

Integrity and Personal Leadership

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After long reflection, I realized that the one thing that will significantly impact my personal and organizational leadership is integrity. It is not that I have issues with integrity, but how I can keep working at it so that I have ‘trikarana suddhi’ as they call it in India – alignment of my words, thoughts and deeds - more often than I do in the coming year? Where would I like to make progress in 2010?

Integrity is not just essential for leaders, but for everybody. It is at the root of character. If I can work on my integrity in 2010, I have a feeling that the returns on that investment will not only benefit me, but also my organization and my family. In this article, I will explore what integrity is, the three “gaps” that prevent us from maintaining it, and how to avoid and bridge these disconnects. The three gaps are:

- The Saying-Doing Gap (Credibility gap)
- The Feeling-Doing Gap (Commitment gap)
- The Being-Doing Gap (Courage gap)

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, integrity is “the quality or state of being complete or undivided; completeness.” Simply put, we would say a person has integrity if his or her words, actions, thoughts/feelings and being are aligned. Whenever I find the alignment between these components in my life, I feel “complete” or whole.

The Saying-Doing or Credibility Gap

When I talk the talk but not walk the walk, I fall into the Credibility Gap. This gap is much more prevalent in the home life than the work life because at work we are subjected to assessments based on what we promise to do and what we actually do, while at home we do not have to undergo a formal performance review. If my actions do not reflect the values I want others to follow, chances are that they will do what I do rather than pay attention to what I have said. This reduces my credibility. My children have been good mirrors for me. They don’t hesitate to hold a mirror up for me to reflect and make a course correction.

The most effective way to prevent myself from falling into this gap is simply to be aware and conscious of my saying-doing gap in my everyday life. I have to become aware of my credibility in my work place and pay attention to the promises I make versus promises I keep. I also have to create a tracking system to keep me in check and pay attention to my words. I always risk falling into this gap when I make a promise in the heat of the moment without considering whether it is possible to keep that promise and whether I have the resources to follow through. Sometimes, I make a sincere commitment only to change my mind later, and become afraid of telling my family/coworkers that I can no longer keep my promise.

If I want to bridge credibility gap in 2010, I have to reflect on where I am and why I do what do:

- What kind of credibility do I currently have with my family, my organization, and my community? What kind of credibility do I want?
- Where and with whom do I have special difficulty bridging these gaps?
- Who will be the right kind of people and what will be right kind of system to support my goal of building my credibility?

The Feeling/Thinking-Doing or Commitment Gap

Another area I struggle with often is that of commitment. Somehow, what I feel and think is not necessarily what I end up doing; I do what is convenient and comfortable instead of what is right and appropriate. I say yes when I should say no and then I kick myself. I tend to say that I will do something, but have not really made an internal commitment to follow through. Then I struggle with the repercussions. I am sure that I am not alone in this. Why do we make commitments we are not *committed* to keep? Maybe we don't want to keep commitments if that means we have to point out mistakes or shortcomings in others. Perhaps we don't want to embarrass or offend them by letting them know that we saw what they did or that we know that they did not keep their promise. Maybe we hope somebody else will do the dirty job of letting others know that they don't have the skills, that they are not getting the job done, or that their fly is open. How authentic am I in my relationship with you if my commitment is primarily to look good and not necessarily to support you in getting better?

In trying to bridge the commitment gap, sometimes I have gone the other way – ending up upsetting the person because I did not choose the right context to share my concern. I have

learned over time that timing is a critical thing. I must choose carefully when, where and how to communicate my concerns to the other person. When pointing out a mistake, I have to learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable. It is very important for me to attack the issue not the person and if I do it right, then the other person joins me in attacking the issue.

Additionally, I need to make a habit of thinking through the words I plan to use to express my concerns because, as an extravert, I think by talking and I have to pay extra attention and not blurt things out. Another area where I have to pay extra attention in 2010 is keeping my emotions out of the conversation. Instead, I want to use logic and provide evidence to support my argument in a way that allows other person to see what I am seeing. Tempers might rise in important conversations, but if I don't get caught up in emotions, I make good progress. I also know that the Commitment Gap is where the majority of our relationships fail over time. By bridging this gap carefully, thoughtfully, and tactfully, our relationships will significantly improve over time.

Finally, here are three questions that I will pay extra attention to over the holidays to bridge my Commitment Gap:

- With whom, in which relationship do I have the biggest commitment gap? Why don't I express my thoughts and feelings in that particular relationship? What is my mental model?
- What is the worst that can happen if I share my concerns with others? What the best that that can happen if they understand and appreciate my feelings and thoughts about them or about their actions?
- Where am I ready to take some steps and make progress?

The Being-Doing or Courage Gap

We all have our own unique hopes, dreams, aspirations and passions, but oftentimes we do things that go against those dreams – in fact our essence -- to fit in and belong to a group. We end up doing what is expected of us – be it for our parents, community, authorities or peer group -- instead of what we really want to do because we are afraid to stand out. I find that it is easy for me to adapt myself to others; I have done it at a significant cost to myself, my family, and my

health. I have to watch for my need for approval. Maybe your issue is not a need for approval, but a lack of confidence.

Each time you and I do what others expect us to do – especially when it goes against our own beliefs, values or self-interests – we are sacrificing our integrity and falling into the Being-Doing gap. We are *doing* for others rather than *being* ourselves. It is difficult and I am afraid, but whenever I have the courage to stand up for myself and my interests, I find that others respect me even more. And each time, it takes courage to fight the habit and bridge the gap.

Each of us is unique and has significantly different capabilities, skills and interests. Sometimes, others know about our uniqueness. But as author and musician Michael Jones said -- if you don't sing your song, who will?

I am exploring the following three questions to reflect on during the holidays, in preparation for 2010, in which I will pay more attention to being more courageous, more myself and less stressful:

- What am I most afraid of that makes me do what I detest most – seek approval?
- Where have I been sacrificing my passions and interests in order to make money or be successful?
- In 2010, what is one dream that I am going to follow? What is one area I can incorporate my passions into my work/life?

I realize that 2010 is an important year in my life and what I do in it will change my future. It is clear to me that I don't need to worry where I begin – I could work on building credibility in my relationships while paying attention to my commitment to others. Working on my credibility or commitment does not get in the way of working on my courage and bridging the being-doing gap.

The key is, first, to become aware of my gaps, then pay attention to them one at a time. Paying attention allows me to choose my next action; it does not have to be preplanned. Finally, I have to spend more time reflecting on what actions I have taken and what lessons I have learned from them. This increases my awareness and the cycle continues. Maybe at the end of 2010, when I reflect, I feel that progress has been made. What about you? Where do you see yourself in 2010? What are your new year resolutions?