

From the Superintendent's Desk
Dr. Jeff Athey
February 24, 2017

As you are aware, I have been reading and writing about Thomas R. Hoerr's book titled The Formative Five: Fostering Grit, Empathy, and Other Success Skills Every Student Needs. This author asserts that **empathy, self-control, integrity, and embracing diversity** will be the key success skills students (and adults) will need to solve all of the problems they will inevitably confront. He asserts we will need lots of **grit**, too.

In this article, I want to write about **integrity**—what it is, why it is important, and how it can be developed.

This chapter of the book started out talking about the importance of being an **honest** and **responsible** person. This implies to me that one should always tell the truth and be accountable for their actions. However, the author implies that being a person with **integrity** notches things up even higher. The truth is people are not always honest and they don't always take responsibility for their actions. Some people will say there is "gray"—things aren't always black or white. And, when it comes to being held accountable, people will acknowledge they can only be held accountable for the things they have direct control over—not things outside the scope of their control (e.g., the actions of others, fate, the weather, etc.).

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines **integrity** as "a firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; incorruptibility." I would put it this way—"Integrity is demonstrated even when someone else isn't looking." A person with integrity doesn't lie, cheat, or steal when someone else isn't looking—they just don't do it period. That's quite a pedestal to be on! And, even though we all are sinful creatures, it is that lofty pedestal that we should all aspire to.

Warren Buffett, the multibillionaire CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, said, "In looking for people to hire (for a job/position), you look for three qualities: **integrity, intelligence, and energy**. If they don't have the first, the other two will kill you."

Bob Marley put it this way, "The greatness of a man is not how much wealth he acquires, but in his **integrity** and his ability to affect those around him positively."

George Peternel, the retired associate director of Northwestern University Center for Talent Development said, "I never met a person whom I respected who did not exhibit a high level of **integrity**. Few, if any, people can succeed for any length of time in any workplace without the respect of colleagues, subordinates, and superordinates."

In schools, teachers and principals typically do a good job of focusing attention on **honesty** (i.e., fairness and straightforwardness of conduct), but need to pay more attention to **integrity**. When it comes to teaching about **honesty** directly, educators need to help students to think through matters so that it occurs instantaneously without them being aware they are making a decision. The more realistic and relevant lessons are—as well as discussions—the more likely that students will understand and internalize them. **Integrity**, though, is always public and developed intentionally. In other words, a person with integrity is consciously making their personal values known to others. It shows. It speaks volumes! **Integrity** means being responsible for our actions and owning our roles in solving problems. In other words, **integrity** carries our value of **honesty** to a higher level.

Hoerr states there are 5 steps to progressing from honesty to integrity. They are:

1. Becoming aware of what honest means.
2. Internalizing and acting with honesty.
3. Becoming aware of what integrity means.
4. Identifying opportunities for integrity.
5. Initiating situations to display/carry out integrity.

So, what are things a person can do to develop **integrity**? Some strategies that educators can help with and do in school:

- Model honesty by quickly and visibly admitting to mistakes.
- Model integrity by talking about values and intervening in unfair situations.
- Help students understand there are often difficult consequences for acting with integrity.
- Make it a point of routinely applauding students when they step up to do the right thing.
- Ask students if they act more or less honest in different situations and why.
- Discuss whether or not integrity changes over time or is affected by context.
- Have students identify characters from literature who are honest along with those who do and do not display very strong integrity and get them to explain why.

Integrity is something we all should aspire to have. Of the 5 success skills Hoerr writes about, **integrity** probably ranks in the top two, if not the top. In two weeks, I'll come back with an article about the fourth success skill—**embracing diversity**. That should be a very interesting article when you think about the political climate and division in our country right now regarding diversity/differences among people.