

The ABCs of Work: Integrity

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is about the importance of **Integrity**.

Last time we talked about why you should strive to Be Happy because this will allow you to maintain

a high level of performance over the long-term. Today we talk about the importance of integrity (both yours and others) to having a successful career.

The one thing you can never compromise

I'm the first one to say that we should be flexible and keep an open mind. It's OK to have an opinion and even to believe firmly in it. But, it is most helpful to allow for the possibility that our opinion may be wrong. For more on this, see Career Path: Why You Should Doubt Yourself.

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There's one time, however, when you should not waver in your conviction: when it comes to your integrity. It doesn't matter whether the issue is trivial, and no one will notice. Nor does it matter when the stakes are gigantic and the upside to you for being "flexible" is equally large. Your personal integrity is what sets you apart from all others. It is your professional obligation, sure, to never behave in an unethical or illegal manner. It should also be your personal commitment to live your life consistently with your personal values.



It is imperative as an in-house counsel to uphold high personal morals even when no one else is looking. Gannvector / *Shutterstock.com*

It can take some time to gain a practical sense of how our personal values play out in practice. But rest assured. Your work as an in-house lawyer will likely put you in situations that give your theories real-world tests. You will thus develop your personal values about the correct way to behave.

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Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Your mission is now to **follow your personal values** in difficult situations, such as the following:

- **Behaving illegally**. This one is hardly difficult, right? You'd be surprised how many otherwise honorable people find themselves making regrettable decisions due to situational pressure.
- **Behaving unethically**. You can be aggressive, you can zealously represent your client's interests, but you must recognize when you are crossing the line and violating your values.



Always behave in an ethical manner and be mindful of the integrity of your colleagues. Diki Prayogo / *Shutterstock.com*

- **Keeping company with villains**. Can you be a person of high integrity if your business associates are not? Theoretically, I suppose. But, if you help an improper business prosper, your own integrity is open to question.

- **Supporting win at all costs approaches**. You probably don't have criminals for colleagues. But what about hyper-competitive types who believe winning justifies all? You must trust your colleagues will follow your advice. Winning at all costs means there *are costs*. Who is going to pay them?
- **Being untruthful**. A white lie in pursuit of a noble goal? Leave it for answering a friend's question about whether those jeans make them look fat. At work, your standard should be never to lie. If you ever do you risk your primary value proposition, which is telling the truth in difficult situations.

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Can you take personal integrity too far?

Being honest doesn't mean saying everything that comes into your head. You will certainly want to keep your own counsel in delicate situations. Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing.

Behaving with integrity also doesn't mean substituting your judgment for your colleagues' judgment. Many situations are gray, permitting multiple approaches. Businesses thrive upon calculated risk. Even though you may advise a different approach your business may still proceed along other legal paths.

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Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as integrity. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mentions to serve as food for thought:

- **Information** — You cannot be too well informed. Read widely, consult many sources, including other people. You should know what's going on in your industry, among peer companies, and in the broader in-house world. Attend ACC events to keep your in-house know-how well-honed.
- **Innovation** — Be creative, and try new things. But, don't innovate for the sake of innovation. Your best innovations will be process improvements that generate efficiency gains and reduce frictions in the business.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.