

## Leading With Integrity by Del Suggs

Leading with integrity is one of the great challenges of leadership. We often hear those phrases like “walk the talk” and “lead by example.” Unfortunately, you can’t just lead by cliché. You really have to “put your money where your mouth is,” as the saying goes.

So, let’s begin with defining our terms, starting with Leadership. Here are my favorite definitions. Leadership is the process by which a person influences others or directs an organization. Or how about this: Leadership is the ability to facilitate action and guide change. But here’s my favorite definition: Leaders inspire others to know, to do, or to be. Isn’t that what we want to do as a leader? We want to inspire others to know, to do, or to be.

Integrity can be misunderstood. We think of integrity as a positive attribute. We say he or she “has integrity” as a compliment, meaning honesty and strong character. It’s used as a virtue term. Actually, integrity comes from the same Latin root as “integer.” You remember integers from math-- they are whole numbers. Integrity truly means whole, or complete.

Consider leading with integrity as the proper combination of the two words: leading completely. It’s a concept that we need to really ponder to understand. Perhaps a

deeper consideration of leadership is in order.

### Sources of Leadership

I believe that there are basically four sources of leadership. First of all, leadership comes from our values and beliefs. Our values are essentially our attitude about worth. What do you consider important, worthy, or of value? And our beliefs are the assumptions that we carry, perhaps understood as our convictions. Beliefs are also important, because we compare every new experience against an existing conviction, and evaluate it.

A second source of leadership is our ethics and character. Ethics is often confused with morality, or right and wrong. When I refer to ethics, I mean our conduct in a given situation. I think ethics is situational. People we consider to be ethical are people who behave consistently in the same or similar situations. Consider character to be a summation. It’s the combination of your conduct, values, and beliefs.

Knowledge and skills are another source of leadership. Think of knowledge as the information you’ve learned-- what you know. Skills are those abilities and capabilities that we gain throughout life. Certainly we look for our leaders to have knowledge and skills.

The fourth source of leadership is authority. We often think of authority as power, but that’s not exactly right. Someone with power is just the boss. He or she may not have any real authority. I like think of authority as power that we give to someone as a function of their position or job. Most of our elected officials have authority-- we’ve given them power over us by voting them into office. When officials leave office, they tend to leave their power behind for the newly elected official.

### Add in Integrity

How does this discussion of the sources of leadership factor in integrity? It’s pretty simple. While we can define the source of leadership, and even break it down into multiple areas as I’ve done, there is one more thing to consider. I call it the “gut check.”

Designating leaders is not as simple as looking at someone’s values and beliefs, ethics and character, knowledge and skills, and their authority. We all have this sixth sense, this personal intuition that we listen to when selecting leaders. When all is said and done, we trust our gut. We choose our leaders based on the obvious rational factors, but we supplement that with our gut feelings.

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This is why integrity is so important. We seek leaders who are whole and complete, like integers. It's that integrity that grabs us. If there are two potential leaders with equal qualities in all other areas, we will choose to follow the leader with the most integrity. We make that decision in our gut.

### Developing Integrity as a Leader

I can share with you a pretty simple formula for increasing your integrity as a leader. Understand that when I say simple, I don't mean easy.

There is a theory of leadership known as "servant leadership." I like the term "custodial leadership." It means striving to be the best caretaker, the best guardian, and the best keeper and protector you can be for those you lead. Servant leaders, or custodial leaders, govern with integrity. It comes from intrinsic core values, and a cognizant choice of service over self-interest.

Here's the three step formula for improving your integrity as a leader:

**Step One: Seek the best for others.** Leaders with integrity ignore self-interest and personal gain, and reach out to do the best for those they lead. Leaders with integrity are not the stereotypical boss, barking out orders for others to follow. Leaders with integrity are more like shepherds.

They pursue the best for others, and watch after their flock.

**Step Two: Practice good stewardship.** Leaders with integrity work to guard the resources of the group. That means spending funds wisely, using volunteers fairly, and properly utilizing and developing followers. Leaders with integrity are like farmers. They take care of the land, guard the crops, and maintain the resources.

**Step Three: never forget your constituents.** Leaders with integrity always keep their followers in mind. They are constantly looking for ways to lead, to take responsibility, and to do a better job as a leader. Leaders with integrity are like good parents. They are always thinking about their children.

Strive to be the best leader you can. That means leading with integrity.

If you have any questions or comments, I'd love to hear from you. Just drop me an email, and I'll get back to you.

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