

## Living in Integrity With Ourselves

by Deb Elkin, LPC

Most people would agree that it is very important to live our lives with integrity – to be truthful and honest, to honor our words and our deeds, to let others know they can count on us to do what we say we will do. When we live with integrity, we feel good about ourselves. And we know that other people feel good about us too.

There is another aspect of living with integrity – that of living with integrity with ourselves. What does this mean? It means listening honestly about what we want and need and value and then honoring those truths by living them.

Sometimes that can be a real challenge because we often have conflicting needs and wants. For example, you may value good health and a healthy lifestyle. Yet you may eat poorly, not get enough exercise, work too many hours, or not get enough sleep. You KNOW this is not good for you. You're usually not happy with yourself for doing it. But you can't seem to change it. You are living in internal conflict with yourself. You are not living in integrity with yourself.

Perhaps you are in a career that isn't fulfilling. You know you aren't happy but you don't know what you want to do, you're afraid to make a change, you think others would disapprove of what it is you do want to do. So you stay. Perhaps you are in a relationship where you get ignored or criticized when you express your feelings. You may shut down and give up (but the feelings are still there), you may rage, act out, or get revenge. But you don't really feel good about yourself when you do that either. Perhaps you are "living beyond your means." You want what you want and you want it now! You deserve it! And yet, you have a deep internal nagging, a discomfit, because you are out of touch with how much money you really have and you are feeling out of control.

All of these are examples of how we can get caught up in our internal conflicts and how we end up betraying ourselves because we are not living according to what truly feels good and honorable to us. When we betray ourselves, we don't feel good about ourselves in the world. We're not happy. We lose self-respect.

So what do we do? How do we empower the voices and values that are truly important to us and live from that place? The first thing we have to do is take the time that's needed to get clear on what it is that truly is important to us, what we really value about living our lives.

So I invite you to start paying attention first to what you already do that feels good to you about how you are living your life right now. Acknowledge these. Acknowledge yourself. This is important.

Then start looking at the ways that you do not feel good about how you are living your life. Be honest. Try not to judge yourself as you do this. You can only make changes and move toward integrity when you know what it is that needs changing.

Once you have clarity on what is working for you and what isn't, it's time to start taking steps to make those changes. Sometimes it's easy – all you needed was the awareness. Sometimes it's about making a major change in your life, like a job change or a shift in your relationship. Know that you don't have to do it all at once. This may be a process that takes time and planning. It also takes a huge commitment and a whole lot of courage to claim ourselves differently in the world so that we can live with integrity.

Ask for help if you need it. Talk to a friend you trust and whose opinion you value. Get help from a therapist or a coach. Don't be ashamed to need help. This is a big deal! This is your life. Choose you! Be proud of yourself. Be happy. Live your life with integrity.

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