

Why small choices of integrity still matter in a world of shortcuts

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In today's fast-moving world, integrity can feel like an old-fashioned virtue — something admired in theory but too often dismissed in practice. We see examples of this every day. Politicians twist the truth with impunity. Corporate leaders walk away from scandal with golden parachutes. Even in everyday life, there's a subtle cultural shift: if you can get away with it, maybe it's not so bad. "Getting over on someone" has become, in some circles, not a shame but a kind of sport.

Yet integrity is not a relic of the past. It is the glue that holds communities together, the moral compass that keeps us aligned with values deeper than profit or convenience. And most importantly, it is still being practiced — often quietly, without fanfare — by people whose internal code will not allow them to act otherwise.

I was recently reminded of this while talking with a friend who once ran a small retail business. He told me how he trained new clerks to avoid being cheated when making change. The trick, he said, was simple: never put the customer's bill into the drawer before making the change. Instead, lay the bill across the shelf above the drawer, count the

change back carefully, and only then deposit the bill. Why? Because otherwise a dishonest customer might say, "Hey, I gave you a twenty," when in fact they handed over a ten. That one small habit — placing the bill in plain view until the transaction is complete — helps protect both parties. It's a safeguard born of wisdom, but it also signals a deeper ethic: that integrity isn't just about doing right ourselves; it's about creating conditions that help others do right too.

I also remember my father, many years ago, pulling a U-turn on a quiet road in our hometown. He had just paid for gas, and we were halfway down the street when he muttered something under his breath, spun the wheel, and headed back. "The kid gave me too much change," he said. I think it was less than a dollar. But that didn't matter. He pulled the car back into the station, handed the money to the startled attendant, and said simply, "You made a mistake." No sermon, no grand gesture — just a quiet act of integrity, witnessed by a child in the passenger seat.

That moment stayed with me. Not because of the amount, but because of the example. In the faith traditions I've known best, integrity isn't about being perfect. It's about being consistent — living according to your values when no one's watching, and even when it costs

you something. It's not transactional. It's relational. It's not about whether you'll be caught or praised, but whether you can look yourself in the mirror — and whether your actions help build the kind of world you believe in.

But when someone turns around for 89 cents, or teaches a teenager to keep bills visible, or admits a mistake and makes it right, they remind us that integrity is still alive — and still contagious.

From a Quaker perspective, truth is not something static that we simply inherit — it is something we are called to discover, moment by moment, in the unfolding of life. Friends speak of *continuing revelation*, a belief that both physical and spiritual truths are revealed over time through experience, reflection, and the inner Light. But that revelation is not automatic — it depends on our willingness to pay attention, to question what we think we know, and to open ourselves to deeper insight.

When we allow ourselves to believe that gaming the system is acceptable — or worse, admirable — we turn away from that Light. We become numb to the harm we cause, not just to others but to ourselves. The small justifications we make — "It's just smart," "Everyone does it," "They should've known better" — begin to cloud our moral vision. We may

still think we're clever, even successful, but we're living in a kind of darkness. What we fail to see is the social damage and the moral injury that follows — eroding trust, fraying community, and dulling our own capacity to distinguish right from wrong.

But revelation doesn't stop just because we've strayed. It is still offered, quietly, in the course of daily life: a pang of conscience, a child's question, a voice within. And every time we listen and act from that deeper place, we recover something essential — not only our integrity, but our belonging in a moral universe.

So maybe that's the call for this week. Not to be perfect, but to stay awake. To keep our inner compass aligned with our outer actions. To listen for the quiet promptings that show us the difference between what's easy and what's right.

Because in a world where shortcuts are glorified and trust feels fragile, the commitment to integrity isn't just admirable — it's an opening to personal revelation. It's a daily act of faith.

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