

Integrity – Something We Can All Afford

Let's start by rounding up a few of the usual suspects – the statements I like to refer to as the tail wagging the dog:

- You'll start as a freshman
- Yes, they are dangerous, but aluminum bats help us win
- Their parents send them here for us to baby-sit
- Most of these kids won't make it anyway
- My Athletic Director doesn't back me up and support my discipline and standards
- If I don't make it to the playoffs this year they'll fire me
- I have to take what I can get because I can't recruit
- I get no help at all, I have to do everything
- We have a business to run, bottom line costs
- He's got desire, and with lot of training we can make a pitcher out of your boy
- These kids today have no respect for the game
- Parents overwhelm us, they are in your face all the time
- We can't compete with the big schools – they have too much to offer.

These are some of the environments that generate violations of integrity. They provide the convenience of the elastic clause, self-pity and paranoia, justification for non-action or just plain deceit. The answers, solutions, and how to manage issues like these would make a fascinating course or seminar. But let's stop right here. Honorable men already know what they believe. Where things get really tough (or not) is in the execution of our values.

What is integrity? It's very important to come face to face with your own definition. How else could you lead an honorable life? For most of us, integrity is truly the unconscious. It is the way we were raised. It's as much a part of us as the color of our eyes or the sound of our voice. But the exercise of defining the word is well worth the effort. It brings us in touch with who we want to be compared to – who we've become.

Integrity is our moral values in action. If there is a breakdown in that action it is our fault – and our fault alone, as coaches we held accountable and we should be. Baseball is not a democracy. As coaches, teachers, and businessmen all rolled into one, we are in command. We make and enforce the rule of order, respect, and team play. Or we choose to turn our backs, let it slide and hope for the best. We are the fathers to an extended family. Or we bitch and moan, find excuses and transfer responsibility. Similar to some of the young students we train.

I have lived in Northern Virginia for 25 years. I have had a love/hate relationship with Washington, DC for that entire time. They say to make it in this town you must learn the art of compromise. They do it well. Too well. Here they don't know when to stop –

where to draw the line. They compromise their integrity to win; the art of artificial ruling and the ultimate act of fooling yourself.

If your situation or your job compromises your integrity, don't make excuses. Change it. If you can't change it, go somewhere else. It may not be convenient. It may be risky. It does take courage. But is staying worth the risk of your reputation? As coaches it's our only commodity.

Tradesmen have a great saying that I've adopted for our business: "My name is on the side of the van." At our school we have used an integrity contract for many years. Everyone signs it and it stays on file. The contract identifies what students should expect of us and what will be expected of them. It also commits them to be a positive role model. A copy is posted on our web site.

We have instituted strict rules against profanity and disrespect to parents both in our facility and during off site team play. We encourage (require) parental participation during lessons. We place guarantees on the success of the educational experience they come to us to receive. We raise expectations on everyone. Yes, we probably lose business - bad business. I have come to value the ability, the freedom to say, "this is not a school for everyone."

In the past two years we have had the honor of training over thirty boys who went on to pitch in college, eight to the Ivy League. Regardless of their individual skill level, each player has an excellent character and will represent the school with integrity.

Another definition of integrity is soundness, complete, wholeness. Because we are human we make mistakes. Perhaps the deepest cuts from our own self-inflicted wounds come from our own violations of integrity. We know it instantly and it is painful. That wound within takes much longer to heal. We stare in the mirror of personal accountability. All of our excuses to recruit, win, survive, or increase profit margins in the long run will not sustain our need for self respect. Like losing a game, integrity violations should be observed, analyzed, forgiven, and then corrected if we are to be complete. Self-esteem and self-respect is developed through the action of integrity – happiness is the by-product.