

An Easy Stress-Test for Your Integrity

A big part of integrity is continuity of character – in other words, being pretty much the same person in all places and circumstances. But how do you know if you have it?

Look to your circle of relationships.

How would you feel if you gathered people from all areas of your life – work, friends, family – and hosted them together at one party?

If you're terrified by the thought, you might have some things you're hiding or keeping back from one group or the other. God forbid you're consciously playing false, but that's not all that uncommon. In either case, you probably want to keep these different groups away from each other as much as possible. You fear that if they all come together, your friends might find out that you're more (or less) than how you represent yourself when you're around them.

Your good-time friends may learn from your colleagues that you have a reputation of seriousness and strictness at work. Your work colleagues may find out that you go to church with your parents. Your parents may find out that you party hard with your friends on the weekend.

While it is OK to enjoy different activities with different people (your good-time friends probably won't enjoy going to church), it's not good if you're afraid to be "found out" by anyone.

Start to integrate. Start to be the same person in every group, even going back to relationships you formed long ago. Let your rough edges show.

When you do that, you'll discover the joy of forging connections across your relationship groups. I've come to love hosting parties with people I know from different parts of my life in Atlanta. My church/spirituality friends might enjoy meeting my philosophy friends, who might love to meet my economics/politics friends, who might love to meet my startup friends. We all have things to share with each other. And as I grow more fully into integrity, I become more comfortable with actually bridging these connections myself.

I'm sure I'll have more big life changes that I'll have to integrate back into all of my different relationships. But when the time comes, a good stress-test (and a milestone) of my integrity will be another big old party with ALL my friends.