

# **SIGMA**

## **Leader Character Series**



**Great Leaders  
Act with Integrity**



## GREAT LEADERS ACT WITH INTEGRITY

“ Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not.  
— Oprah Winfrey

Leadership character is an essential element needed to become successful in today’s working environment. Though leader character is not something that may be easily articulated on a resume, leader character in the workplace helps to keep everyone accountable, collaborative, and fair.

Integrity is a particularly relevant aspect of leader character that is essential to individual, team, and organizational success. Integrity is defined as holding oneself to a high moral standard and behaving consistently with ethical standards, even in difficult situations. Individuals high in integrity are seen by others as behaving in a way that is consistent with their personal values and beliefs and with organizational policies and practices. Integrity encompasses elements of authenticity, candidness, transparency, principledness, and consistency. This is considered a foundational value that is critical to uphold organizational values and behave ethically in the workplace.<sup>1</sup> Integrity may be particularly important for leaders, as previous research has found that leader integrity is related to follower satisfaction and trust, ultimately leading to improved follower job performance.<sup>2</sup>

In assessing your integrity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are my actions consistent with my beliefs?
- Do I tell the truth even when it is uncomfortable to do so?
- Am I honest with myself about how my actions affect others?
- Do I hold myself and those I work with to a high ethical standard?
- Do I care about doing the right thing?
- Have I behaved in a way that is consistent with my company’s core values?

### Ways to Improve Your Integrity

**Admit when you are wrong:** One way to develop integrity is to commit to consistently tell the truth, even when it is uncomfortable.<sup>3</sup> This includes admitting to past mistakes and changing your own opinion on topics when new, conflicting information is learned. Accepting responsibility for previous actions allows others to trust that you are accountable for your own behavior and take ownership of your decisions.<sup>4</sup>

**Keep your ethical standards high:** It can be easy to only think about your ethical standards in extreme situations, but most situations where you will have to exercise your integrity at work are much more mundane. You may not find yourself in a major ethical dilemma at work, but at some point, you may have to choose between the easiest thing and the right thing. For example, you may find yourself with new information about a project that complicates things. You can choose to share this information and delay the project timeline or keep it to yourself and stay on track. In these situations, leading by example and choosing to make the harder — but right — decision will have positive long-term implications for you and your organization.<sup>5</sup>

**Be transparent with your colleagues:** Another important element of integrity is engaging in open and honest communication with others at work.<sup>1</sup> It can feel vulnerable to express transparency in terms of your values, intentions, and decision-making processes, but keeping everyone on the same page will help others to make clear decisions and understand exactly where you are coming from. This can also be helpful as it can allow others to understand when you are struggling and know when to step in with their support and perspective.

## Consider These Tips to Moderate Your Integrity

Effective leaders are able to balance the 11 leader character dimensions rather than focusing on just a few. As you develop your leader character, look for places where strengths may need to be moderated. If you scored a 4 or higher on integrity, use the tips below to help you balance the expression of this character dimension.

**Disagree without becoming disagreeable.** Integrity is extremely important, but it is not the only ingredient to success at work. Letting go of rigidity and welcoming mistakes can lead to innovation and creative decision-making in the workplace.<sup>1</sup> To successfully balance both integrity and collaboration, make a point of brainstorming ideas individually before coming together as a group and reinforce that all group members will be heard equally. This will help novel ideas to be shared without any one person needing to assume the role of “devil’s advocate.”

**Be willing to move forward when setbacks inevitably happen.** Balancing integrity with patience and acceptance for others is key to maintaining a civil workplace. This does not mean you have to accept all poor decisions made by others, but mistakes occasionally happen. Understanding that people make errors will help you hold others to a high standard while simultaneously being a kind and compassionate colleague.

**Consider the context of the situation.** Part of activating integrity involves making uncomfortable decisions. However, it is important to also consider the broader organizational context before making any decisions that may negatively impact others. For example, what are the organizational values and norms? Would pursuing formal action, such as filing a complaint with your organization’s HR department, align with these values and norms? In many instances, pursuing formal action is necessary. Be sure to use your best judgment to assess the situation before moving forward with any major decisions.

## Resources



[What Does Integrity Mean?](#)



[13 Ways to Demonstrate Integrity in the Workplace](#)



Develop your integrity by taking advantage of SIGMA's [coaching services](#).

Contact SIGMA for more information about leader character.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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

Call: 800-265-1285

## References

<sup>1</sup> Crossan, M., Seijts, G. H., & Gandz J. (2015). Integrity. In M. Crossan, G. H. Seijts & J. Gandz, *Developing Leadership Character* (pp. 15-24).

<sup>2</sup> Palanski, M. E., & Yammarino, F. J. (2011). Impact of behavioral integrity on follower job performance: A three-study examination. *Leadership Quarterly*, 22(4), 765-786.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver, V. (2021). 13 ways to demonstrate integrity in the workplace. *Lifehack*. Retrieved from <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/work/how-succeed-with-integrity-competitive-workplace.html>

<sup>4</sup> Indeed Editorial Team. (2020). How to maintain professional integrity in the workplace. *Indeed*. Retrieved from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/maintaining-professional-integrity>

<sup>5</sup> Chestnut, R. (2020). How to build a company that (actually) values integrity. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2020/07/how-to-build-a-company-that-actually-values-integrity>