortune 500 companies design and implement strategies to acquire, engage, and retain all critical stakeholders to profitably grow business. Her approach is to apply current human sciences insights to sales improvement, employee engagement, and consumer loyalty initiatives so that clients get the best return for their sales and marketing or human resources spending. As an experienced industry veteran, Michele personally consults on all P3Advisors business and each client starts with her personal attention. She is a research fellow of the Center for Hospitality Research (michelesarkisian@p3advisors.biz).

**Heather Allen** is founder and principal of the WOW Factor, which provides coaching, strategy, conflict resolution, and leadership consulting to a wide list of clients, with special expertise in fire services. A member of Mensa, she is trained in group dynamics and is a specialist in group behavior and personal development. Trained and qualified as a nurse, she has worked as a residential social worker and was a research assistant for The Integrity Dividend (heather@thewowfactorltd.com).

**Charles Feltman** is founder and owner of Insight Coaching, where he coaches executives and managers in several areas, including leadership development and presence, effective team leadership, strategic planning, and conflict management. His professional experience includes top level management in the high-tech industry and higher education management. A graduate of the University of California Santa Cruz, he holds a master’s degree from the University of Southern California (cfeltman@insightcoaching.com).
Leader behavioral integrity has been linked to employee satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and fairness perceptions.

As Palanski and Yammarino note, their definition is similar to one I proposed in a 2002 paper to describe the concept of "behavioral integrity." The key difference is that I posited that actual alignment or follow-through is critically important, and further that this alignment must be perceived by others if it is to influence a manager's interpersonal and leadership effectiveness.

This difference means that the leader's integrity challenge is not only to live by one's word, which is clearly hard work, but also to communicate effectively enough that others see him or her in that way, which makes the leadership task harder still.

This paper seeks to illuminate the dimensions of integrity through anecdotes and observations of five business leaders. As a starting point for the discussion, I shared with them copies of my book, The Integrity Divided, which outlines the value of integrity and begins to point to the key elements of integrity.

The behavioral integrity concept has given rise to dozens of studies which I have reviewed and analyzed that have been able to integrate word–action alignment into a web of attitudinal and performance outcomes, personal and situational drivers, and contextual factors that say when this alignment is more important and when less so.

Outcomes. Leader behavioral integrity has been linked to employee satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and fairness perceptions, while the lack of integrity is linked to follower cynicism, burnout, and stress levels. Several studies have also found that leader integrity improves followers' performance.

The five essays that follow begin to address some of these questions. These top consultants' comments offer practical insights and several ideas for future research. As mentioned above, we used my 2008 book on the integrity dividend as a starting point for the discussion.

The Nitty Gritty of Integrity Kurt Schnaubelt

Reading through Tony's book was a bit like a walk down memory lane. I have experienced many of the ups and downs Tony and his contributors mentioned. In fact, I found myself looking critically at my career with that familiar feeling of growth—learning from mistakes and getting better, which is both painful and necessary.

The Young and Restless...But Organized: The Day-Timer Story

Following through on your promises is often not the hard part of integrity. Sometimes, the hardest part is to remember which promises you made in the first place. Fresh out of college, I was obsessive about keeping track of what I needed to do, an obsession which led me to use a Day-Timer planner calendar. Following through on your promises is often not the hard part of integrity. Sometimes, the hardest part is to remember which promises you made in the first place. Fresh out of college, I was obsessive about keeping track of what I needed to do, an obsession which led me to use a Day-Timer planner calendar. That Chili's franchise group as a restaurant manager. This was a dynamic and exciting time with an excellent group of new executives and district managers. I had just finished an intensive 15-week training program and was assigned to one of the Providence-area restaurants. The GM was talented but burned out, the two assistant managers were looking for jobs and had run out of "give a damn." Of course, the cooks, servers, and bartenders were simply going through the motions. There was no energy in the building, sales were flat (in a strong economy during the heyday of casual dining), food waste was eye-popping, and management–staff suspicion was the norm. That Chili's restaurant needed a turnaround badly. It was nothing like the buttoned-up, tight-ship training restaurant I had just left.

One day, I was doing a line check during the afternoon hall, throwing away product that was over shelf life and teaching our cooks about food quality expectations when a server approached me regarding a scheduling issue. She told me that she requested a specific day off well in advance for her brother's military deployment homecoming. However, she was scheduled to work on that day for some reason. With tears in her eyes she asked me if I could follow up and work around the schedule so she could take that day off. I pulled out my Day-Timer and dutifully jotted a note to follow up. I don't remember how we got her shift covered, but she was at the airport to greet her brother for a tear-filled reunion.

Several months later, another team member asked me to check on something for him. I pulled out my Day-Timer and made a note, as usual. The team member laughed while walking away and said, "If we see you write it down in that little book, it's as good as done." My habit of being detailed and following up for my team gave them confidence that I would be true to my word. In return, they were true to me and the other new managers who joined that Chili's. One year later, we achieved the highest comparable sales growth, we were in the top three restaurants in the company for revenue and restaurant EBITDA, and we won the "Restaurant of the Year" award for the company.

The credit for that turnaround goes to many people. It was a team effort to get those results, but integrity and trust among the managers and between the managers and the hourly team was the foundation. That trust and integrity allowed us to be free of worry and suspicion so we could focus on all the right things: taking care of the guest, doing our jobs well, having a safe environment, and having fun. And those things created profit.

Sometimes, the hardest part of integrity is remembering which promises you made in the first place.


5 See: Simon, 2008, op.cit

6 Simon, 2018, op. cit.

7 For example, see: Tony Simon, Ray Friedman, Leigh-Anne Lane, and Jack McLean Parks, "Racial Differences in Sensitivity to Behavioral Integrity: When to Live by One’s Word, Which is Clearly Hard Work, but Also to Communicate Effectively Enough That Others See Him or Her in That Way, Which Makes the Leadership Task Harder Still.

8 Similarly, in my 2002 paper I asserted that organizational change, by virtue of organization members’ increased uncertainty, confusion, and ambivalence, puts manager behavioral integrity at risk.


10 Friedman, Simon, Ray, and Ying Yi Hong, “Culture’s Impact on Behavioral Integrity: When a Promise Not a Promise?” presented at 2009 National Academy of Management Conference, Chicago, IL.
The Center for Hospitality Research • Cornell University

Role modeling is the most powerful leadership tool, and it is the method that should be used to teach culture.

Breaking the negative “death spiral” is one of the main things executives and turnaround professionals must remedy.

Make Your “Yes” Mean “Yes” and Your “No” Mean “No”

For a turnaround specialist often working in bankruptcy, integrity is critical. In many cases, the employer has been watching profits fall, capital spending cut to preserve cash flow, reductions in force (often many), and management trying to maintain confidence while secretly doubting whether there is anything left in which to be confident. This negative environment creates a downward spiral of distrust, suspicion, inefficiency, and fear. Breaking the “death spiral” is one of the main things executives and turnaround professionals must remedy if business improvement has any chance to gain traction and begin the virtuous cycle anew.

The Lord of Broken Promises

In fall 2008, the U.S. fell into a major recession. Many will recall how credit markets froze and the world economy sat on the precipice of disaster. Over the next year, many companies faced liquidity crises and were forced into bankruptcy. At that time, I began providing financial advisory services to distressed companies, many of which would be restructured in Chapter 11.

One of the most memorable moments occurred during the confirmation hearing of a large media company that we will call “Acme.” The confirmation hearing is where the final arguments are heard on the plan which will become the blueprint for emerging from bankruptcy. At this client, this hearing was to be led by the CFO (ad nauseam) about how Acme was being “unfair” and “callous” to its employees. From what I was hearing, the employees had written away and new promises made, but for a turnaround and restructuring advisor, keeping your word is critical. Importantly, one needs to understand when a promise is made or implied. For example, our team had successfully navigated a middle-market, bankrupt company through bankruptcy. I was serving as the interim CFO while working through the transition of emergence from Chapter 11 and helping new, permanent management get up to speed. I had developed close relationships with several senior executives at this client, so during the transition, I asked them for some feedback:

a couple of positives about my performance and one or two things I could improve. The VP of sales surprised me by saying, “Be careful what you promise.” I was curious as to what he meant because I considered myself cautious with my words. He reminded me about a meeting several months earlier regarding the compensation structure for sales people. I had conveyed to a sales person that we would try to devise a more equitable commission plan given the shift in market demand (as per the original plan). The sales person told me that “try” or “attempts” are caveats that hold no weight, but if the CFO says something, it becomes expected.

The details and resolution of that event are not the point (of course, we worked hard on the compensation matter and spent several months crafting an improved solution), but what is pertinent to the integrity consideration is the expectation of the team member. Importantly, executives must measure their words carefully and the higher one’s position, the more must be given.

Are You Serious???

In recent years I have become increasingly fascinated with the language used by business people. Listening skills are not strong in most business deals. CEOs have minds full of other deals and focusing on what the other person is saying rather than thinking what to say next. But the effect is paying off, and my ability to be a good, active listener is improving.

One of the more interesting outcomes of that effort is my sensitivity to key words and phrases. For example, I hear executives say something like, “let’s get together soon.” Most of the time, that’s unlikely to happen but it sounds like a nice thing to say. Recently I was on the verge of saying something similar when my internal polygraph went scribbling wildly. I rephrased what my internal voice was trying to say:

“I would really enjoy getting together with you soon but based on my travel schedule and yours, that’s impossible. I’m going to be in Los Angeles over the next couple of weeks. Any chance you will get there too?”

As a business person who quips niceties occasionally, I am keeping a mental list of how to rephrase them. For example, “Call me anytime” is better phrased as, “If you have something you think is worth discussing, send me an email. We can decide if it makes sense to set up a call.” Another key phrase to eliminate is, “I’ll try to [do/call/find/research].” Better to say nothing at all or just agree with, “I will commit to [do/call/find/research].” It is a radical change in communication and one that does not come easily. Furthermore, responses vary from a surprised look to confusion when you are deliberately truthful. Often the recipient gets a message that is simultaneously unexpected and refreshing but hard to decipher whether to feel honored or shocked. Most business people believe they act with integrity. They pride themselves on telling the truth and acting in a consistent manner. However, it is easy to slip up and allow pecadillos to knock us off track. The Integrity Dilemma reminds us that staying on track is important for our company’s profits, not just our own sense of ethics (as important as that may be).

Role Modeling, Culture, and Integrity

John Longstreet

In Tony’s book, Peter Kline discusses his time as CEO of Bristol Hotels & Resorts, then the largest independent hotel management company in North America. Specifically, Kline says: “One of the biggest mistakes that happens over and over again, particularly in big companies, is that senior management expects behavioral patterns or attitudes to originate in the middle of the company, as opposed to from the top of the company. They try to operate with two different sets of rules. But the behavior of the entire company is going to reflect the behavioral pattern of the people at the top.”

In helping leaders to develop when I was with Kline at Bristol (or when I was with ClubCorp USA or CEO of Quaker Steak & Lube), I found the concept of role modeling as the most powerful leadership tool, just like I believe it is in effective parenting. This is precisely what Kline is describing.

Having worked for another hotel company, I heard stories from the hotel general managers about preparing for visits from certain company execs and the special items that they would have to have on hand to satisfy the execs’ personal requests. In many cases thousands of dollars, if not tens of thousands, were spent to prepare for the visit. Contrast that with Kline’s visit to a Bristol hotel when he was CEO. In one example, he was checked into one of the hotels finest suites, complete with an elaborate desk clerk in a nice way that, while he appreciated the suite, he also recognized that this was an executive hotel. He desk clerk in a nice way that, while he appreciated the suite, he also recognized that this was an executive hotel. He

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Why don’t you take your door off, John? I did—and culture became somewhat passé. The day that I called chief engineer Tommy Foster into my office and told him to take my door down, John? I did—and culture was on to something. Eight years before The Service Profit Chain was written,11 we had created our own “Hotel Profit Chain.” We continued to find other ways to create transparency and improve two-way communication, understanding that if employees had a comfortable way to share ideas to improve the work environment, and the hotel leadership responded, we would also increase guest satisfaction and, as a presumed, sales.

In addition to open offices, we implemented open meetings. We discovered that there was a fair amount of speculative chatter about what had taken place at the weekly staff meetings which included the general manager and hotel department heads. Of course, the typical employee did not know, but perhaps based on preconceived notions, they assumed that whatever was happening within the meeting might lead to bad things for them. As a consequence, these companies experience levelling levels of leader and employee turnover; low employee engagement and customer satisfaction scores, and flat or down trending stock prices. They simply cannot deliver results because they have no set of honest values; there are only tired clichés. Leaders who consider themselves self-aware and patronize their employees as being “best in the business” turn around months later and describe themselves as victims of people who are lazy and not accountable, with partners who aren’t aligned to their vision and line managers who aren’t smart enough to “get” their strategies. Employees know the cycle. Those who stay deliver average work and simply wait for the next so-called “change agent” to inject short-term fun during their honeymoon.

So, what does it take to break this nonsensical pattern? Breaking out of this pattern requires integrity-based leadership. Leadership begins with the board and permeates the leadership team, line management, and the entire enterprise because it is harked to, lived in, and reinforced—and the misaligned are weeded out. Why? Because the human capital risk is as great a risk as competition, product development, IT and cybersecurity, emerging markets, or anything else. People matter and they are always observing as auditors of what’s said and done. They’ve been trained to be cynics, whether they are employees, partners, or customers, so words matter little and sustained behavioral integrity matters more than anything else. Book after book—including Good to Great,12 Conscience Capitalism,13 Execution,14 Built to Last,15 and The Integrity Dividend—have described the successful leaders who delivered sustained results as being those who lived into their promises, sought perspective, made decisions, and were continuous learners. They were humble enough to know they did not know everything! These leaders were authentic. Their internalized values were expressed in words and actions resulting in behavioral integrity. Involved followers responded with buy-in, alignment, and action, which results in business outcomes superior to others in the marketplace. People made the difference.

This is true in any industry. I’ve witnessed it in banking, hospitality, retail, marketing services, consumer products, transportation, and business services, among others. As a consequence, these companies experience levels of leader and employee turnover, low employee engagement and customer satisfaction scores, and flat or down trending stock prices. They simply cannot deliver results because they have no set of honest values; there are only tired clichés. Leaders who consider themselves self-aware and patronize their employees as being “best in the business” turn around months later and describe themselves as victims of people who are lazy and not accountable, with partners who aren’t aligned to their vision and line managers who aren’t smart enough to “get” their strategies. Employees know the cycle. Those who stay deliver average work and simply wait for the next so-called “change agent” to inject short-term fun during their honeymoon.

All relationships in life are assessed through the lens of behavioral integrity. We all have expectations. What would or could be different if we simply told one another what our expectations are?

16 A teacher who was “passed the trash” (a 4th grade student who could not read) personally tutored the student on her own time until the student could mainstream with his class.
17 An employee copyswiper who drops by the printer and stops the press because there is a figure of speech that could offend a minority and the copy must be changed, despite the fact that he or her boss wrote the copy.
18 A line manager who makes a habit of “dropping in” on direct reports to see what’s working and what’s getting in the way of work—and then makes changes to remove barriers and ease the process of getting things done.
19 A CEO who calls a dismantled client mid-level manager to query what would have been a home run for him or her—but then doing it.
20 A CEO known for foul language who owns the language problem and asks the organization to hold him accountable to stop, offering to pay $100 toward a charity of choice for every infringement of his or her clean language promise.
21 A CEO stating publicly to the enterprise that gossip about him or her is within limits but gossip about anyone else in the company is grounds for dismissal and advising all hands that the alternative to gossip is to help,
22 A hotel company signing a code of conduct that removes points from all rooms and trains all employees in how to spot exploitation of children and what to do about it.
23 A company goes public and everyone employed there for at least a full year receives some bonus for increasing value of the company, not just the senior executives,
24 A company offers a suggestion system where any employee or team may submit an improvement idea (backed by some evidence or reasonable business case) and receives remuneration if the idea is adopted and improvement is realized; and
25 A company’s recognition system is based on quiet heroes alongside the loud ones where every recognition includes both.

All relationships in life are assessed through the lens of behavioral integrity. We all have expectations. What would or could be different if we simply told one another what our expectations are?
To have behavioral integrity, we should be loyal to our values.

Integrity and the Challenge of Conflicting Loyalties

Heather Allen

As a child, I learned an early lesson from my older brothers. This lesson was compounded at primary school and finally faded home at my English boarding school. To split, tell, snitch, grass, or dob someone in was the worst thing you could do. Loyalty came before everything else, and getting someone into trouble meant you would be an outcast for a time. This is a v

To have behavioral integrity, we naturally assumed my friends would cover for me. They didn’t, and I was furious. I asked them why their “silly little rules” were more important than me, and I took it personally. I left and stopped volunteering soon afterwards. Because these two people were older friends I admired, though, the event stayed with me.

London Lighthouse was one of the first organizations to publish values and really commit to living them. They were the vanguard of equality and “non-oppression,” as it was called in the 1980s. It was the place visited at night by Princess Diana, to hold the hands of gay men with AIDS. Providing the care cre

I was disappointed in my friends, understanding their ac

The “family loyalty” issue goes much deeper. At the national level we have seen evidence of a truly horrifying willingness to cover up pedophile activity by people in the media, broadcast

I recently ran a two-day workshop for a group of se

In one fire service I worked at, one of the surgeons was being paid a lot of money to perform female circumcision on young girls of African origin. Time and time again I tried to look at it as an example. The person reacted to the situation by casting me in the role of persecutor and becoming my victim, a drama I was unwilling to play out. Within three minutes, another had personally attacked me. They talked about being a family.

Through the work they had done together they felt bonded and began to be a family. Not that they would actually attend each other’s weddings or be close friends, but that they took on the dynamics of the family. My Family Right or Wrong. We had to slowly and deliberately unpick the pervasive cultural beliefs that allowed them to create “them and us” so quickly, and to forget the purpose of their team, their mission. We talked about family values and how they work for families, where the mission and purpose are the same or identical. Together, we mindfully redefined the loyalty of this team to the mission of change. Then we were ready to begin working on how to be an example of a new way of being.

In one fire service, the discipline officer talked to me about how he was dealing with a situation that had arisen at one of the stations. A group of schoolchildren had been brought to the fire station to look around and learn a bit about fire safety and I went too fast and broke her ankle at the bottom. In an effort to hide the misdemeanor, the firefighters did first aid and took her to hospital themselves, rather than call an ambulance. Of course, the teacher was off sick from school the next day and needed to explain why. Eventually that came back to the fire service and here was a disciplinary case. What was decided was a fairly severe punishment for the whole watch (shift). Not for getting the teacher slide down the pole, which would have been a minor infraction, but for covering it up. They had put loyalty to each other ahead of the organization with which they had a contract, putting the organization at real risk of litigation.

In the British public sector, final salary pensions are com-

We must be honest with ourselves and each other and be loyal to what we do and the way that we do it.
The most successful companies are places where keeping promises is one of the top priorities of everyone in the organization.

Promises commit us to taking specific actions. I promise a customer we will deliver the new version of our product on time. I promise my boss that I will complete the drawings by the deadline. I promise my team I will have the presentation completed and ready their review by the end of the day Wednesday. I promise my employee I will take his idea to senior management. When we make promises casually, without thinking them through, we greatly increase the risk of failing to deliver. Yet many years of coaching leaders and leadership teams has repeatedly shown me that people in work settings fail to keep the promises they make way too often. In fact, it is so common in some companies that it is assumed that people will only do what they’ve committed to if they are continually nagged about it (the squeakiest wheels syndrome). The costs of this insig- nificant seeming failure—this inattention to keeping promises—are enormous: skipped deadlines, missed opportunities, lost business, resentment, resignation—the list goes on, including, of course, loss of trust.

On the other hand, the most successful companies I’ve had the pleasure of serving as a coach and consultant are places where keeping promises is one of the top priorities of everyone in the organization, from the shop floor to the C-suite.

Managing to Keep Promises

What makes the difference? Many small things contribute, but there are two characteristics I have observed that are consistently present in successful organizations where promises are consistently kept. One of these is that everyone in the company takes their promises seriously. People intentionally manage their commitments. They don’t over promise. They are clear about what they are promising to do. Why? They know it is their responsibility to do something and subsequently find that something outside their control will prevent them from fulfilling all or part of their commitment, they let their “customer” know as soon as they possibly can. They don’t wait for their customer to remind them of what they were supposed to do. And they did the same with their reports on the line. Once he understood the problem, the president began deliberately substi- tuting a process of commitment management in place of nag- ging his people. The result over about the next right months was that the entire culture of the company shifted toward individual responsibility and accountability for action. Since then, the president has been able to focus on what is important in his role.

The Larger Commitment

The other key characteristic I’ve observed is that everyone in the organization understands how requests, offers, promises, and the resulting actions are connected to the larger organiza- tional purpose. They are part of the process of coordinating action in service to the mission and vision shared by everyone. When someone makes a work-related request—whether it’s the CEO or other senior leader, a middle manager, or an individual contributor on the factory floor or engineering lab—both the person making the request and the individual to whom it is directed understand how it fits with what they are all working to accomplish. It isn’t so inherently obvious, the requestor takes the time to explain how the request fits in the larger scheme of things.

Creating this kind of clear connection between requests, offers, promises, and shared purpose requires people throughout the company to participate in ongoing conversations about what they care about. It means the software engineer’s supervisor has taken the time to help her understand how the lines of code she is writing will affect their shared future. She may not understand (or care about) all the elements of company strategy, but she knows enough to appreciate that when her boss asks her to drop what she’s been working on for weeks to go help a team doing a last minute redesign, the request is not capricious, nor is it some- thing that could have been avoided with better planning.

This, in turns, requires strong trust throughout the company. That engineer has to believe the people “at the top” setting company strategy, and the people in the middle deciding how to best implement that strategy, are all working to serve the same mis- sion and vision she does. The leaders have to earn the engineer’s trust in this regard.

I recently had the pleasure of coaching the division head in a large U.S. government agency who learned to make this link for her people. At first she just talked about her team having a strong shared commitment to their larger goals. But her actions were often at odds with this ideal. Not long after she started in the position she gave everyone her vision of changes that would make the division more accurate, timely, and responsive. People can thoughtfully and intentionally build trust by keeping promises and continually checking to ensure their behavior is worthy of others’ trust.
Loyalty needs to be openly discussed and integrated with missions and values, so that workers understand that doing the right thing is not disloyal.

action and the larger commitments their teams, departments, and companies have to their employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and other stakeholders.

These leaders build cultures where trust is deliberately cultivated. Integrity is a lived value in such places. Not surprisingly, prominent integrity comes around and connects back up with values integrity. These kinds of companies often hold other lived values that relate to trust, as well, including transparency, empowerment, gratitude, curiosity, success, and well being. Values the entire organization is committed to matter. What matters equally is that those values are accepted and lived by everyone in the organization.

Implications for Managers and Researchers

Let’s close by considering the implications these five essays offer both for practice and for further research. While there’s little doubt of the efficacy of the suggestions made above, most of these principles remain anecdotal and could benefit from rigorous research.

Schnaubelt: “The Nitty Gritty of Integrity”

Kurt Schnaubelt provides additional anecdotal evidence for my assertion of the effectiveness of simple time management tools, such as Day-Timers and to-do lists, for the management of consistent follow-through and thus of integrity perceptions. It is no accident that Steven Covey, the performance guru behind the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, partnered with Franklin Planners, the maker of Day-Timers.

Schnaubelt likewise confirm the importance of verbal precision, the avoidance of casually made promises, and general ineffectiveness of promise qualifiers such as “I’ll try to…” in managing integrity perceptions. These practical suggestions, while probably effective, still warrant careful empirical study to increase confidence in their efficacy. The context of bankruptcy and debt restructuring, as discussed in this essay, is intriguing as an opportunity to study organizational and cultural lost worthiness in essence, an effort to quantify the credibility of a potential debtor.

Longstreet: Role Modeling, Culture, and Integrity

John Longstreet documents the fact that modeling of desired behavior is critical for promoting behavioral change in others. His essay demonstrates how transparency and receptiveness to suggestions build trust, and how all of these elements help to create a positive organizational culture that is “employee-centered,” while also providing excellent guest service. Longstreet’s discussion of how some managers believed the new vision, and so implemented it successfully, while others did not, suggests an interesting research avenue, as “value congruence” can be examined as both an antecedent to effective organizational change and possibly also as an outcome of it.

Sarkisian: Integrity Dividend Observations

The many examples of integrity proposed by Michele Sarkisian focus on straight talk and transparency, with an emphasis on long-term human resource enhancement over short-term gain. Her illustration of the “honeymoon period” is an intriguing notion for further research, since it points to the source of increasingly cynical behavior by executives and employees alike, possibly in response to incentives for short-term financial performance. It would be interesting to document this trajectory, especially if it is as typical as Sarkisian suggests.

Allen: Integrity and the Challenge of Conflicting Loyalties

Heather Allen’s article continues the theme of conflicting values, and highlights the role of loyalty—toward peers, to the company—and to mission or principle. Her examples of the potentially corrupting effects of loyalty to peers demonstrate how loyalty can sometimes become an enabler of much behavior that we might term “unprincipled.” From a practical standpoint, this argument suggests that loyalty needs to be opened discussed and integrated with other missions and values, to better assist workers in understanding that doing the right thing is not disloyal, and that sometimes loyalty to the enterprise must trump loyalty to peers. From a research standpoint, the argument opens up both a particular value that should be measured alongside others (loyalty), and a perspective that asks why some values are both espoused and enacted, some are espoused but not enacted (classic hypocrisy), and some are enacted but not espoused (like loyalty). Is the challenge here that loyalty is openly espoused, but only to internal audiences? Given the apparent repercussions of this particular driver of divergent words and actions, it deserves to be researched and better understood. A second implication of this piece is the illustration of a phenomenon described by Hennestad as a “double bind,” wherein established behavioral routines conflict with espoused values, creating an organizational context that inhibits honest questioning, learning, and adaptation.

Feltman: Keeping Promises as an Integral Part of a Culture of Integrity

Finally, Charles Feltman highlights the way that we all tend to think we are better at managing promises than others think we are, a finding that has been replicated in research and one that raises the question: what determines accurate self-perception? He discusses the interrelationship between promise-keeping and enactment of espoused values, as two mutually reinforcing aspects of the behavioral integrity construct. From a practical standpoint, he addresses the development of one’s own integrity through a process of prioritizing it and building habits of organization and of communication. He points the way toward creating a culture of accountability with steps that include:

- getting everyone to take commitments seriously,
- learning careful language to use when asking for or making commitments,
- deliberately extending trust,
- holding people accountable, and
- sharing the “big picture” purposes behind broad directives (a specific kind of transparency), and
- training employees to manage their commitments well.

The processes he describes are similar to those discussed in my book, but he offers the perspective of someone who has coached numerous organizations through the process of enhancing personal credibility and of building a culture of individual responsibility and accountability. This culture he describes may be a refinement of the high-trust, high-service cultures alluded to by Sarkisian and Longstreet. The nature of the convergence between the cultures described by these three authors warrants thought and articulation.

18 Steven Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: The Free Press, 1989).
