



# ENHANCING INTEGRITY AS A POSITIVE VALUE FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*One major problem for the citizens of any country has been the privilege to elect or appoint leaders with integrity and who are ready to maintain high moral standards and norms in the conduct of public affairs especially in a democratic setting where expectations are usually high from electorates. In democracies like Nigeria, what is experienced in most successive governments are leaders with Acquired Integrity Deficiency Syndrome. These are leaders who are competing on high magnitude and mode of certain unethical conduct such as fraud, corruption, and collusion with armed /pen robbers. The unethical dimensions of how influential and powerful people in the society conduct themselves; have set a bad precedent to the younger generation and lowly ones in the society, especially those in the formative again. For Nigeria to regain integrity and express positive values in the core of leadership, the war against corruption must be tackled with the right weapon. We cannot continue to use “catapult to shoot an elephant”. There must not be sacred cows. This battle must be taken with all sincerity of purpose; the existing procedures and sanctions for dealing with misconduct should be vigorously be fine-tuned.*

**KEYWORDS:** *integrity, leadership, good governance, democracy, corruption, public affairs, character.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Integrity is not a trait that we are born with, rather it is acquired as we go through various stages of life. Most of our leaders do not come from family backgrounds that would reflect their level of integrity but in the course of influencing people and also engage in proper character transformation, integrity is developed

According to Thomas M. Cunningham (2002), no two people have the same level of integrity even though we share common ideologies. He further stressed that this process of integrity begins when we are very young, usually taught by our parents, grandparents, neighbors, teachers, and other children whom we may have contact with. This process can also be taught by reading or by the watching of certain television programming. The process by which we develop integrity is also dependent upon our reception senses as well. How many times have we heard of families who were the cornerstone of integrity and wholesome living in the community,

only to have a child who turned out to be the complete opposite, otherwise known as “the demon seed?” In defense of that example the reverse can be true as well, there have been some who come from families that have lacked integrity only to have a child who possesses a high level of integrity. While this does not happen often, it does happen (Thomas M. Cunningham2002).

James F. Bracher (2012) in his contribution, said that integrity is congruence between what you say and what you do, as well as what you say about what you did. Integrity is the keystone of leadership. The keystone holds the enterprise together at its most critical junction, where ideas, products and services meet the customer. The keystone enables the arch to fulfill its supportive mission. Integrity enables an organization to achieve its mission. Integrity is the strength, unity, clarity and purpose that upholds and sustains all of the activities of the enterprise. Integrity provides this stabilizing dimension by never, ever, compromising. Integrity recognizes risks and



assumes responsibility. It drives the realization of vision toward the enterprise's destination. Leaders exude integrity.

We cannot rule out the fact that one of the challenges of leadership is leading with integrity. People want their leaders to be a source of trusted values and integrity. They look to their leaders for assurance and confidence and for clarity, vision and purpose particularly during times of uncertainty (McKee, 2010). Phrases like “walk the talk” and “lead by example” are often talked about. We insist on integrity in our business and political leaders because they are granted so much power over us. So much is expected of leaders, which is why we feel let down when there is lapse in integrity.

It is claimed that leaders need integrity in order to function effectively. Integrity is seen as a positive attribute. When it is said that person “has integrity” it is a compliment, meaning honesty and strong character. Integrity derives from the Latin root “integer” meaning whole, or complete therefore combination of the two terms: leading completely (Suggs, 2007).

Dr Kenneth Boa (President of Reflections Ministries, Atlanta) describes integrity as the direct opposite of hypocrisy; he states “it’s self-evident that a hypocrite is unqualified to guide others toward attaining higher character. No one respects a person who talks a good game but fails to play by the rules. What a leader does will have a greater impact on those he or she wishes to lead than what a leader says. A person may forget 90 percent of what a leader says but he or she will never forget how the leader lives”.

In other words, integrity has direct relationship to ethics, morality, authenticity, commitment, but what we need is a clear understanding of the concept of integrity. Integrity is concerned with individual wholeness and conscience – the quality of being true to oneself.

The rewards for integrity always come at a long run. The gain for lies and deceit may pay for a short while but the end will always be disastrous.

### **Leadership Definition:**

John C Maxwell: In the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell sums up his definition of leadership as “leadership is influence - nothing more, nothing less.” This moves beyond the position defining the leader, to looking at the ability of the leader to influence others - both those who would consider themselves followers, and those outside that circle. Indirectly, it also builds in leadership character, since without maintaining integrity and trustworthiness, the capability to influence will disappear.

Warren Bennis: Warren Bennis' definition of leadership is focused much more on the individual capability of the leader: “Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential.”

Peter Drucker: The forward to the Drucker Foundation's “The Leader of the Future” sums up leadership: “The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers.” To gain followers requires influence (see John Maxwell's definition below) but doesn't exclude the lack of integrity in achieving this. Indeed, it can be argued that several of the world's greatest leaders have lacked integrity and have adopted values that would not be shared by many people today.

Some of the common ideas that others include in leadership definitions include exerting influence, motivating and inspiring, helping others realize their potential, leading by example, selflessness and making a difference.

Above all, Peter Drucker gave us a clear-cut image of the leadership definition which include qualities needed to enhance effective leadership and good governance.

### **Features of A Good Leader**

Del Suggs (2007) asserts that, first of all, leadership comes from our values and beliefs. Our values are essentially our attitude about worth. What do you consider important, worthy, or of value? And our beliefs are the assumptions that we carry, perhaps understood as our convictions. Beliefs are also important, because we compare every new experience against an existing conviction, and evaluate it.

A second source of leadership is our ethics and character. Ethics is often confused with morality, or right and wrong. When I refer to ethics, I mean our conduct in a given situation. I think ethics is situational. People we consider to be ethical are people who behave consistently in the same or similar situations. Consider character to be a summation. It's the combination of your conduct, values, and beliefs.

Knowledge and skills are another source of leadership. Think of knowledge as the information you've learned-- what you know. Skills are those abilities and capabilities that we gain throughout life. Certainly we look for our leaders to have knowledge and skills.

The fourth source of leadership is authority. We often think of authority as power, but that's not exactly right. Someone with power is just the boss. He or she may not have any real authority. I like think of authority as power that we give to someone



as a function of their position or job. Most of our elected officials have authority-- we've given them power over us by voting them into office. When officials leave office, they tend to leave their power behind for the newly elected official.

Apart from the relevant features stated above, James F. Bracher (2004) contribution is that integrity has some attributes which must qualify a good leader which include:

1. **Character:** Being consistency between word and deed, care about other people around you and do the right thing even when no one is watching you.
2. **Honesty:** Truthful communication.
3. **Openness:** Operational transparency. Know and understand the rules
4. **Authority:** Know that you have the right to do something, to take action.
5. **Partnership:** honor obligations. Look for ways to help one another --- and then pitch in!
6. **Performance:** accountability throughout the organization. Live up to promises
7. **Charity:** generous community stewardship. Give to others with no strings attached -- don't expect to get anything back

### **How Characters Influences Leadership**

A nation with people of strong positive character is an asset to her citizen because standard of living will be high. Whereas a nation that is low in character is a liability to her citizens in the comity of nations. In the fast changing and deteriorating world of today, leadership with strong positive character is desperately needed in Nigeria. Nigeria should be best positioned to provide leadership envisaged to take the world out of the morals that inept good governance. This is why it is imperative for Nigeria to raise up to the occasion.

Nigerian leaders need to have strong and positive sense of responsibility of who they are in power. They should understand and accept that their self- worth does not come from the position they occupy but their stand on what they believe is right.

All leaders need to be confident that their worth is ultimately from whom they are, rather than what they accomplish. Failure does not discourage the leader but continues to focus on his responsibilities. 'Failure is an event-not a person 'so says John Maxwell.

In national leadership, trust is perhaps the greatest characteristics a leader must build. Without trust people will not follow the leader's vision; they will not put forth their full efforts. Trust is built out of a strong character and transparency.

Ensure what you think, say, and do matchup, examine your motives. If the circumstances change will your action change?

Stand for the things you considered right despite fear. When you act wisely inspire of the fear, you will win over it. Control your fear by taking every fearful thought captive. Confront your fear by looking fear in the face and tell it you would and what you would not accept.

### **The Force Of Character**

- Character distinguish you be advertising the sterling qualities in you and undeniable strength.
- Character endears you to the heart of your leaders, peers and followers respectively.
- Character speaks for you when everybody abandon you or ignore you.
- Character takes over when reputation fails.
- Character imbues you with confidence and strength when ll else fail and everyone condemns you.
- Reputations attracts people to your leadership style but character is what make them remain with you long after they have forgotten what even made them draw closer to you in the first place.
- Whereas ordinary or vain people protect their reputations, character protects the leader with strong positive value.
- Characters cannot be intimidated by limitations because it is who you are in the real sense.
- Character makes you a credible, dependable and predictable leader ever when the chips are down.
- Character is the best legacy you can give the followers and successors. Character is transferrable through teaching, indoctrination and mentoring.

According to Pastor Adeola Mensah (2012), when all things are lost you can still be a transformational leadership. But if you fail the test of character, your leadership position may never be recovered. Character is like an elevator. It takes you up if you apply the right principles. However, if you press the wrong button it can bring you down or get you trapped in the middle of nowhere in leadership, governance and life.

Despite the many failures of leadership in the past and present generations, leadership is still needed today as it is important in initiating meaningful change and galvanizing people to respond. However, it is pertinent to reiterate that knowledge and skills without character can be outright irresponsible and dangerous and can lead to evil outcomes on the part of the leader.



### Value -Based Leadership

Value represents principles which are truth that are universally applicable to guide behavior. Enduring values, when imbibed and practiced consistently, become standards of behavior that can ensure the utmost good to the person, group, nation, or group of nations. They can, therefore, be looking at as a moral standard that guide the way of the people relate and treat one another. When the principle of selfless love guides a person, he will weigh every action of his in this light. He is therefore able to decide among options and choices that he may face in his every day activities. Several groups and profession has put these standards together into what are referred to as the ethics of the profession or association.

The leader should look deep within him to identify the sacred convictions of his heart that would guide his behavior irrespective of the circumstances. These values should be timeless and unchanging and he should be ready for their convictions. This leads to compromises which whether we want to accept it.

### Perspectives

I am in agreement with Del Suggs (2007) who suggest three formulas for leaders to improve their integrity:

1. Leaders with integrity ignore self-interest and personal gain, and reach out to do the best for those they lead. Leaders with integrity are not the stereotypical boss, barking out orders for others to follow. They are more like shepherds. They pursue the best for others and watch after their flock. Little wonder, the followership gets fully committed to the leader's agenda, which should be in tandem with organizational objectives.
2. Leaders with integrity to guard the resources of the group. That means spending funds wisely, using volunteers fairly, and properly utilizing and developing followers. Leaders with integrity are like farmers. They take care of the land, guard the crops, and maintain the resource in the interest of the organization.
3. Leaders with integrity always keep their followers in mind, they never forget their constituents. They are constantly looking for ways to lead, to take responsibilities, and to do a job as a leader. Leaders with integrity like good parents. They are always thinking about their children.

Nigeria greatest problem in governance within the democratic structure is the absence of integrity. According to Professor Wale Omo (2012), Nigerians

are living in a land where yesterday is better than today; where institutions get weaker by the day; where religious centres are mostly trading centres; where traders sell fake to the people; where mediocres are celebrated as achievers; where the dubious play a role of a genius and where corruption expands in high proportion to position. That land will destroy the real vision; it will ground the real and potential leaders. That land is travelling on a fast track to the abyss. The world must come to her rescue.

Nigeria needs rescue missions that will enable her at the end of the day to produce visionary leaders with positive values in order to enhance integrity in the affairs of public governance. This mission requires people who can display the extraordinary ability to ignore chaos and difficulties that surround on decay system and remain focus on positive values. People equipped with inspiring and profound abilities to pierce through hard times into the future and envision the future of Nigeria as a great nation.

Integrity should be earned in the society. Parents should focus more on children upbringing than pursue of money and allow the virtues of good family moral values and ethics be eroded in the fabrics of future and potential leaders.

### CONCLUSION

In Nigeria as a country, days are gone when integrity and transparency took preeminence in the society. Today, we only hear about looting the treasury, massive fraud in the banking sector, e-crime, and corruption and here the common man find themselves harbouring grievances without solutions.

Several governments have come and gone with various structures and agencies to address this situation but worsened on daily basis.

This crusade is to build a viral state devoid of unethical behaviour and conduct known in recent times, where private sector organizations seem to be in keen competition with their public sector counterparts in the magnitude and mode of certain unethical conducts such as e-fraud, corruption, collusion with armed robbers/kidnappers, unauthorized debiting of customers' accounts and so on. There is of course the menace of undue victimization and harassment on the basis of ethnic, religious considerations. Above all, the up-coming generation must have pedestal of information with the moral and social value-orientation in the society which is experiencing a state of decay and confusion.

Virtually no one is completely honest. A leadership which messes up in a big way should come clean and admit their errors. People will generally forgive mistakes but they do not tolerate being treated like idiots by leaders. A mistake is



therefore an opportunity to be better, and to show remorse and a lesson learned

Leaders must establish internal organization codes, systems and structures that reward ethical conduct and punish leaders that behave otherwise. We must deliberately make 'heroes' of leaders with proven track of integrity to encourage such behavior and guarantee organizational effectiveness we must desist from measuring just organizational success without thorough appraisal of the 'method' of attainment of such goals. Organizational chaos is guaranteed if leaders only focus without resistance in right methods.

Public officials should exhibit high ethical standards of behaviour while in office; and the elected officials should be ready to account for the political power in their hands. The issue of accountability and transparency should take a central stage in the affairs of leadership and governance. Emphasis on fighting corruption should be given serious attention so that it can be minimized in the fabrics of the people. It is good to understand that the source of good leadership cannot be position, power, pressure or popularity. Being a decent human being is often the major part of the answer to what makes people great leaders.

Above all, strategies for enforcing accountability and transparency should be put in place so as to give this new generation a sense of belonging and hope for a better Nigeria.

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