

## Integrity, Entry #1 of 3

Integrity is the state of being fully integrated: Our actions, our thinking, our feelings, our ideals, and our values all match up (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Spirituality is Practical").

Most of us think of having integrity as being honest and reliable, as keeping our word. While that's certainly true, integrity has a deeper and more nuanced meaning we don't always consider: being whole, being wholly ourselves, being our whole selves at any given moment, no matter whose presence we're in.

As active addicts, we often demonstrated a lack of integrity. We weren't dependable, trustworthy, or responsible, and we weren't whole. We omitted parts of the truth and parts of ourselves. "I was like a three-legged table," a member joked. "Yeah, I could stand, but don't try leaning on me."

We compartmentalized our existence: we behaved in certain ways with some but not with others, and we led double—sometimes multiple—lives. These ways of being can follow us into recovery. How we act and appear on the outside doesn't always match who we really are—or strive to be—on the inside. A member put it like this: "Today, I know I'm out of alignment with my values when my emotions reflect my defects—like fear and judgment—and I act on them. Instead, I try to show up as honestly and entirely 'me' as possible. That includes the 'ideal me' I want to be in relationships and interactions."

It's unlikely that our feelings will "match up" with our ideals and values all the time. For instance, we can still maintain integrity when we don't like somebody and would prefer to punch their lights out—yet we treat them with kindness and respect. That friction is productive; it's an action of love that doesn't necessarily *feel* loving. Other times, our feelings are less reactive; they match our conscience rather than our defects. In those cases, it may be necessary and right to address someone's behavior. Integrity guides our decisions and how we express ourselves in those moments. It allows us to risk others' disappointment and anger. That's being true to ourselves. That's honesty and reliability. That's love.

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*I'll practice integrity by reliably being all that I am, ensuring that my actions reflect what's inside me. I'll keep on this path of distinguishing my conscience from my reactions—and, of course, I'll show up when I say I will.*

## Integrity, Entry #2 of 3

Everyone makes mistakes; promptly admitting when we are wrong shows integrity and responsibility for our actions (*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, "Work").

Perception is a funny thing. Self-centeredness shapes the way we experience our lives, magnifying our own wants, and minimizing our responsibility and accountability. It can be like walking through a carnival funhouse filled with distorted mirrors or echo chambers—our senses deceive us. We have a hard time perceiving reality for what it is, especially when it comes to responsibility for our lives and our actions. Checking our perspective with other addicts helps.

Working the program—especially the daily inventory of Step Ten—helps us make our way through the funhouse of personal responsibility. As we come to terms with our powerlessness and unmanageability, we blame others less for the wreckage of our past. We begin taking personal responsibility. As we take inventory and ask for help letting go of our defects and shortcomings, we lose the need to make excuses for current actions and choices. We take responsibility for making past wrongs right, and we make a practice of checking our perceptions regularly. We shift our senses away from the carnival distortions and get a better perspective on ourselves and our lives. The Steps help us get better and better at being the type of people we can be proud of being.

When we make a wrong turn on our way through the funhouse and find a dead end, it doesn't do us much good to pretend we're not lost. We ask for direction, and we backtrack if we have to. We make mistakes because we are human; we correct them because we have integrity.

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*My disease distorts my view of myself and the world around me. I will use regular inventory to adjust my skewed perceptions so that I can find my way out of the madhouse of addiction.*

## Integrity, Entry #3 of 3

Integrity is the consistent application of spiritual principles, no matter what the circumstances (*It Works*, Tradition Two).

We recognize the ultimate authority in NA groups to be a loving Higher Power that's expressed in our group conscience, according to Tradition Two. For better or worse, however, we entrust mere mortals—and addicts, no less—to carry out our decisions. To do right by this Tradition, it's important to choose trusted servants who demonstrate "the full range of personal characteristics associated with a spiritual awakening," according to the Fourth Concept essay. We select such leaders and we evolve into those kinds of people as we live clean and work the Steps.

As trusted servants, we do our best to practice integrity as we fulfill our commitments. Yes, that's a big order, but the Steps prepare us well. Some might even say that integrity is the proof in the pudding, the evidence of how working the Twelve Steps transforms us. "By the time Step Twelve told me to 'practice these principles in all my affairs,'" one member said with pride, "I was ready to do just that. I've come a long way, baby!" We become people with character and backbone, the kinds of people who do the right thing even when no one's watching—the very definition of integrity.

Of course, the real effort of character building starts long before we get through all Twelve Steps. It's perhaps most apparent when we're in the thick of Steps Six and Seven, which give us a close look at some of our deeply ingrained bad habits. The price we've paid for living this way was starkly detailed in our inventory. We know what we don't want. Now, we take the opportunity to identify and practice healthier, more spiritual ways to deal with situations as they arise in all our affairs.

And practice we do. Like so much in recovery, thinking and character follow the course set by our actions. We might think of right actions as the seed, which—in time—produces the fruit of good character. We do good works, practice virtuous behavior, and become people with integrity.

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Regardless of the circumstances, who's looking, or what's convenient, I will adhere to my new code of conduct today.