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# THE CEO OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

What are the qualities and characteristics that help create successful leaders? Consider this four-point plan. *continued* ▶

by Mark Goulston

With business leaders' public—and private—behavior coming under increasing scrutiny, it's becoming nearly impossible to avoid getting caught in a lie. Few things detract more from your credibility and the respect of your colleagues and peers than being called on the carpet to deflect accusations and defend an untruth. Can leaders who lapse learn how to be truthful in words and honorable in deeds? Of course they can.

If you're fortunate, you'll meet people over the course of your career who exceed your expectations in every way. When you work or spend time with them, you find yourself wanting to be a better person. You put a lid on your neuroses (which might cause you to coax others to go easy on you because you are wracked with worry) and on your sense of entitlement (which can drive you to manipulate others into doing what you want through intimidation). And you work well.

Why do we try to be the best that we can be with such people? Given the choice between instant gratification and the lasting satisfaction of earning the esteem of someone you respect and admire, all but the most myopic of us would choose the latter.

What would happen to your leadership effectiveness if you became more like the people from whom others actively seek acceptance and support? How productive

This article originally appeared on *Fast Company*.

would your teammates and peers become if they all felt that having you as a leader represented the rare opportunity to work with someone that people inside and outside the company admire? How much harder would people work if they were inspired and motivated by the privilege of your adamant faith in their skills?

If you answered anything less than an enthusiastically positive response to those questions, imagine the effect on people if you acted in a manner that was the polar opposite of this. How motivated would your colleagues be if you attacked, blamed, demeaned, and embarrassed them and yourself? Perhaps they'd work hard in the short run because of fear or even resentment. Your organization might squeeze a winning quarter out of intimidation, but without inspiration you will never build a winning company.

What are the qualities that leaders should aspire to in order to earn, deserve, and command respect? Look no further than a mentor whose belief in you made you want to give your best shot in your professional and personal life. Chances are they possessed the following four attributes:

- » The judgment to know the right thing to do.
- » The integrity to do it.
- » The character to stand up to those who don't.
- » The courage to stop those who won't.

If you consistently practice and develop these qualities in your professional and personal life, you will accrue an additional benefit beyond getting the best out of your peers and colleagues, as well as your family. You will develop wisdom. With that you will be able to distinguish what's important in life, what's worth fighting for—even dying for—and what makes up a life that's worth living.

In the next few columns, I'll further explore each leadership attribute, highlighting new ways you can incorporate the qualities into your work life.

**USABLE  
INSIGHT**

Command respect, and people will beat a path to your door.  
Demand obedience, and sooner or later they'll head for the exits.

## WHAT WOULD MY MENTOR DO?

Good judgment is one of the four characteristics of successful leaders. But how do you know what the right thing to do is—and when to do it? [SECOND IN A SERIES]

Even with Sarbanes–Oxley and the pressure for leaders and boards to be, well, above board, we still live in ethically and morally challenged times. Nice guys may not finish last, but until there is clear evidence that some of them are finishing first and doing

so because of their honesty, the needle is not going to move very far toward taking the high road instead of the low road.

Can you do the right thing before you know what the right thing is? Where does knowing the right thing come from? Is it instinctual and in our genes? Or is it learned and in how we were raised? Why do the right thing, when doing the wrong thing is sometimes so much easier, quicker, harder to detect—and something everyone else is doing, too? Why bother making your life hard when you can make it easy?

Taking the time to **learn the right thing** to do  
in various circumstances—and then **do it**—  
is **a matter of values** more than anything else.

Taking the time to learn the right thing to do in various circumstances—and then do it—is a matter of values more than anything else. If you value winning at any cost, how you play the game won't matter. But putting value on being the best you can be, testing your mettle against the best opponents, and then becoming even better because of it results in your having a winning life.

A couple of years ago I was a speaker at the Annual Association for Corporate Growth's (ACG) Middle Market Mergers & Acquisitions conference in Los Angeles. Arguably the most successful amongst the other perhaps more notable speakers was

Michael Heisley, CEO and chairman of Chicago-based Heico Acquisitions and owner of the NBA Memphis Grizzlies. Mike has made a career—and a bundle of money—buying underperforming companies and turning them around.

The ACG hosted the guest speakers at a cocktail party at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Mike attracted people to him like bees around honey. Everyone wanted his attention. When it was my turn to greet him, something possessed me to ask, "How much of who you have become was due to your father?"

Not betraying the trust of those less powerful than you is one of the best ways to inform you about what the right thing to do is.

Momentarily taken aback by this question, he pointed to a couple of chairs at a nearby table and said, "C'mon, let's sit down." Other people waiting for their audience with Mike may have been a little miffed, but I wasn't about to refuse such an invitation from this successful revitalizer of the rust belt.

We sat down and Mike shared the following: "Some of the best advice I ever received came from my dad. There was the time when I told him about a business I was about to buy that was clearly a win for me and a lose for everyone else who had any connection with the company. He looked at me and said, 'Why would you do a deal that helped you and hurt everyone else?'"

“It was as if he were saying, ‘Mike, because you know how to take advantage of opportunities, you don’t have to take advantage of people.’ What I didn’t realize at the time was that my father had so much confidence in my ability to be successful by knowing and doing the right thing, that I didn’t want to dishonor his belief in me by being any less than he thought I could be. And I didn’t. Like Jack Nicholson’s famous line from the movie, *As Good As It Gets*, my dad made me want to be a better man. And I like to think I have.”

That sense of judgment is a guiding principle that Mike tries to follow in his business and his life. Not betraying the trust of those less powerful than you is one of the best ways to inform you about what the right thing to do is. Knowing the right thing—and then doing it—is what causes not just success, but also the peace of mind that comes from a well-lived life.

One of the reasons Mike exercises his judgment with care is to honor his dad. You, too, can use your mentors, role models, and those authority figures that were more authoritative than authoritarian as your guides to knowing the right thing to do. Every time you are faced with a decision in which there appears to be a right and a wrong response, just ask yourself in your mind’s eye: “What would my mentor say?” If you have the least bit of hesitation in running it by them even if only in your mind, there’s a good chance that you’re being tempted to do the wrong thing.

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Doing the right thing is what leaders do to honor the trust—and to be worthy of the esteem—of the people they work with.

## THE INTEGRITY-BASED BUSINESS

Integrity is one of the four characteristics of successful leaders. And it's important in every aspect of your business. [ THIRD IN A SERIES. ]

With almost all of a difficult year behind him, a CEO (who asked that his name not be used in this article; let's call him John) and I sat down for one of our regular Friday meetings. It was halfway between Thanksgiving and Christmas. John, the 53-year-old grandson of the founder of a third-generation manufacturer of high-quality socket and ratchet tools looked 10 years older than his age—perhaps because the firm had been losing its market share progressively for those 10 years. As the end of the year drew nigh, John just wanted to talk. When I asked him where he wanted to be at this time next year, he said, "Next year, I'd like to feel hopeful and proud instead of afraid and ashamed, like I feel this year."

We began a heartfelt discussion about how he might turn his fear into hope and shame into pride. We kept going back to the same word—integrity. Our conversation evolved into an idea for an integrity-based business, one that had an excellent chance of getting John out of the sad place he found himself now—and into the place he wanted to be.



After meeting with John, I realized that although baring his neck so completely was unusual, it was not surprising. The ache to transform fear into hope and shame into pride is felt by many presidents, CEOs, COOs, and other high-level leaders whose companies are going through hard times. Our plan for an integrity-based business has a good chance of working for John, and it may work well for other leaders facing the same dilemma.

## INTEGRITY OF VISION

Create the greatest-value service or product. By exceeding customers' expectations, you will satisfy them—and instill pride in your employees. If you do good business, it's good for business. Don't rest on your organizational laurels and risk losing your commitment to customers and clients, much less the possibility of being exposed as mediocre. In John's case, this meant improving the design, quality, and reliability of the tools his firm manufactured to match what they had been in the company's heyday 25 years earlier. So prized were its earlier tools that they had become collectibles, and John envisioned developing new markets for a younger generation that could become just as crazy about these tools as their parents had been. Creative pricing strategies could then be developed by looking at and learning from the pricing leaders in the tool and other industries that are known to give customers great value for their money.

## INTEGRITY OF MISSION

Make your business' quality and value the best that it can be regardless of whether you're contemplating selling your business. Work to increase your company's value by improving every aspect of it. Cut costs wherever possible without cutting quality. Avoid cutting corners and half-hearted efforts, and you won't have to be concerned that your competition has already passed you by. For John's company, this involved a long-overdue update of the engineering and design departments to utilize new technologies—and encouraging the sales department to enthusiastically reconnect with current clients while still going after new markets. The company pursued a rigorous cost-benefit analysis of expenditures, leading employees to ask a question they'd been avoiding for years: "Is what we're getting worth what we're paying?"

## INTEGRITY OF FUNCTIONS

All functional units need to be the best that they can be. A strong engine won't make up for a weak transmission. Work together toward mutually agreed upon goals to correct departments' previous practice of acting like prima donnas with disregard for other departments, to expose inadequate departments that try to hide their incompetence, and to counter leaders' fears that a laissez-faire attitude may already have caused too much damage. In John's company's purchasing, engineering, and service departments worked together to develop higher-quality products and improve customer satisfaction.

## INTEGRITY OF TEAM MEMBERS

Each person needs to do his or her best in all aspects of their job. People show strength of character and commitment by giving their best effort to every responsibility in their job, even when they don't want to. It's called professionalism. If you don't feel confident in an area, seek assistance or training. Don't do anything behind anyone's back. Avoid the counter-productivity of excuses, blame, not meeting commitments or keeping promises, and counter concerns of inadequacy by directly addressing deficiencies. Employees who raised criticisms and complaints at John's company now helped find realistic solutions—and committed to taking action. Supervisors and team leaders helped hold everyone accountable.

## INTEGRITY OF FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

Tie pay to performance. Basic compensation includes salary and benefits. Bonuses need to be saved for sustained performance above and beyond the call of duty rather than an assumed part of compensation. Prolonged impaired performance evolved into an idea disciplinary measures and financial consequences. Set quarterly goals and develop an objective performance evaluation method that involves the COO, supervisors, and employees. Bonuses and raises tied to popularity, political savvy, and squeaky wheels are less effective than bonuses tied to productivity. If the health and success of the company is at stake, confront overpaid, overextended, high-level executives—perhaps including yourself.

## INTEGRITY OF NON-FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

Respect, gratitude, and recognition should also be tied to performance and attitude. Don't treat employees who stroke their bosses better than conscientious and loyal workers. If you favor undeserving workers who flatter their superiors and play politics, conscientious and responsible workers may become demoralized, which could result in sloppy work. Supervisors at John's company began to track the progress of their team members, offering recognition and praise for good work and positive attitudes.

## INTEGRITY OF SECURITY

Develop a plan that shores up the stability and security in the face of the changing needs, abilities, and stamina of devoted, conscientious, long-term employees. Don't allow executives to claim excessive perks or treat employees like commodities; if you do, insecure workers could retaliate by stealing, lying, or doing poor. If you take advantage of people, how can you expect people not to do the same to you? At John's company, some highly technical work required skills that some devoted employees in their mid- to late-50s were having trouble learning. But those same people fully understood another aspect of the business—what the tools were all about. They were true “tool guys.” Leaders designed a program to develop the managerial skills of these mid-career employees so they could impart their tool wisdom to the more technologically current but less seasoned workers.

The higher road of being dedicated to integrity at all levels of his company appealed to John enormously. Even though, John, too, would have to change how he worked, he looked forward to relieving the gnawing feeling in the pit of his stomach. After we completed our list, he looked it over, turned to me, and said, "Now that's the kind of company I want to lead, work for, and buy from. I haven't felt this way in years!"

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If you tell the truth, you never have to remember anything.  
— Mark Twain

## **STANDING UP TO THOSE WHO DON'T DO THE RIGHT THING**

Character is one of the four characteristics of successful leaders. Sometimes, expressing it can take the courage of your convictions. [FOURTH IN A SERIES]

"General Powell, I understand that your wife once suffered from depression, had to take medicine, and was even in a mental hospital. Do you want to comment on that?"

The 8,000-strong audience filling the Dallas Civic Auditorium was aghast. Everyone went quiet. They could hardly believe their ears. Colin Powell—then considered a serious contender for the Presidential nomination—was delivering a stirring, inspiring

keynote address. His audience: a leading residential real estate company's top producers. Speaking to the group of type A, driven sales people, Powell urged them to give back to their communities, his voice filled with gratitude for his family, childhood friends, and opportunities to do well by doing good. He entreated the gathered successful real estate agents and brokers to do the same.

I also learned from **Colin Powell** on that day that when you **wrap aggression around a principle**, it gives you the **conviction to stand up** to anyone.

He faced an uphill battle with this crowd. They listened politely enough, but you'd be hard pressed to imagine Powell's impact having a lasting effect. After all, these were the best deal-makers of a profession not known to be circumspect, but who instead appeared to take pride in their "transaction myopia," namely—find the deal, get the deal, do the deal, next deal.

During the Q&A period, a man asked the above question. Inappropriate is too kind a word for his off-the-wall question. The audience and I listened intently. I wondered how Powell would react. Would he be politically correct and say that he was glad the man asked the question to make the point that mental illness should be treated with parity to medical illness? Would he ignore the man? Would he become hostile? Or would he bring back memories of Edmund Muskie throwing away his presidential

hopes 25 years earlier when his wife was similarly attacked, causing the Maine senator to cry?

He looked firmly at the man and responded: "Excuse me sir, the person you love more than anyone is living in hell, and you don't do whatever you can to get her out? Do you have a problem with that, sir?"

The **leader** of the **21st century** will be **principle driven** rather than personally driven.

You could hear a pin drop. You felt Powell's values and principles fuse into deeply felt conviction. Talk about leadership! I said to myself, "I would buy a used country from that guy."

He so commanded my respect that he made me want to be the best I could be. I went to the breakout session I was scheduled to lead after his keynote and announced that I had changed my content from the previous day on how to sell more effectively to how to do right by your client. I asked the audience how many of them felt it was an honor to hear Powell's words and felt that they would be dishonoring that privilege to not go back to their communities and give back. Nearly everyone raised their hands.

That incident remains one of the best examples I have witnessed of someone commanding respect through demonstrating:

- » the judgment to know the right thing to do by stepping in to help a loved one who was defenseless against a foe such as severe depression
- » the integrity to do it by not stopping until an effective treatment was found
- » the character to stand up to someone who would malign his wife as being weak instead of understanding that she had an illness

In doing these three things, Colin Powell gained the deep admiration of an audience not generally known to value doing the right thing more than landing a big sale.

I also learned from Colin Powell on that day that when you wrap aggression (his reaction to the man asking an inappropriate question denigrating a loved one) around a principle (getting your wife out of hell), it gives you the conviction to stand up to anyone. By allowing the principle to keep you centered, you remain firm of purpose and can look anyone in the eye. Your taking the high ground will silence any foe that comes at you from any place lower than that. I also learned that when you don't have a principle to stand up for and on, but instead take things personally, you become hostile and usually end up shooting from your hip and then shooting yourself in the foot, making the situation worse.

The leader of the 21st century will be principle driven rather than personally driven. And the principle? Do what's in the best interest of the company and that is fair to everyone it touches. Merit for merit; effort for effort; value for value.



If in the heat of the moment, you're tempted to stray from principle to what feels personal, try this three-step tool to get you back.

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>STEP 1</b> | Think of the first thing you want to say or do and don't do it (this is about retaliation)        |
| <b>STEP 2</b> | Think of the second thing you want to say or do and don't do it (this is about starting a debate) |
| <b>STEP 3</b> | Think about the third think you want to say or do and do it (this is about finding a solution).   |

Or perhaps Sara Jane Radin, principal of Performance Advantage Systems, put it best: "Your character is the anchor that grounds you, the compass that guides you, and the magnet that draws others to you. Being aware of your character gives you confidence and increases the probability of achieving your desired results."

**USABLE  
INSIGHT**

AGGRESSION + PRINCIPLE = CONVICTION  
AGGRESSION - PRINCIPLE = HOSTILITY

## MY DINNER WITH A BULLY

Coming face to face with an overbearing, win-at-all-costs blowhard can take courage. Recognizing those characteristics in yourself can take even more.

"The world is a dangerous place, not because of the people who are evil,  
but because of the people who won't do anything about it"

—Albert Einstein

Deep within the heart of many men is the fear that they lack courage—and that they wouldn't step in the way of a bullet meant for their wife or children. They hope they will, but they aren't sure. They aren't confident. And it bothers them because a man who lacks courage isn't a man.

Many men feel this way. I have felt this way. After my first child was born, I attempted to change this. I'm still a work in progress.

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"The one thing I am most happy about right now is that I don't work for you," I said emphatically.

"What?" replied my dinner appointment in surprise. Let's call this 43-year-old CEO of a rapidly growing company Frank. We had just met. And Frank had just made a condescending, sexually demeaning comment to our waitress at the famed Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel. Our waitress could only smile back at him uncomfortably and then glance at me, as if to ask "Who's your creepy friend?" Frank's arrogance clearly

exceeded his considerable smartness. And his action pushed me to keep a commitment I'd made to myself after receiving life-saving surgery: the commitment to not allow such people into my life.

It's **an addiction**; the best you can be is a **bully in recovery**. You have to work on it every day or else you'll **slide back**.

"Yeah, I wouldn't want to work for you because I would be deathly afraid to tell you business—what the you have a capacity for contempt that crosses over into abuse," I said. "When my undiscovered mistake causes you to have to explain a mess to the board of directors, what are you going to do, blame it on a little person like me? I don't think so. After all, the company is *your* responsibility, isn't it? Life is just too short to put up with crap from a bully like you."

His jaw dropped. Looking at me incredulously, he said, "Nobody has ever talked to me that way."

"Well, maybe it takes one to know one," I said. "But more importantly, is it true?"

"It's all true. It cost me a marriage, a relationship with my kids, and a job," Frank confessed. Then he leaned forward and, as if he didn't want anyone to hear, whispered, "Is it curable?"

I replied without missing a beat. "It's an addiction; the best you can be is a bully in recovery," I said. "You have to work on it every day or else you'll slide back. But it's probably worth it, because at the end of your life you'll be less bitter and have more friends, and people won't have to lie at your funeral to come up with nice things to say about you. You'll accomplish more than you thought possible."

He laughed. "Can you help me?"

I pondered that for a moment. "I'm trying to figure out whether you're a bully to your core. If you delight in beating up on people, especially those who can't fight back like our waitress here, then I won't help you," I said. "That's because you have already more than you deserve. And furthermore, I would help anyone who has to deal with you to beat you. If, however, you act like a bully because it gets things done and you don't know any better, then there is some wiggle room. I might work with you."

"Which one am I?" he asked.

"Well, if I'm going to be your shrink—your coach—I get to ask the questions. Which one do you think you are?"

"I am very driven and goal oriented. I was on my cell phone after an angioplasty seven months ago," Frank explained. "But I don't think the bully bit works for me anymore, so maybe it's time for a change."

"Right answer, wrong reason," I replied, "You should change because it is wrong to abuse people, especially those below you—not because it doesn't work tactically anymore. But you have earned the right to my meeting with you once more after this

dinner. You're on probation."

"Done," Frank agreed emphatically. "How soon can we start?"

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We met the next week. I was not optimistic. I expected him to show up but not really be committed to changing. To check that out, the first thing I asked when he sat down in my office was: "What did you learn from our dinner?"

"That I may or may not be a bully," he answered, trying to be the dutiful, cooperative client.

"Close, but still wrong," I said. "You're so smart everywhere else, it's tough to figure why you're so dense here. We both know that you are very much a bully, we just don't know whether you want to change."

"Geez, you don't give a guy a break, do you?"

"Sound like anyone you know?"

"This is where you're screwed up!" he blasted back, showing his true colors. "I give everyone a chance, but when they mess up and then worse, try to cover it up, that's when I go off on them. You're being the jerk now. I should have known better than waste my time with a shrink. I've spent tens of thousands on you useless guys sending my wife and loser kids to you. And they're still not any better."

"You're right. Being glib like that was inappropriate and wrong. I'm sorry," I replied

contritely.

"Too late. I must have had too many drinks at the Polo Lounge when I thought you could help me."

"I might have had one too many myself to think I could help you," I pushed back.

"Oh, screw it. I made the time on my calendar for this. Let's just move on and do it," he said in a self-serving semblance of graciousness.

"Not yet. I made an accidental glib remark, probably because I was having performance anxiety about seeing you, and then you reamed me verbally," I asserted. "That was a bit of overkill, I'd say, so I think you now owe me an apology."

"I said, 'Let's just move on,' didn't I?"

"You certainly did. Here's your lesson for today: You do regret, but you don't do remorse," I said. "You need to work on that."

"What's the difference?" he asked.

"Regret is where you admit wrong-doing and say, 'It won't happen again' and then say, 'Can't we just move on?' like you just said to me. Remorse is where you look deeply into the eyes of the person you beat up, see the damage you did, let them see that you accept responsibility for it, and then say, 'I did that. I was wrong. I'm sorry.' No excuses, no explanations, no defenses."

"Oh," he responded, a quick study even when exploring brand new territory.

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I felt a little more optimistic before Frank came in the following week, but I still wasn't convinced he wanted to change. When he arrived for the next meeting, he seemed more enthusiastic. "What have you learned and done so far?" I asked.

"I've learned how much of a bully I've been, how much I need to change, and how much I want to change. I've also learned that I didn't know the difference between regret and remorse, but I do now," he responded mournfully, but happily.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I met with my 20-year-old drug-using, in-and-out-of-rehab, college-dropout son and told him I was sorry and wrong for going off on him for everything he did wrong. I told him I was sorry and wrong for almost never saying anything positive to him for what he did right—and for driving him to the point of not caring anymore," Frank admitted, his eyes watering.

"What did your son say?" I asked.

Frank's eyes reddened with tears. "He looked at me and started to cry. Then he said, barely audible, 'I'm sorry for all the times I wished you were dead and all the times I tried to kill myself because I didn't see any way out.' I asked him why he didn't tell me it was so horrible. My son looked straight through me and said, 'You didn't want to know.' You know, he was right."

"You're incredibly goal- and task-oriented and tune out anything or anyone that gets in the way," I said. "That's why you're so successful at work and such a failure at

life—and why you're seeing me. Isn't that true?"

"You're right," he said pulling himself together.

"Here's your lesson for today: To reach goals, you have to keep control; to reach people, you have to give it up. See you next week."

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When you're dealing with a person who won't do the right thing, words alone rarely have an impact. Doing the wrong thing is an action, not a statement. In the story above, it became rapidly clear that Frank wouldn't have listened to words. It was only when I threatened not to see him (something he was smart enough to know he needed) if he turned out to be a bully through and through that he really took notice.

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"Confront evil at the earliest opportunity."  
— Walter Dunn

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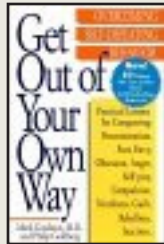
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Mark Goulston, M.D., F.A.P.A. helps high performing leaders, senior management and sales people reach their high potential through learning and utilizing emotional intelligence. He is Senior Vice President Executive Coaching & Emotional Intelligence at the Palo Alto based business advisory firm, Sherwood Partners and has worked with businesses ranging from early stage to *Fortune* 100 as well as national law firms. He speaks nationally at offsites and conventions and is the best-selling author of *Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior* (Perigee). He appears regularly as an expert resource in print, on network television and on syndicated radio news programs.

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
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