

# Maintaining Honesty and Integrity by Jim Rohn

For a leader, honesty and integrity are absolutely essential to survival. A lot of businesspeople don't realize how closely they're being watched by their subordinates. Remember when you were a kid in grammar school, how you used to sit there staring at your teacher all day? By the end of the school year, you could do a perfect imitation of all your teacher's mannerisms. You were aware of the slightest nuances in your teacher's voice—all the little clues that distinguished levels of meaning that told you the difference between bluff and "now I mean business."

And you were able to do that after eight or nine months of observation. Suppose you had five or 10 years. Do you think there would have been anything about your teacher you didn't know?

Now fast-forward and use that analogy as a manager. Do you think there's anything your people don't know about you right this minute? If you haven't been totally aboveboard and honest with them, do you really think you've gotten away with it? Not too likely. But if you've been led to believe that you've gotten away with it, there might be a good probability that people are afraid of you, and that's a problem in its own right.

But there is another side of this coin. In any organization, people want to believe in their leaders. If you give them reason to trust you, they're not going to go looking for reasons to think otherwise, and they'll be just as perceptive about your positive qualities as they are about the negative ones.

A situation that happened some years ago at a company in the Midwest illustrates this perfectly. The wife of a new employee experienced complications in the delivery of a baby. There was a medical bill of more than \$10,000, and the health insurance company didn't want to cover it. The employee hadn't been on the payroll long enough, the pregnancy was a preexisting condition, etc., etc.

In any case, the employee was desperate. He approached the company CEO and asked him to talk to the insurance people. The CEO agreed, and the next thing the employee knew, the bill was gone and the charges were rescinded.

When he told some colleagues about the way the CEO had so readily used his influence with the insurance company, they just shook their heads and smiled. The CEO had paid the bill out of his own pocket, and everybody knew it, no matter how quietly it had been done.

Now an act of dishonesty can't be hidden either, and it will instantly undermine the authority of a leader. But an act of integrity and kindness like the example above is just as obvious to all concerned. When you're in a leadership position, you have the choice of how you will be seen, but you will be seen one way or the other, make no mistake about it.

One of the most challenging areas of leadership is your family. Leadership of a family demands even higher standards of honesty and integrity, and the stakes are higher too. You can replace disgruntled employees and start over. You can even get a new job for yourself, if it comes to that. But your family can't be shuffled like a deck of cards. If you haven't noticed, kids are great moral philosophers, especially as they get into adolescence. They're determined to discover and expose any kind of hypocrisy, phoniness, or lack of integrity on the part of authority figures, and if we're parents, that means us. It's frightening how unforgiving kids can be about this, but it really isn't a conscious decision on their part; it's just a necessary phase of growing up.

They're testing everything, especially their parents.

As a person of integrity yourself, you'll find it easy to teach integrity to your kids, and they in turn will find it easy to accept you as a teacher. This is a great opportunity and also a supreme responsibility, because kids simply must be taught to tell the truth: to mean what they say and to say what they mean.

Praise is one of the world's most effective teaching and leadership tools. Criticism and blame, even if deserved, are counterproductive unless all other approaches have failed.

Now for the other side of the equation, we all know people who have gotten ahead as a result of dishonest or unethical behavior. When you're a kid, you might naively think that never happens, but when you get older, you realize that it does. Then you think you've really wised up. But that's not the real end of it. When

you get older, you see the long-term consequences of dishonest gain, and you realize that in the end it doesn't pay.

“Hope of dishonest gain is the beginning of loss.” I don't think that old saying refers to loss of money. I think it actually means loss of self-respect. You can have all the material things in the world, but if you've lost respect for yourself, what do you really have? The only way to ever attain success and enjoy it is to achieve it honestly with pride in what you've done.

This isn't just a sermon, it's very practical advice. Not only can you take it to heart, you can take it to the bank.