

Chapter 9
Integrity
Adhering to a Code of Honor

Integrity is an unimpaired conditional state of being complete and undivided, especially as it pertains to ethical morals and values. Integrity is what a *leader* is made of; it entails *honor, respect, loyalty, trust, tolerance, compassion, honesty, courage, and unity*. Having integrity inheres to doing what's righteous even as no one is looking. One's *character* is structured based off the volume of their integrity. When measuring integrity; it's either you have it or you don't. Granted mistakes will be made, and if so, the honorable thing to do is communicate the truth and take responsibility by holding yourself *accountable*.

Nobody likes a liar. "*Keeping it real*" is appeasing and admirable to both one's self and in the eyes of others. I irrefutably achieve more pleasurable satisfaction in life when I am up front and honest about my issues and concerns from the jump as opposed to lying about or concealing information for it only to be discovered later down the road. Hiding something from someone is just as bad as lying to them because in the end the truth **will always** come to light. In any event, lying will only worsen the situation. Beyond materialistic items all we have in this world is our *word* and *reputation*. It's more respectable and courageous to confess the truth early on and deflect the guilt than to later be exposed as a liar and be faced with the shame. "Life is 20% what happens and 80% how one responds". I'd rather be known as a person who made a bad decision and took accountability for it than to be a person who lied and refused to admit it. My Grandma told me there is nothing she can't withstand more intensively than to be lied to. She said, "If you make a promise— keep it, if you agree to a deal— stand on your end, and if asked a question— answer honestly." Aside from upholding the truth and retaining accountability, keeping it real to the authenticity of your character and personality under any circumstance is another pillar of *integrity*. One should never have to falsify their identity. Integrity is the ability to tolerate interference and remain resilient as you stay true to who you are as a person. Be you, not what others want you to be. Not everyone is going to like you, and so what, who cares if they don't that's their loss. Pretending to be someone or something you're not leaves only a matter of time before you're exposed as the fraud you are.

Holding the title of being *fake* is a monstrously despicable reputation to haul. Being *real* and having integrity is the engine to *magnetism*. No one wants to associate with an imposter. Representing yourself authentically on a consistent basis will draw in a more extensive following than to not. It comes down to trust; at the end of the day people want to know the ones they associate themselves with are trustworthy. The way I see it is, if one doesn't care enough to keep it real within their own situation and to whom they are as a person— then how can I trust them to keep it real with me. Confirmed loyalty unifies separate entities to maneuver side by side. Integrity isn't a skill, it's a lifestyle, and with it we can't lose. Where ever I am, whoever I'm around, I *am* and will *forever* be **me**. I call it like I see it, if I say it then I mean it, others can love it or hate it, take it or leave it. “*Everything I'm not made me everything I am*” –Kanye West

Of all the diverse environments I have been positioned in not once did I hold back nor substitute my true self. Yes, I make mistakes but those don't define me. What I do after making the mistakes is what counts. When I was employed for a top-notch corporate company I wasn't in the office acting all corny trying to fit in, instead I brought a whole new dynamic to the office by being myself and relentlessly expressing my open personality. The magnetism I constructed urged others to loosen up more and do the same, while through it all my network system and pay grade skyrocketed. Back on the block I didn't make any claims towards being some big and bad gangbanging kingpin, because to keep it real, I wasn't. Actually I never even been in a gang; although I did more dirt than a little bit, I was just a hustler with the heart to put it all on the line for the dollar bill. What got me reverence in the streets wasn't a set, a rank, or an amount of cash, it was the fact that I was real and nothing or no one could change it. Even in the concrete jungle I have always been trustworthy, courageous, and loyal. I could go to any hood on any block and be respected as if I was one of their own. My reputation allowed me to move freely throughout the Twin Cities and do what I loved; make money.

To be honest there was also a time in my life that I acted as if I had absolutely no integrity whatsoever; even the reminisce of those times immerses me into disgust. Throughout the last year or so before I went to prison I conducted myself like a total scumbag. Blinded by my gambling addiction I quit a decent paying job to make time for the casino. After losing all my money and the ability to pay my rent I lied to the landlord about why I didn't have the money. In hopes of stalling time to keep a roof over my head I told him that I got laid-off and was

awaiting for my state unemployment application to go through. I played this game for more than two months.

During this time I was caught red handed by my girl cheating on her with some random female I took home from a bar. The evidence was right there in my phone and yet I still chose to lie to her about the entire thing. From there she cut me smooth off, ignoring all of my phone calls and my pleading text messages. As the holiday season approached I was presented with the opportunity to see our kids for Christmas. I agreed to a date and time, but when it came I reneged on my promise. I guess I was too busy doing nothing. My kids were so devastated that I lied to them that it left them in tears.

Following this incident I spent time with my grandfather as he was extremely ill and admitted into the hospital. I called Sarah (the woman I cheated on and mother of my children) to ask if she would bring the kids to visit my Grandfather as his conditions dimmed. She was ambivalent and bleakly refused, without delay I spazzed out to the extent that I threatened to kill her. I said, "If you don't bring my kids up here to see their Grandpa before something happens to him then I'm going to kill you". This behavior was completely uncharacteristic of me. To protect herself she went to the Sherriff's office and filed for an "order for protection". I was oblivious to the order for protection until I was served with the official documents one morning at home. I exploded in frenzy and decided I was going to let this woman know exactly how I felt about it. I called and called, texted and texted, but got no answer and no reply. My attempt to contact her put me in violation of the order and generated 3 separate domestic violence warrants for my arrest. When I found out the police were looking for me I knew I couldn't go home so instead of clearing my debts with the landlord I unyieldingly went on the run. Possessing hardly to any money in my pocket I scrolled down my phonebook and burned the bridges between myself and every contact I could get a hold of; not one was safe, even people I did solid business with for years weren't an exception from my manipulation. As the money and drugs streamed in from my devious trickery and strong-arm robberies my drug habits ballooned and my chemical addition pushed me to behave even further distant outside of my actual self.

Living without my integrity intact was like living paralyzed in a realm of darkness. I knew deep in my heart the cycle of my actions were not derived from my *true self*. I *wanted* to do the right thing but because of my selfishness, addictions, impulsivities, and as well as other mixed emotions made such righteousness seem unviable. Bombarding myself with so much at one time was the premise for me degrading my character and taking the easy way out by fecklessly saying “*F*** It*”. The only way I was going to stop was to **be** stopped.

Subsequent to shackling myself to a gambling addiction, departing from stabilized income, negating my obligations with my landlord, breaking promises to my children, stripping my woman of the decency she deserves, bamboozling unwary associates out of cash and drugs, and drowning myself under a harping chemical addiction something suddenly stopped me in my tracks. Boom! It was that damn “brick wall” in the middle of the road again; **Jail**. My run was up and according to the judge it was time I be held accountable.

Being back in custody after morphing into a character of no integrity was a pivotal juncture for me. I was determined to restore my identity and infuse my integrity to the stature of which it previously stood. Although I was originally picked up on the warrants for violating an order for protection I also had a 5th degree drug possession pending in another county and been ducking my appointed probation officer from my initial aggravated robbery case for months. It was imperative to me that the only option I had to squash these legal burdens off my back and redeem my true sense of self was to man-up and *confess* what was on my heart. Standing before the judge I plead *guilty* to the three domestic violence charges for attempting to contact my kid’s mother after already threatening her life. (For the record; I had no actual credence to follow through with these threats, nevertheless I was 100% wrong for what I did and am sincerely apologetic). Exiting the courtroom my probation officer caught up to me and informed me that he was going to recommend additional time to my sentence for violating probation by not staying in contact with him for the past few months. I told him straight up that I would be more interested in purely *executing* the remainder of my 57 month stayed sentenced. A week later I was in route to do my first prison bid; 2 pending cases down 1 to go. About three months or so into my prison stint I was transported on a writ to handle my last pending case. I went into court with my head held high, took responsibility for possessing a “controlled substance”, and walked out dignified. Fortunately my sentence was run concurrent with the first two

cases so with all the t's crossed and i's dotted, my legal affairs were sufficiently under wraps.

Patiently waiting for my sentence to expire I directed my efforts towards making *amends* and providing closure to those I mistreated.

Apology

*This is an apology to all the people I robbed
I also want to say thank you to those that didn't call the cops
I'm writing this to inform you all that I'm caught and off the block
I got 57 months to do and deserve every day I got
I can't remember every stain, damn sure can't think of every name
Truthfully I feel ashamed with no one but myself to blame
I told myself I had to do it
Get in, Get out, and Keep it movin'
I wanted to win cause I was losing
Now I'm here to face the music
I'm saying sorry from the heart, I will not rob again
I pray to GOD every night to forgive me for my sins*

—Michel Durell Comer

Though I didn't get as far as personally apologizing to each individual "street associate" that I swindled out of money and drugs, I did however communicate with my old landlord and the mother of my children.

I started by writing a ravishing letter to my landlord explicating to him exactly why I vanished without notice and also fessed up to the *real* reason behind my overdue rent payments. I then petitioned for his sympathy as I expressed how deeply remorseful I was for misrepresenting myself and requested that he grant me the liberty to pay what I owe to revitalize the situation and rebuild our mutual understanding. Writing this letter was keenly rejuvenating; with every word I inscribed came with it an internal feeling, as if fragments of my *true* character were being recouped. I'd like to believe my sincere wordage made a lasting impression on Mr. Williams because less than a month later he responded to my letter by sending one of his own. In his reply he accepted my apologies and told me not to worry about the money I owed to him. He then went on to share some words of wisdom with me and commended me on the amount of *integrity* I hoisted by submitting such a genuinely heartfelt note. Most astonishing, enclosed in the envelope was a money order made out in my name to be deposited

into my inmate account. This gesture by Mr. Williams was a testament to *his* character and level of integrity, it also proves that it is never *too* late to rehabilitate our **true self** and make things *right* amongst those we treated *wrong*.

Shortly after the impeccable reception and feedback from Mr. Williams I worked up enough courage to reach out by way of a third party to the woman I regretfully mistreated the most, the mother of my children; *Sarah*. I was astounded yet again; my message was returned instructing me to call her. I felt an extensive internal surge as my body froze in a shock of disbelief, none the less I was inarguably the happiest man in the world at that moment. This was my chance to take full accountability for my preposterous behaviors with the purpose to reform my integrity and rectify the relationship that I single handedly eradicated.

In the wake of procrastinating for a few hours, I set my nerves aside and dialed the number to the woman who deserved to hear the truth. The phone rang, she answered, and before she could say another word I adamantly apologized, owning up to the woman in my phone and admitting there to be no logic for my disrespect. I plead with Sarah not to measure my character based off my *mistakes*, for its actual content is much greater. Emotion poured out from my heart, freeing my soul of its toxic components and progressively reinstating my integrity. I proposed that we salvage our relationship and renew our family bond while *guaranteeing* her and our children a better **me** in return.

It took a lot of chipping away, however, Sarah eventually put her faith in my word, dismissed my rash history, and permitted me another chance to proclaim my love and commitment to her and our young children. I was lifted with joy and couldn't have asked for anything more. The *ripple effect* from my behaviors spread wide and the only way to ameliorate the damage was to delve in head first and put in the work. As much as I wished I could reverse time and recant my statements, what I did could not be overturned and the only considerable alternative I had was to unveil my "*true colors*".

Dramatically enough, after my compassionate expiation, Sarah and I pronounced to get back together. I vowed to uphold an infinite opulence of integrity. I made certain that I would rather jump into a bottomless pit full of flesh eating piranhas then to go back on my word and break this promise. Every day that goes by I impel to be the righteous person that my Grandparents raised me to be.

In essence, adhering to a code of honor is virtuously the only conventional passage towards *magnetism*, *leadership*, and *healthy success*. Rhetorically speaking isn't **success** what we all hanker for in the first place!?