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2nd Place Essay: The World Needs Leaders with Integrity

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Nicholas Eckart

Since its inception, mankind has been plagued by incompetent or corrupt leaders of all nationalities and from all walks of life. To study the history of leadership in any population is to study the mistakes people in positions of power have made. Although many explanations abound as to why leadership failures occur, one of the core reasons is integrity. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of integrity is “firm adherence to a code of moral or especially artistic values: incorruptibility.” Because of their lack of integrity, many leaders are quite corruptible, and easily fall prey to temptation. Leaders who lack integrity suffer a lack of support, are more easily corrupted, and as a result, miss out on making a lasting impact on those they lead.

Someone who is willing to lead, but is not willing to play by the same rules that others are held to, will quickly fall. Unfortunately, the best examples of this are found in American politics. Mere days ago, David Petraeus resigned as Director of the CIA and officially retired from public life after reports of a scandal between him and his biographer were discovered in probes of his e-mail account. Despite his popularity as director of the CIA and as a former general, once knowledge of his affair became widespread he had little choice but to resign and retire. Likewise, years ago Bill Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives for having an affair with an intern and lying to cover it up. Clinton had been a very popular president, and although he remains popular and is still prominent in politics today, he lost much of the support and respect he once had, and was never fully able to recover. In both cases, the absence of integrity cost each man his reputation and much of the respect he once held.

Leaders of all kinds are faced with a variety of temptations that their power affords them. For some, this temptation is of a sexual nature; others are tempted to exert their power and will upon others. Whatever the case may be, in every situation leaders without integrity are more susceptible and more easily fall prey to temptation. Morals provide a standard by which to contrast what is right and wrong, and although many would argue that moral values are relative, and depend only on the individual, it cannot be denied that certain actions provide better results than others. From a Christian perspective, integrity, as laid out in the Bible, is the very foundation on which we are to build our relationships with others. “I have the right to do anything,” you say – but not everything is beneficial.” (1 Corinthians 6:12 NIV).

In the end, what is most tragic about those who attempt to lead without integrity is that they miss out on so many opportunities to have a positive impact. Leadership should never be focused on the leader themselves, but on the potential impact they can have on those around them. The best way to understand what leaders sacrifice when they lack integrity is to study the impact of one who was perfect in integrity: Jesus Christ. Throughout his lifetime on earth, Jesus led others with the kind of integrity that every leader should aspire to. Huge crowds came to follow him, and although in the end Jesus was abandoned by those who claimed to be his followers, the impact he made upon the world in just thirty-three years cannot be overestimated. Jesus is the perfect example of what integrity in leadership should be, and if every leader were to strive to be like him, the world would be changed for the better – for everyone.

Although no one is perfect, and no human being has gone their whole lives without making a mistake, leadership that adheres to integrity is still possible. And it is a concept that many leaders, those of Christian and other faiths alike, have understood and applied to effect great change on the world in small ways: Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa;

the list goes on and on. Regardless of nationality or cause, there is a common denominator: in all they did, they had integrity. The world today lacks leaders with solid morals and an integrity that can't be shaken, and ultimately it is up to each one of us to be this kind of leader wherever we are.

Works Cited

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