

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



**Great Leaders  
Have Integrity**



## GREAT LEADERS HAVE INTEGRITY

“ The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.

– Dwight D. Eisenhower

One of the keys to a positive and productive work environment is having leaders who act with integrity. Integrity in leaders refers to being honest, trustworthy, and reliable. Leaders with integrity act in accordance with their words (i.e. they practice what they preach) and own up to their mistakes, as opposed to hiding them, blaming their team, or making excuses. Integrity also involves following company policies, appropriately using company time and resources, and respecting one's colleagues and direct reports. It is important to remember that a leader's behavior reflects on not only their own reputation, but also on the reputation of the organization.

Integrity provides several benefits to both leaders and the organizations. For instance, research has linked greater integrity with increased workplace performance<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, leaders with integrity foster greater trust and satisfaction from their direct reports, who are more likely to follow suit<sup>2</sup>. Employees serving under high integrity leaders demonstrate more positive workplace behaviors (e.g., helping others during busy periods) and fewer negative workplace behaviors (e.g., falsely calling in sick)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, employees who trust their leaders to have integrity are likely to work harder, perform better, and have greater company loyalty<sup>4</sup>.

In assessing your level of integrity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I accountable for my behavior and the decisions I make?
- Do I accept responsibility for my mistakes?
- Am I setting a good example for my direct reports?
- Do I always follow through on my commitments and promises?
- Do I act in ways that build trust with my direct reports?
- Am I open and honest with my co-workers and direct reports?

## Improve Your Integrity

**Cultivate a good reputation:** A leader's reputation is based on more than performance. A good reputation also stems from being perceived as honest, responsible, reliable, and respectful by one's co-workers and direct reports. Remember that while it takes time and effort to build a good reputation, that reputation is easily damaged by negative behavior. Because a leader's behavior also influences the company's reputation, it is especially important to always act responsibly, respectfully, and ethically.

**Consistency is key:** It is difficult to have faith in a leader who says one thing but does another: a leader's words and actions should match. Similarly, leader behavior should be in line with company values and policies; otherwise, it sends the message to direct reports that these not important. On the other hand, leaders who consistently act with integrity can inspire direct reports to follow their example<sup>2</sup>.

**Hold yourself to a high moral standard.** Leaders with integrity do what is morally and ethically right and avoid questionable practices. For example, when making decisions, they consider potential consequences on the organization and other people. Acting with integrity also includes working diligently rather than cutting corners, accepting responsibility for decisions, and being honest and open with co-workers and direct reports.

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Act with Greater Integrity

The following steps can help you act with more integrity in the workplace:

1. **Set a good example.** As a leader, it is your responsibility to be a good role model for your direct reports. Engaging in negative workplace behaviours (e.g., disregarding company policies; gossiping about colleagues; using company time for personal matters) signals to direct reports that this behavior is acceptable. This may lead to other consequences. Employees who lack integrity are more likely to engage in unethical or counterproductive behaviors<sup>1</sup>, which hurts both the work environment and the company. However, leaders who act responsibly, make ethical decisions, and uphold company values help set and maintain expectations for employee conduct<sup>5</sup>.
2. **Take responsibility for your actions.** Everyone makes mistakes, and not everything always goes according to plan. Rather than conceal mistakes or pin the blame on others, take responsibility. Fix mistakes if possible and if not, learn how to prevent them in the future. Finally, accepting responsibility for your own errors shows you care. This generates trust with your direct reports, and also encourages direct reports to be more open about their own mistakes.

- Honor your commitments.** It is challenging to earn trust and respect from direct reports if you are unreliable. They want to know that if you make a promise, you'll keep it. This includes meeting deadlines, holding yourself to your word, and fulfilling commitments to coworkers and direct reports. Similarly, recognize your limitations and don't over-commit. It is far better to say no than it is to fail to follow through on a promise.

## Resources



[Live a Life of Integrity](#)



[The Importance of Integrity in the Workplace](#)



Develop your integrity by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: [support@SigmaHR.com](mailto:support@SigmaHR.com)

Call: 800-265-1285

## References

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- <sup>5</sup> Grojean, M. W., Resick, C. J., Dickson, M. W., & Smith, D. B. (2004). Leaders, values, and organizational climate: Examining leadership strategies for establishing an organizational climate regarding ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics, 55*, 223-241.