



## Integrity

### The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality

Henry Cloud | INTEGRITY: The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality  
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Clinical psychologist and leadership consultant Henry Cloud opens his book with a personal anecdote. A friend asked him to advise her two sons about what it takes to be a big success in life. He told them that successful people have areas of competence and can connect with other people to build alliances, but that the third ingredient of success is harder to define: character. Using examples from his extensive consulting work with successful people, Cloud explains why integrity is necessary to them, explaining that to succeed, people must have the ability to gain the trust of others, confront reality, produce expected outcomes, deal with problems, create growth and transcend self-interest. Although some of Cloud's truths seem self-evident and he can become repetitive, *getAbstract* recommends his highly readable, timely moral lesson to current and aspiring business leaders.

### Take-Aways

- Successful leaders need more than intellect and training: They need integrated character.
- Many people have talent and ability, but lack of integrated character gets in their way.
- You can trust people of character and integrity, and trust is the foundation of business.
- Most successful people transcend their self-interest and devote themselves to a larger mission.
- People affect a company in two respects: the tasks they perform and the relationships they establish.
- A person with character can confront the demands of the real world and perform well.
- People should not try to do everything, but character affects all that they do.
- Problem solvers work with what a company already has. "Growers" move a business beyond what already exists.

- While many people have a natural drive for growth, other people's growth remains stifled due to a lack of character and integrity.
- Those whose character orients toward transcendence know the world doesn't revolve around them, and can base their decisions on values.

## Summary

### Character and Integrity

Highly successful people share at least three key qualities. First, they are knowledgeable and competent in their chosen fields. Second, they are strong alliance builders who form solid relationships with people who are relevant to their companies. Alliance building is not just networking. It involves establishing relationships that create the leverage to take a company to a whole new level. But most competent people who can form alliances still don't become highly successful. Often they lack a critical additional ingredient: character. Success at the highest level depends on your integrated character.

*“When we realize that we are smaller than the transcendent things, and we exist for them and not for us, we grow into greatness.”*

Many people associate character or integrity only with morals or ethics. Obviously, the executives who perpetrate corruption and scandal through lies and deceptive practices exemplify bad character and lack integrity. You can only trust people who have good character and high integrity. Trust is the foundation of business, society and personal life. Though character and integrity are often associated with morality, character traits past ethics and morals are needed for high levels of success.

*“Just as we leave the effects of our work behind in results, we leave the effects of our interactions with people behind in their hearts, minds and souls.”*

For example, plenty of people who would never lie or cheat fall still short in performance and never reach their full potential. They can't gain the full trust of others, don't see or grasp the full reality of what is going on, don't produce the expected results, fail to deal with problems, don't create growth and can't transcend their own self-interest to become part of a higher purpose. Such character failures lead to poor performance, an inability to overcome obstacles and a tendency to self-destruct even after achieving great success, even if they are ethical people. Wholistic character determines whether a person achieves success.

### Character and Reality

A hard-driving vice president of sales racked up spectacular numbers, showing steadily increasing results in his first two years with his company. The CEO was thrilled with his performance. But

many of his colleagues didn't like him, and saw him as disrespectful. Two employees threatened to quit if the company didn't fire him. While some colleagues approved of his intense style and results, others found him rude and divisive. The CEO depended on his performance, but worried about the salesman's impact on other employees and on the company.

*"The structure of life, from relationships to society, depends on moral and ethical structure being intact and practiced."*

The marks people leave at an organization reflect two kinds of impact they have on the company: the impact of the tasks they performed and of the relationships they established. The sales VP performed his task splendidly, but his relationships with much of his staff were toxic, and this had costs. The company spent time and money settling a harassment claim. Replacing the two key employees who threatened to quit would be time-consuming and expensive. People suffered distraction and failed to work effectively as a team. Employees could have put the time they spent discussing their problems with the VP to better use. In the end, the expense of keeping the problem VP outweighed the revenue he generated.

*"Outcomes are separate from the person, and the people who perform have a stable sense of self no matter what happens."*

The wake people leave at a company is an extension and expression of their character. This is not just a matter of numbers, though results matter in business. A person with a defective character can leave behind good numbers, but a turbulent backwash of people who feel wounded, angry and disappointed.

*"To sit with failure and loss, and understand it, process it, and grieve it before going on, takes depth of character."*

People need to confront certain realities and deal with them in order to perform well. Reality makes many different demands, some of them interpersonal. Character helps a person meet these demands of reality. This might involve realities such as dealing with a difficult employee or responding to bad numbers. People of character and integrity embrace such challenges and find a way to turn them around; others panic and retreat. People often remark that character is fixed, but it isn't: character can change and grow.

## **Integrity**

Success in business is more a matter of people than of the market, strategy or resources. If the right people attack a problem, they can figure out how to address it. Similarly, if one strategy proves ineffective, they formulate another; if resources run dry, they find a way to replace them. If you don't have the right people, then great market conditions, a brilliant strategy and unlimited resources will not bring you success.

*“Integrated characters are able to recover motivation, hope, judgment, clear thinking, drive, proactivity and other faculties needed to move something forward after something bad happens.”*

Most people associate integrity with character and morals, but it is more than those elements alone. Integrity involves a complete picture of a whole person and his or her performance. To have integrity is to have all of the different aspects of your being working together. A person with integrity integrates character into all other facets of his or her personality.

*“Work environments [are] transformed to higher levels of functioning through empathy.”*

However, this integration doesn't mean that these people excel at everything. No one can do everything well. Some people have special gifts, like the golfer Tiger Woods. People should focus on and develop their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. Great filmmakers shouldn't try to sell their films to distributors; star athletes might make terrible business managers.

*“We need our gifts, but without wholeness of character – integrity as we are calling it – our gifts will become unusable or at least less fruitful.”*

But character and integrity transcend specific strengths and weaknesses. The need for wholeness of character doesn't mean a person should not aspire to capitalize on his or her strengths. But without wholeness of character, even the most gifted people can't fulfill their potential. People perform most effectively when they have a strong sense of their own identity. Then they can focus on their strengths and avoid their weaknesses.

### **Aspects of Character and the Real World**

A person's wholeness derives from integrating all aspects of his or her character. Character has at least six discrete aspects. These include the capacity or ability to connect authentically with other people; to orient toward the truth; to respond to and deal with problems or negative information in an effective way; to be open to growth rather than the status quo; and to be willing to transcend self-interest and commit to a larger purpose or mission.

*“If fears, narcissism, pride, emotional ties, emotional and spiritual emptiness, or other character issues are in the mix, then the work is going to be mixed up with the fruits of those issues, instead of the fruits of labor.”*

When these aspects function together, people can fulfill their potential and achieve meaningful results. Those who work with such people will benefit and grow. When the aspects of character do not integrate, the result is compartmentalization or excessive focus on a single arena like problem solving. A lack of integration results in dysfunction. Dysfunctions occurs, for example, when the attempt to solve a problem makes it worse.

## Building Trust

Earning trust in business leadership positions is possible only when people believe that you acknowledge and understand their concerns. When leaders establish trust, people follow and support them. To build trust, leaders must create an authentic connection with people and exhibit empathy. Empathetic leaders who recognize other people as individuals enable effective communication. Invalidating others' experiences damages communication. When leaders fail to connect with their employees, they lose the support of the workforce and create internal division.

## Truth and Reality

Orienting toward the truth is a foundation of business and of society. You could not work with – much less trust – someone who constantly lies. Everyone might have occasionally told a minor lie, but people with integrated characters always tell the truth when it counts, even when the truth is painful. But while foundational, only telling the truth is not sufficient for success. To succeed, people must grasp other important aspects of reality in detail. They must be in touch with what is really going on, not a fantasy version of events. People who achieve high levels of success must confront the brutal facts of reality. You cannot make a sound decision without acknowledging those facts.

## Integrated Character

Leaders with integrated characters take criticism, and face problems and failures straightforwardly. Such leaders can lose or fail, handle it well and move on. A leader who doesn't fail well will take the company down the wrong path, with even worse consequences. All businesses face problems, and only leaders capable of confronting those problems head on can keep going and eventually succeed. People with integrated characters can recover from setbacks and move forward.

*“The consequences of deceit are usually greater than the ones of truth.”*

A young Harvard MBA succeeded in the record industry, but that wasn't enough for him. He resigned from his lucrative job, dramatically downsized his life and re-educated himself in the real estate industry. He started over in commercial real estate and amassed a massive portfolio. He was smart, but he also had an intense drive to grow.

*“The most important tool ultimately is the person and his or her makeup, and yet it seems to get the least amount of attention and work.”*

In business, some people who are good problem solvers still work only with what they already have. “Growers,” on the other hand, move a business beyond what already exists. Those with a drive to grow must also embrace developing new skills and capacities. To sustain success, a leader

and his or her organization must grow continually. While some have a natural drive for growth, others stifle their own growth – often because they don't have an integrated character.

## **Transcendence**

People must recognize that some things in life are simply bigger and more important than they are. Those who fail to understand this often act as if they are the center of the universe. Such people are often narcissists and prone to selfishness. They overestimate and inflate their abilities and importance. Those who overcome selfishness and go beyond self-centeredness have the quality of transcendence, and want to be part of something much larger and more meaningful.

*“We trust people who we think hear us, understand us, and are able to empathize with our realities as well as their own.”*

People prefer leaders who are part of a larger mission in pursuit of the greater good. When people see the possibility of becoming part of something bigger than themselves through their work, they participate and become part of a team. They grow by serving a bigger cause or purpose. Great success comes to those who don't actually seek success but who instead serve a larger mission.

## **Values and Transcendence**

Values transcend the ordinary and are central to a person's character. This is also true of companies. People hold values in esteem. Values provide guides to higher behavior. People set self-interest and ego aside to serve their values. Both for people with integrated characters and for companies, transcendence brings concrete consequences. Executives who value their staff members place their well-being above profit. A company that places supreme value on an issue like the environment won't sacrifice it for higher revenues.

*“The person of “integrity” is a person of balanced integration of all that character affords.”*

Those whose characters lack the quality of transcendence act only out of self-interest and are often at the root of corporate and economic meltdowns. When they act only on behalf of their egos, such people fail to consider the impact of their actions on their colleagues, employees, investors, business partners and the economy as a whole. They leave a huge amount of damage. Ironically, people who act only out of self-interest end up losing their own interests as well.

## **Tylenol: What Companies Can Do**

Companies can show transcendence. In 1982, several people in Chicago died from cyanide-laced Tylenol. In the beginning it was not known that a criminal had taken bottles of Tylenol off the shelves, tampered with them and put them back. So rather than focusing on a few stores in Chicago or regarding it as a fluke and letting insurance pay for the damages, the company

took Tylenol off the shelves in the entire United States. This was not the result of a cost-benefit analysis; the company acknowledged that the loss of even one life was too many. The values of the people who led the company determined what they did. They acted on behalf of the greater good.

Leaders who develop an integrated character meet the demands of reality. They adjust their actions and decisions based on values that transcend their individual concerns. Leaders who accomplish this perform better and have better relationships at work. Faced with the option of acting in their self-interest or on behalf of a transcendent reality, the right leaders will choose the transcendent reality regardless of costs. For a person with an integrated character, spectacularly successful or not, integrity is its own reward.

## About the Author

Clinical psychologist and leadership consultant **Dr. Henry Cloud** is the author or co-author of more than 20 books.



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