

The Truth About Integrity

Picture a crisp, clean dollar bill: unscathed by a crammed wallet, unmarred by any strange substance. It is a fairly uncommon sight, but mesmerizing when it appears. We all know the feeling of a shimmering penny, a fluttering bill beckoning to us from the side of the street. More often than not, we choose to pick it up. “What’s the harm?” we think, “Who would miss five bucks?” Many of us are privileged to view the world like that; five dollars could compose a homeless man’s magnanimous donation to his local soup kitchen. A seemingly small penny could comprise a child’s contribution to the clothing donation center that kept her spirit warm through even the coldest winters. It is all too easy to pick up that coin or dollar; after all, nobody will remember your action. The most admirable people, however, perform the morally right decision even when nobody is there to witness. Integrity requires inviolable moral fiber and animus for sincerity, but that characteristic has been slowly disappearing.

As a child, I often moved from city to city, house to house, school to school. I lacked a true home; each place felt more temporary than the next. It would have been easy to mouth off at school, forget about my homework, and disregard my responsibilities: a reprehensible attitude. Nevertheless, the option crossed my mind more times than I would like to admit. If I could impute my behavior on my circumstances, get away with it, and change schools next year, why would I not? Everyone would cease to remember me within a year or two, so why bother trying to leave a positive mark? The answer is integrity: an incorporeal yet invaluable trait. True, nobody will remember the girl who paid no attention to the teacher, who failed to complete homework, who decided not to care. Who will they remember? The girl who listened eagerly to

new information, who worked hard to finish at the top of the class, and who redressed each mistake she made.

This is not something that came easily to me. In fact — although I now express chagrin — I was unable to express integrity until recently. Not until my junior year did I understand the duty and obligation I had to myself and my community; I vowed to work my hardest and achieve the goals I previously lacked the confidence to attain. I realized that I could make a mark on society by bettering myself at school, at home, and everywhere I went. I was no longer content remaining a shadow in the background; I decided to work harder, practice generosity, and adhere to my core beliefs.

Integrity is a value learned slowly throughout time. Although it takes patience and effort to cultivate, the results are priceless. Like the turtle and the hare, slow and steady wins the race; those who take the time to better themselves and their neighborhoods will live a richer, more rewarding life. They will be the ones remembered fondly amongst friends and family throughout generations. It does not take a Nobel Prize, an Oscar, or a Purple Heart, but rather love and loyalty to oneself and one's community. The meaning of integrity has never changed, but the occurrence of it has; it has become a moribund trait — atrophied by a lack of use and prostrated by a shift in values. It is my generation's responsibility to ensure that integrity becomes the crux of our actions and the force behind our thoughts; we will change the world slowly but positively, one decision at a time.