

To live - and be governed - with integrity

By Meredith Metsker



I've been thinking about integrity a lot lately.

When I was a junior in high school, my English teacher gave everyone in the class their own 4-inch-by-6-inch notecard. We were instructed to write the word "Integrity" on one side and decorate it however we saw fit. She then laminated all the cards and returned them to us to keep in our binders, folders, pencil cases, etc. Her intention was that we would see those cards and be reminded to live and pursue our education with integrity.

Her lesson has always stuck with me, and I'm pretty sure my card is still lying around my parents' house somewhere (sorry, Mom and Dad). Now, rather than carrying a physical reminder, I just try to make integrity the foundation upon which I conduct myself.

Merriam-Webster defines integrity as "the quality of being honest and fair" and "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values." All of the people I've come to admire - family members, friends, colleagues, coaches, teachers, leaders, etc. - personify these definitions. They live honestly, they help others without complaint or expectations, they do their fair share and they respect their fellow human beings.

That's one of the things that has bothered me most about the 2016 presidential election. There is a distinct lack of integrity. It's like we've forgotten how to live honestly. We've forgotten how to communicate respectfully. What happened to electing leaders because they are intelligent, honest, fair and humble? Now it seems like we elect or idealize leaders based on who can shout the most extreme viewpoints the loudest.

To me, integrity in politics is about sticking to your principles but being willing to discuss alternative ideas and compromise when necessary. We have fallen into this trap where compromise is seen as weakness, when really it's the ultimate display of strength.

We think a person changing their viewpoints over the years is a sign of flaky behavior. But I would much rather know my leader is capable of evolving and adjusting his or her views based on new experiences and information. To cling to outdated and, in some cases, offensive ideologies simply out of stubbornness is narrow-minded. A truly strong man or woman will listen to all viewpoints, deliberate and make the decision he or she believes is right.

Perhaps this is a romanticized view of democracy, but I think it's possible to govern with integrity. For example, I view President Barack Obama as a principled man with integrity. I have not agreed with all of his political policies, but I respect him because he is a good person whom I feel has represented me well.

I promised when I became a Town Crier that I would not go on any political rants, and I hope this does not come across as one. I'm not here to tell you how to vote. That is 100 percent your decision and yours alone. I just want to encourage all of us to do our research, go to the polls on Tuesday and vote with integrity. And when the results of the election come in, I encourage all of us to accept them and move forward with integrity. Regardless of who is the next president of the United States, we have to continue living and working together.

I often hear people throw around phrases like "playing the race card" or "playing the woman card." As for me, I'm going to remember what my high school English teacher taught me and play the integrity card.

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