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Integrity

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“Integrity demands consistent attention to what we should do rather than what we desire to do”

- Stephen Carter (p. 235)

In a Nutshell...

In our society today, we claim to value honesty, uprightness, and integrity, but “when push comes to shove,” Stephen Carter points out, “we would just as soon be on the winning side” (p.4). In his book, *Integrity*, Carter explores the nature of society and why we uphold integrity in high esteem for our leaders and ourselves, but then discard it in favour of success and advancement. Carter looks at the concept of integrity and what

practices it requires for any person, organization, or business.

After establishing exactly what true integrity means and how it should look in our society, Carter focuses on individual aspects of life—politics, athletics, the justice system, marriage, education, and media—and how integrity plays its role in each of these various facets of life.

Naturally and in the spirit of the book’s

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A Stanford University and Yale Law School alum, Carter does not shy from speaking his mind.

About Stephen L. Carter: The Author, Lawyer, and Educator

Stephen L. Carter, born October 26, 1954, has spent his life immersed in the sphere of education, whether as a student or teacher. He received his B.A. from Stanford University and his Law Degree from Yale Law School, serving as editor and contributor in both the Stanford Daily and Yale Law Journal school papers.

Carter is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale Law School and has been since 1982.

He teaches on ethics, contracts, and professional responsibility and adeptly uses his background in these subjects in the book *Integrity*.

In addition to *Integrity*, Carter has written eight non-fiction books, including *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* and *The Violence of Peace: America's Wars in the Age of Obama*. He has written four novels as well, including *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, which spent eleven

weeks on the New York Times' best-seller list. A man of distinct and comprehensive skills, Carter has been a contributor to many newspapers, blogs, and magazines across North America.

Although a man of many accolades, it is clear, throughout the pages of *Integrity*, that Carter lives his life as an endeavour toward character and integrity.



In a Nutshell...continued from p. 1 title, Carter does not sugarcoat or sidestep significant issues and conflicts within our society; he speaks plainly about leadership concerns in our culture and explains how they may be rectified with the involvement of true integral practices.

Carter concludes his venture into an integral society by suggested steps to take in order to move toward that goal. He realizes it is not an easy task, but, as he says numerous times throughout the book, "integrity is not integrity unless it entails some risk" (p.131).

“That is America’s integrity dilemma: we are full of fine talk about how desperately our society needs it,

but, when push comes to shove, we would just as soon be on the winning side” (p.4)



Part One: Explanations

Chapter One: The Rules About the Rules

Integrity’s Role in Society

Carter opens his book by taking a look at society. He asks questions about the role integrity plays in our culture; we seem to admire those with ethical stances and positions of integrity, but, ultimately, winning is more important than playing by the rules. Carter calls it the Integrity Dilemma: “we are full of fine talk about how desperately our society needs it, but, when push comes to shove, we would just as soon be on the winning side” (p.4). In our society, we don’t mean what we say or say

what we mean, and yet we expect our leaders to. This is the quandary that Carter presents.

Integrity: A Definition

Often we think we know what integrity means, but when it comes to defining it, we find ourselves at a loss. Carter’s perspective of integrity defined is more of a practical one. He defines it as being courageous in one’s convictions, steadfast and undivided, and consistent with one’s beliefs. He comes at it with a three-step process: discern, act, state.

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The Three Steps of Integrity:

Discern

Spend time reflecting on what is right and what is wrong

Act

Take the required course of action, based upon discernment

State

Speak openly about decision and action, being plain about beliefs

The Steps of Integrity

In order to live with integrity, one must **discern** what is right and what is wrong. This discernment must be accompanied by thorough reflection and focus; it is something that requires time and energy and should not be taken lightly. One must also **act** upon what one believes to be right. This is the natural follow-up to discernment. Once it is clear what one should do, it

Chapter Two: The Integrity of the Upright

Integrity, Religion, and Risk

Carter refers to the Bible and its view of integrity as a basis for moving forward into better understanding of integrity. He directs the reader's attention to Proverbs 11:3 ('the integrity of the upright guides them'), connecting integrity to wisdom, saying integrity is a possession of the upright. Carter makes numerous connections to religion, relating integrity to taking the high road, seeing it as following one's conscience, and involving aspects of self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice is a large part of integrity, Carter explains, as "doing right in preference to wrong implies that one will do so even in the presence of risk" (p.23). For true integrity to be exhibited, one must place doing right ahead of personal interests.

Discerning Right

Carter is adamant of discernment's role in

becomes time to do it. Fight, advocate, and get involved in the areas that need addressing. Finally, one must **state** why one is acting in this way based on discernment. Integrity requires one to speak about one's actions without shame; explain what one is doing with regard to the beliefs and the right that has already been discerned. Carter comes back to this definition time and time again throughout the book.

determining right and says that different people's beliefs affect their views of right and wrong. He offers a few words of caution: just because we do not agree with a person does not mean they cannot be acting with integrity, and just because someone is willing to die for a cause does not make it right. He explains that a person with upright character is not necessarily better at determining what is right and what is wrong; the upright person is simply more inclined to try to determine what is right and what is wrong. Overall, Carter proclaims the value and necessity of discernment: "if we decide that we do not have the time to stop and think about right and wrong, then we do not have time to figure out right from wrong, which means that we do not have time to live according to our model of right and wrong, which means, simply put, that we do not have time for lives of integrity" (p.29).

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Chapter Three: Why is Integrity Admirable?

Admiring Commitment

As Carter explores how commitment is part of integrity, he refers to leadership and what we expect of leaders. We want leaders to do what they have said they would, are firm in their decisions, and hold true to what they believe.

Admiring Steadfastness

As already noted, integrity remains in the presence of risk. This is the steadfast component—staying to the course even in the midst of difficulty and criticism.

Admiring Forthrightness

Along the lines of risk, forthrightness is saying what you think in spite of risk. Even if it might cause some harm to their interests, we want our leaders

to say what they mean and mean what they say.

Admiring Compassion

We also want our leaders to have personal connections. We want their decisions to be rooted in people's needs and interests.

Admiring Consistency

In our leaders, we desire consistency. We admire those who do not change the way they act in similar situations; we appreciate a certain transparency in this.

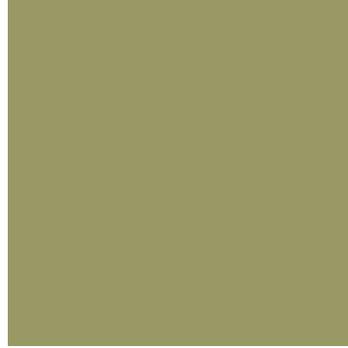
We admire integrity, Carter writes, because we admire commitment, steadfastness, forthrightness, compassion, and consistency. Integrity is a combination, in a sense, of these ideals.



Chapter Four: Coda: The Insufficiency of Honesty

Many people would closely relate honesty and integrity. Carter would agree that these two are linked, but he would argue that they are very far from the same thing. Sometimes acting with integrity requires one to not be completely honest in the situation. Carter offers examples of individuals acting with integrity as spies in an attempt to overtake a very

real evil. Carter also speaks to the fact that integrity requires discernment, whereas honesty does not; integrity compels us to act, whereas honesty does not; and integrity requires us to explain our actions, whereas honesty does not. It is clear that Carter does not believe it is sufficient for an individual to strive to live an honest life.



“People seem to spend their time thinking of more and more clever ways to avoid their obligations instead of doing what integrity commands and fulfilling them” (p.62)



Part Two: Applications

Chapter Five: The Best Student Ever

Hyperbole in Society

Carter uses this chapter to discuss our use of exaggeration and timidity in dealing with others. He frames this discussion in the topic of reference letters and how professors, writing recommendation letters, too often exaggerate in their praise and make the subject look better and more qualified than he or she is. As this happens, it becomes “harder and harder to trust... the literal meaning of what we say to each other” (p.71).

Reluctance to Judge

This ties in to society as a whole. We do not want to offend anyone and so we do not comment on performance or actions because it could come back to bite us. Carter realizes we need to use discretion when communicating to others in these ways, but he says that lives of integrity require us to be true to others in order to allow them to see mistakes and become better people.

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Chapter Six: All the News That's Fit

Adjusting the Facts

Carter explores integrity in journalism in this chapter, and he acknowledges the struggle many journalists have to be honest and report in an integral manner. He talks about many reporters make the facts fit the story, when they should be writing the story based on the facts. Journalists search for controversy and, in covering politics especially, will over-cover a promise broken while barely touching a promise kept. This is the nature of journalism today.

Hiding in the Constitution

Many journalists justify their actions by referring to rights they have by

law. Carter responds by saying that just because the Constitution “tells reporters what they have the right to do... it does not tell them what they ought to do” (p.91). Integrity does not mean justifying actions according to laws or rights, but by holding oneself to a higher standard and acting according to what has been discerned to be right. Carter envisions a world where integrity and freedom of press are used together to be of “greatest use to democracy” (p.102). Carter continues to talk about standards when he says that “integrity in journalism requires that the press apply to itself the same standards it applies to everybody else” (p.103). This is integrity in journalism.

Chapter Seven: And Nothing But the Truth

Integrity in the Court

Carter surrounds chapter seven around something that hits close to home for him, being a lawyer, and that is the area of law and the court system. He acknowledges that within the trial system, we learn “what we think about our integrity...[and] what we think about each other’s integrity” (p.107). Carter also admits that the system does not lack integrity—the people who run it do. Often in the observation of lawyers

and law officials, we are challenged about what we know about integrity—it is about playing by the rules, not winning; lies can get us more smoothly toward where we want to go—and it is imperative that we keep our feet firmly planted or it will be easy to be led astray. The lies that get us more smoothly where we want to go, the expedient lies, are especially pervasive because of their apparent benefit. This is where it becomes evident that integrity requires a certain degree of sacrifice.

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Integrity...

- “is a life of striving toward the good and the true” (p.20)
- “requires doing right in the presence of risk” (p.23)
- “is the basis of trust” (p.31)
- compels us to act
- “is not about winning, it is about playing by the rules” (p.109)
- “comes only when doing the right entails a significant cost” (p.137)
- “usually means following the rules, even when following the rules costs victory” (p.170)
- “leaves little space for evil to take root” (p.233)
- “demands consistent attention to what we should do rather than what we desire to do” (p.235)

The Expedient Lie

“The expedient lie get[s] us more smoothly where we want to go” (p.112)

“Perhaps what integrity demands is that we at least spend greater efforts than we sometimes do searching out the expedient lies of everyday life and making plain that we will not stand for them” (p.121)

Lawyers and Their Role

Admittedly, however, lawyers have a tough line to walk. It is perfectly acceptable for a lawyer to withhold information in order to protect a client, but this must be within the boundaries of the law. This is not as easy as it sounds and it takes much deliberation and consideration for the integral lawyer.

Application to Our Lives

Even though Carter emphasizes the court

Chapter Eight: Until We Are Parted

Integrity, Fidelity, and Vows

Carter spends the next two chapters discussing marriage and exploring integrity implications within it. He sees a connection in that, just like with integrity, marriage requires discernment. It is a promise, not a contract, to “stick with what we are stuck with” (p.129). Fidelity is such a crucial part of marriage, but it is more than most people think. Carter preaches fidelity as a promise to care, to stay, to treat with affection, and to keep one’s word. To stop acting in a loving way within a marriage is to choose infidelity and to, in effect, break a promise and one’s vow.

Chapter Nine: To Have and To Hold

Sometimes it is impossible to keep a marriage commitment intact and divorce is an option that is taken. This is what Carter addresses here: the possibility of exhibiting integrity in divorce. Honour and respect is a part of this, as is, keeping the children’s interests in mind. Carter argues, however, that staying together because of the children may be the most integral choice, and “the choice to live the

system here, he makes it clear that it has ties to the rest of society. No matter where we are, people so rarely tell us what is true, or even what is rarely true; they simply tell us what will help them get to where they want to be (the expedient lie). What can we do about it? Carter suggests, “perhaps what integrity demands is that we at least spend greater efforts than we sometimes do searching out the expedient lies of everyday life and making plain that we will not stand for them” (p.121).

Carter looks at the marriage vow in an interesting way. He explains that “the marriage vow already anticipated the possibility of ending love, and the person now seeking to break the vow knew all along that keeping it could have a price” (p.131). That knowledge, Carter says, is what makes integrity integrity. The keeping of the vow is a matter of will, and the purpose of the vow is to “liberate us from the possibility of yielding to desires and doubts” (p.132). Integrity in marriage is doing one’s best to adhere to the vow established in spite of any cost.

committed life... will usually be the better choice to make” (p.143).

Carter finishes his thoughts on marriage by saying that marriage is a daily choice and integrity is evidenced when there is “an abiding mutual respect and an abiding mutual commitment to work at it” (p.148).

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Chapter Ten: The Integrity of Fun and Games

Sports: A Life Window

Often, sports can tell us things about life on a larger scale, and it is the case with integrity. As athletes, we want to be people who do not value winning over valuing everything else. In the thick of things, however, it becomes apparent who cares more about the points than about respect, and who has integrity. Carter sees the need to address sportsmanship at a very early age: “young people need to be taught to respect opponents rather than despise them” (p.156).

Winning and Losing

Carter sees sportsmanship as a large component of integrity in sports: “sportsmanship implies a desire to win but a willingness to lose, to accept defeat as also a part of the game” (p.158). Integrity in this matter means giving opponents credit in victory, and following the rules, even when it might be detrimental to victory. This is the main thing for Carter: that “rules are made to be followed, [but] integrity [involves] something far more important than winning must be at stake before they are allowed to break the rules” (p.170).

+ Lessons on Sportsmanship

“Sportsmanship implies a desire to win but a willingness to lose, to accept defeat as also a part of the game” (p.158)

“In losing, as in winning, we may be measured by the degree of our integrity, our wholeness in seeing the game as more than a contest over outcome” (p.158)

“Integrity... usually means following the rules, even when following the rules costs victory” (p.170)

Chapter Eleven: Coda: The Integrity of Civil Disobedience

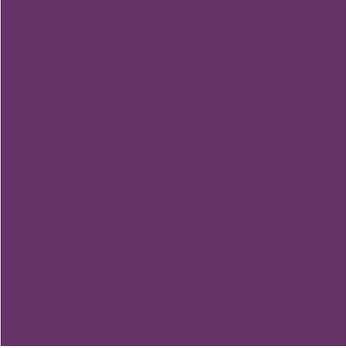
Integrity and Rules

Carter has made it clear that following rules is a mark of integrity, but he also notes that we admire honoured figures “because of their willingness to break laws they consider unjust” (p.171). This is the notion of civil disobedience and Carter looks at how it exists within integrity. People of integrity will judge the actions of others or the actions of the state against morality and will act in civil disobedience in proportion to that moral code. The steps of integrity apply, though, and one must be open about what he or

she is doing (unless it is in espionage).

Disobedience and MLK

Martin Luther King, Jr. is a focus of this chapter and for good reason. Carter looks to him as an example of how a person in civil disobedience is “committed to the reform, not the destruction, of the state” (p.178). King’s goal was to change the hearts of the lawmakers and to be open and loving in his defiance. King sets a great example of integrity in the midst of, and in response to, what he aptly perceived as an unjust situation. Sometimes integrity requires us to stand up against rules that are unfair.



“Our obligation to integrity is to think about all the little decisions we make each day,



because those decisions, if made recklessly rather than deliberately, can lead to evils far grater than any one of them alone” (p. 234)



Part Three: Ruminations

Chapter Twelve: Can Integrity Be Legislated?

Forcing Character

In this chapter, Carter takes a brief look at what it might be like to put into law regulations that would force people to live with integrity. He makes it clear that as soon as people are coerced into something, it does not make them desire it; integrity is something that should be strived for. By instituting laws, it lowers the standard of how we should live. Carter gives examples of already instituted regulations that have tones of integrity, such as censorship, false advertising laws,

and disclosure directives. He noted that these things offer benefits to society, but they often try “to force individuals to speak as though they have engaged in moral reflection” (p.201). By having laws that try to institute integrity, people might think they do not have to adhere to the three steps of integrity; discernment fades, action is hollow, and openness is unnecessary. The integrity that is forced ends up not being integrity at all and, as Carter says, the standard is lowered on how humans showed live and what they should aspire to be.

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Eight Integrity Principles for Politicians

Chapter Thirteen: Toward an Integral Politics

The Need for Integrity

Carter sees a fading democracy and attributes it to fact that people are alienated from government; citizens do not feel connected and relevant to their leaders.

Carter views “ a politics of integrity [as] what is needed to draw people back to their faith in democracy” (p.208). Carter explores integrity within democracy: “the only way to avoid a twenty-first-century politics that is every but as nasty as the politics of the current era is to craft a set of principles and then use our only political weapon—the vote—to make sure that our politicians and their movements follow them” (p.210).

Eight Factors for Integrity

In running a nation or group of citizens,

Carter outlines eight principles politicians should keep in mind as they act in integrity:

- the nation exists for its people
- some things are more important than others
- consistency matters
- everybody gets to play
- we must be willing to talk about right and wrong without mentioning the Constitution
- our politics should call us to our higher selves
- we must listen to one another
- sometimes the other side wins

Carter believes that politicians, keeping these things in mind and acting with integrity, can restore the link and connection that democracy brings.

the nation exists for its people

some things are more important than others

consistency matters

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our politics should call us to our higher selves

we can talk about right and wrong without mentioning the Constitution

we must listen to one another

sometimes the other side wins

Chapter Fourteen: Coda: Integrity, Evil, and the American Core

More Integrity – Less Evil

Carter does not deny evil’s presence in our world. He acknowledges it, but also believes that “integrity... leaves little space for evil to take root” (p.233). The attack on evil must be a daily thing: “our obligation to integrity is to think about all the little decisions we make each day, because those decisions, if made recklessly rather than deliberately, can lead to evils far greater than any one of them alone” (p.234). Carter is clear—good confronts and destroys evil and the point of doing good must be for more than a reward.

But evil is pervasive, so we have to have integrity in doing what we should do instead of what we desire to do.

A Positive American Core

Moving away from evil in integrity is much easier when there is a target. Carter establishes the American Core as a positive set of principles that we can move toward, as we move, therefore, away from the negative. If we teach our children these positive ideals, we can set in motion a cycle away from evil.

+ Critiquing *Integrity*

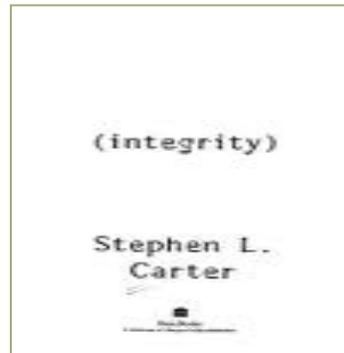
Stephen Carter, in *Integrity*, writes a compelling book that offers great advice for my upcoming profession of a teacher. It presents lessons in leadership and holding oneself to a high standard of character and morality as one finds a balance between authority figure and role model. Not only are these messages beneficial for the work of a teacher, but they also hold much truth for life in general. Carter's work is a challenge for every human being to live a life that seeks to do more than simply survive, but to contribute and enrich society, making it better for generations to come.

Carter outlines integrity in a way that every leader should pay attention to. Often, integrity is interpreted as doing what you say you will do. While Carter acknowledges this as a part of integrity, he sees it as a much more comprehensive value. In incorporating ideas such as discernment and speaking plainly, he develops integrity as more of a process and a cycle that continues. These remarks are a challenge to me as I make choices on a daily level—choices falling in both minor and major categories. They challenge me to think things through and to constantly have a view of right and wrong.

Carter's words have encouraged me to not simply come upon a decision and then figure out what is right and what is wrong, but to establish a moral compass so that I have firm foundations in place upon which to make decisions. I also am challenged to let others know why I am acting the way I am acting, not in a prideful way, but in an accountability way—a manner in which I may challenge them in their beliefs.

In exploring many different examples in life, Carter shows how integrity can and should look in a variety of settings. He recognizes the fact that living a life of integrity in this world is no easy matter, but he offers viable suggestions and exhortations to urge us into a life

"If we decide that we do not have the time to stop and think about right and wrong, then we do not have time to figure out right from wrong,



which means that we do not have time to live according to our model of right and wrong, which means, simply put, that we do not have time for lives of integrity" (p.29)

of character and integrity. At times, Carter's discourse is bogged down with specific cases and legality in American politics, but his real-life accounts and references are helpful in gaining a sense of perspective and application.

I do think, however, in response to Carter's three-step model, that he presents a possibly over-simplified concept of integrity. Because every different day brings a new and unique set of decisions and choices, a life of integrity cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. I know that Carter presents it this way in order to simplify a commonly perceived complex concept, but the way integrity looks in different situations must adapt. Some decisions require immediate action, and so thorough discernment would not be possible. Other decisions would not require explanation or attention—they are private actions—and so one would need not speak openly about them.

I suppose Carter is encouraging a lifestyle of discernment and integrity, one that permeates into every decision because of the constant role it plays in one's life. I agree that this is a worthy aspiration, and one necessary for the effective role as a teacher.