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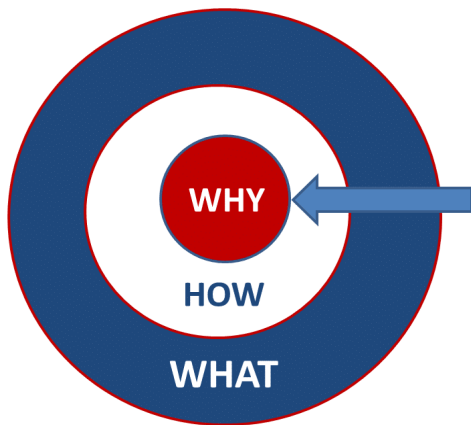
# #INTEGRITASZA MONTHLY

INSPIRE AND INNOVATE/INSPIREER EN INNOVEER



## #integritasza

THE MOVEMENT



Dit maak nie saak hoe  
geleerd, talentvol, ryk  
of hoe cool jy dink  
jy is nie - dis hoe jy  
mense behandel wat  
als van jou sê.  
Integriteit is alles  
- Rob Hills

Vrouekeur

**Integriteit is die kwaliteit om eerlik te wees en sterk morele beginsels te hê. Die toestand om heel en onverdeeld te wees.**

## **INTEGRITY: A WORKPLACE PERSPECTIVE**

*"...Ethics" are principles that guide behaviour, while "integrity" suggests that we should carry out ethical principles in our daily lives and activities, rather than espousing an ideal and then doing something contradictory. Discussions of integrity frequently raise the issue of honesty because if someone advocates an ideal that he or she does not uphold, this can be viewed as a kind of dishonesty..."* (UNODC 2023:8).

Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides the basic values and principles governing public administration. The very first principle is the promotion of a high standard of professional ethics. Ethics represent those principles that guide behaviour. In the South African context every employer should consider incorporating the mentioned principle (ethics) in the value-statement of the business entity and to visibly practice and promote it.

Business owners and their leadership determine the organisations' ethical foundation and the culture to act with integrity. Integrity represents our individual responsibility to pursue and embed ethical principles in our lives, work environment, and daily encounters. So often we criticise government or others, and in the meantime our own house is not in order. We often practice so called selective integrity and pass judgement without first doing proper introspection, self-assessment, or establishing the facts.

Every workplace has its own rules and policies. One of the key pillars of any employment relationship is honesty. The employment relationship is built on trust and a so called "good faith" relationship develops. Parties are compelled to act with integrity and conduct themselves in an ethical manner. The employer's interest should be pursued.

Integrity manifests in the day-to-day behaviour and conduct of an individual in the workplace and beyond. Integrity exhibits in ethical actions or failures. This reflects the so-called morality of the workplace and the ethical standards that apply. The latter is often confirmed in a code of conduct or ethical code. Integrity concerns each individual employee, whatever level in the organisation, and requires honesty, reliability, to accept responsibility, and account for all actions or failures. Therefore, to do what is right, even if others may not be aware or ever become aware of the specific situation or its outcome. To act with integrity and in an ethical manner is a conscious decision, inside and outside of the workplace.

In the South African society, we have seemingly lost our integrity in many ways and on various fronts. Our moral compass is tainted and what should in the normal cause not be acceptable or embraced, has now become a grey and contested space. Often, courts of law are required to judge conduct in such instances.

This is also prevalent in many work environments. We observe that senior managers have acquired authority to make decisions or in certain instances even make discretionary decisions. However, in the process of decision-making integrity is compromised and the decision made cannot be justified given the prevailing facts or a conflict of interest (e.g., not passing the test of acting in a lawful, fair, and reasonable manner). In essence, a senior manager should have or ought to have known better and should at the outset have recused her or him from the process, despite having acquired a discretionary authority. This is what integrity is all about – a conscious decision to do what is ethical and correct under the circumstances, accept responsibility, and account for your actions or failures.

Once senior managers are exposed for a lack of integrity and not acting in an ethical manner, very few display the courage to admit and dissolve their employment relationship. Once exposed, senior managers often display selective integrity and everything possible is done to avoid accepting responsibility and to account for the specific conduct or decision. Senior managers are supposed to lead by example, also in this regard. Often the employing body suffers reputational harm because of this, and trust relationships internally and externally are compromised. In the public sector public managers are often sacrificed to protect politicians that have compromised their own integrity through specific acts or omissions.

I still grapple with the notion that once you have lost or compromised your integrity, it is virtually impossible to reclaim. How do you regain trust? Integrity at a personal level has become a threatened quality and should be practised and cherished with vigour.

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