

What You May Not Know About Integrity

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Stephanie Johnson



Integrity is a non-negotiable trait for school business officials. But how often do we overlook some of the word's most reflective facets? Yes, we have a responsibility to make sound financial decisions, lead with honesty, uphold a blameless name for our districts—but what's the anchor these practices are tethered to?

A look into the word's etymology reveals that *integrity* derives from the same root as *integer*, *integrate*, and *integral*—all words that mean “whole.”

So, if we really have integrity as school business officials, we're not only trustworthy, we're also undivided. Yet with a job description that seemingly separates our talents, intellect, time, and energy into an array of different roles, we become fractured, *un*-whole. We even perpetuate these internal divisions because we verbalize them in phrases like, “Ok, let me shift gears,” or “I've got to put on my [you fill in the blank] hat for this project.”



What is the script that unites all of your roles into a meaningful piece? Why are you here?

Sure, these are simple clichés, but they bear truth about how school business officials really operate. These mental costume changes are exhausting and they wear us out before we realize it. So how can we begin to approach different tasks with a holistic attitude and save ourselves the trouble of a constant costume change?

Two Integral Factors

What is the script that unites all of your roles into a meaningful piece? Pull back the curtains that separate each scene (department) and take a look at what the acts—the school business tasks—are leading up to. Once you reassess your primary passions and goals, each scene will run much more smoothly because you have a deep understanding of the plot and the ending—that is, your passions and your goals.

1. Rekindling Passion. Why are you here? We're not talking existentialism here—we're talking about that unquenchable drive that nudges you through your office door every morning. Don't feel like you have to have a superficial, "I want world peace" answer. Your passion is intrinsic, one that is unique to you. If you can't pinpoint it right away, that's alright. You may have to look past the hundreds of emails in your inbox or beneath that pile of bank reconciliations. But once you've uncovered it, dusted it off, and shaken some life back into it, you'll sense a slight thrill, a reminder of the driving force that makes you great at what you do.

2. Refocusing Goals. Once you've unburied your passion, let it take the shape of a lens. As you peer through your passion, you'll see your goals come into sharp focus. Your passions shape the goals in your workplace,

in your home life, and in your personal life, so don't be so naïve as to think this passion is only on duty from nine to five.

Most likely, your passions already shape your work goals, but sometimes it's easy to lose sight of the connection between your goals and passions. Realizing these connections, whether secondary or even tertiary, will remind you that your tasks, though various in form, are alike in purpose. Understanding that common purpose dissolves the dividers compartmentalizing your goals, and they begin to take the shape of something whole—something that looks a lot like your unquenchable drive.

Fostering Wholeness in Your Team

Passion also plays a lead role in teamwork. And while you'd probably rather be behind the scenes, your job often puts you in the limelight, which means you have to trust that your stagehands are on cue to help the act run smoothly. Your team's capability—and your confidence in that capability—are essential in helping you work with integrity. If you're trying to fill your team's roles as well as your own, the performance won't be a quality one. You can't close the curtain while shouting the last line. But when you have confidence in your staff, everyone can fully focus on his or her own role, which creates a seamless, whole production.

Patrick Lencioni writes about team characteristics that create wholeness by pinpointing the qualities that create discord. In his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, he creates a pyramid chart of the qualities most toxic to a team's success (Figure 1).

By fostering the adverse of these qualities—trust, harmony, commitment, high standards, and humility—your team will work more efficiently than ever, giving you the peace of mind you need to do your work well.

If you have a say in the hiring process, one concrete way to eliminate distrust, as far as job ability is concerned, is to hire team members who have proven

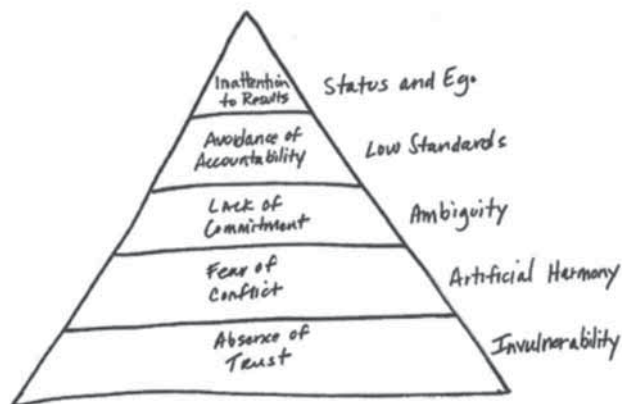


Figure 1. Qualities most toxic to a team's success. From *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: Leadership Fable*, by Patrick Lencioni (2002, Jossey-Bass).

themselves—who are certified in their craft. Most certifications require an ethical code of conduct and these types of certifications exist for almost every field or discipline. Good certification programs weed out inexperienced, underqualified employees.

If you don't have a say in the hiring process, you can still encourage your employees to meet high standards by giving them the resources to take online courses or apply for certification in their field. When your employees see that you care to empower them, they'll trust your confidence in them, and you'll have confidence in their skills. This established trust puts you well on your way to wholeness as a team.



Integrity Means “Knowing Thyself”

You are probably your toughest critic, but that doesn't mean you don't have other critics who are overseeing your performance. Your desire to please your critics often can cause you to take every opportunity to do so—and that can mean taking on too many tasks just to please them. More opportunities to succeed equals more success, right? This habit only gives all parties involved unrealistic expectations and sets you up for both personal and professional failure.

But you can't set your boundaries if you don't know your role. A key contributor to wholeness in the workplace is understanding which tasks should fall under your role and which should not.

Chances are you are already doing too much. We're not just talking about multitasking—we're talking about taking on responsibilities that do not fall under your job description. These tasks may not even be imposed on you by your supervisors; you may be the one who places these responsibilities on yourself because there's a lack of trust within your department (see the previous point on trusting your team). This type of micromanaging leads to compartmentalizing, which in turn creates underperformance.

Take a look at your job requirements and seek out the standards that have already been set in stone for others with roles like yours. If you're curious, here's the official list of job functions that the ASBO International Certification Commission expects certified school business officials to master:

- Manage Accounting Systems
- Manage Accounting Functions

- Conduct Financial Planning and Analysis
- Conduct Budgeting and Reporting Activities
- Conduct Risk Management Activities
- Manage School Facilities
- Manage Information Systems
- Manage Human Resource Functions
- Manage Ancillary Services

Understanding these job functions helps you know where to draw boundaries so you can effectively delegate to your team or to other departments.

Your understanding of your role is important, but it doesn't weigh much if your school board and your community don't have a clear understanding of your role. Consider how you can brand your role in the workplace to communicate to your leaders who you are and what you do. Clearly defining your talents will enable you to drop the constant pressure of meeting unrealistic expectations, and you can commit to high performance using your specific qualifications that make you *one* great worker.

You're only one person, but it's quite possible your level of execution passes you off as an entire team, causing you the stress of playing several roles at work in addition to your personal roles of husband, wife, mother, father, caregiver, etc. That kind of pressure is not healthy, nor does that kind of lifestyle reflect integrity. However, if you take a step back to rediscover your passion and reassess your goals, you can make some changes in your workplace that redefine who you are—not only as a school business official but also as a whole individual.

Stephanie Johnson is the marketing writer for ASBO International. Email: sjohnson@asbointl.org