Integrity & Ethics

An organization's success depends on the integrity of its employees. We have all witnessed the severe problems that result in the personal, professional and political arena, when anyone, *at any level*, acts without integrity. When an organization's reputation is damaged, there ensues a tragic loss of both customers and good employees. Organizations of all types are now taking a proactive approach to preventing problems by offering trainings about ethics and integrity.

We found that clients seemed confused about the differences between ethics and integrity. After reviewing the literature on these terms, we have defined ethics and integrity in a way people can understand and immediately use.

Ethics + Integrity = Alignment (Inside & Out)

Ethics: is an <u>external</u> system of rules and laws. Usually there are rewards when we follow the rules and punishments when we break them. A professional board or committee often monitors compliance. Many organizations have developed a code of ethics that employees are expected to obey.

Integrity: is an <u>internal</u> system of principles which guides our behavior. The rewards are intrinsic. Integrity is a choice rather than an obligation. Even though influenced by upbringing and exposure, integrity cannot be forced by outside sources. Integrity conveys a sense of wholeness and strength.   When we are acting with integrity we do what is right - even when no one is watching.

People of integrity are guided by a set of core principles that empowers them to behave consistently to high standards. The core principles of integrity are virtues, such as: compassion, dependability, generosity, honesty, kindness, loyalty, maturity, objectivity, respect, trust and wisdom. Virtues are the valuable personal and professional assets employees develop and bring to work each day.

The sum of all virtues equals integrity.

There is a dynamic relationship between integrity and ethics, where each strengthens, or reinforces, the other. Personal integrity is the foundation for ethics - good business ethics encourages integrity. A person who has worked hard to develop a high standard of integrity will likely transfer these principles to their professional life. Possessing a high degree of integrity, a person's words and deeds will be in alignment with the ethical standards of the organization.

The right thing to do is not always the easy thing.

It can be challenging for organizations to establish and then comply with their own ethical standards. Whether ethics are defined or not, employees at all levels experience pressures to act against ethical standards and counter to their own integrity. Some say one thing and then, in the heat of battle, do another. It takes awareness and courage to act in that moment; to hold out for a choice that is in alignment with the stated ethics of the organization and the integrity of those involved.

To be strong we must know our weaknesses.

Integrity is what provides the inspiration to convert awareness into action. The good news: There is intrinsic satisfaction in accessing courage at times when our integrity is tested. Think of how a sturdy rope is constructed - shorter fibers interwoven with longer, all braided together with great care. The Abundance Company sees integrity as the effective interweaving of virtues into reliability and honesty. When ethical companies support their employees in developing integrity, they become even more productive.