

Integrity

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It is my great pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the fall semester. Although many of you are new to BYU, there are also those who have returned following missions and other prolonged absences. Some of you have been with us throughout the summer. To all I say that we are very glad to have you here. We anticipate that this will be a wonderful year for all of us.

At the outset, I want to declare my admiration for so many of you who are doing the things that you should in exemplary ways. For example, we have talked about improving our sportsmanship, and most of you are demonstrating tremendous consideration for others as well as for yourselves. Some of you incur debt while in school, and we expect and know you will not borrow more money than is absolutely necessary. Our default rate on student loans is very low—among the lowest rates in the country. So few of you really misbehave in significant ways, and yet it is still newsworthy when one of our students stubs his or her toe. Let me just say that we are almost always proud of you and are almost uniformly grateful for your obvious goodness.

You might guess that I receive lots of mail, e-mail, and phone calls. You would be right. Most of it is positive and uplifting. Some

letters express concerns or suggestions or even criticisms. Those making various requests are not rare—and some few, happily the minority, come close to evoking tears. I'll not read any of these letters to you for obvious reasons. I will share with you the thrust of some of the several that report personal distress on the part of the writers—which in some cases has persisted for many years.

These letters are confidential, uncoordinated with each other, and therefore unique. What they do have in common, however, is a strong thread of regret. The regret is often matched with a pervasive sense of guilt and usually an effort to make things right as part of the person's sincere repentance process. The specifics are fairly varied but the theme is consistent. Each has given an account of a particular violation of his or her integrity or the Honor Code. Examples include seemingly small things like failure to pay parking fines or receiving without correction too much change at the Bookstore. Larger issues like the destruction or theft of university property, cheating on examinations

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or term papers, misrepresenting credentials for admission or on job applications and the like are only a sample of the burdens people have carried needlessly for years because of their lack of judgment and the thought that these things would just go away. They do not.

By now you might think that this is a talk about repentance. In a way it is, but not the one you might suspect. I will say little about the repentance process itself. I will say that we all need to repent regularly, and I suspect that some might find an increased urgency should they listen carefully today. You may ask the question the Savior's apostles asked when He informed them that a traitor was in their circle. Their sincere query was, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19). I don't think any of you are traitors. I do think that we have a number of temptations and errors in judgment that demand our serious attention.

Over the past many years, and particularly since our arrival at BYU last year, I have read several times the account of Karl G. Maeser and his chalk circle. Had I the time and compelling interest in Trivial Pursuit-like activities, I might have calculated the number of times preceding presidents have used this example in settings such as this devotional. Appropriately, it is very many, and I hope that you will think seriously about it today as I increase the telling by one.

Brother Maeser was asked about the meaning of the phrase *word of honor*, which he used frequently. This was his response:

Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first! [In Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 71]

I want to talk today about some of the chalk lines all of us should draw around ourselves with the same resolve expressed by Karl G. Maeser.

If this account of President Maeser is new to you, then I am very glad I have brought it to your attention. If you have heard or read it many times previously, then I hope you will consider it again with fresh eyes and open hearts as I attempt to share some counsel with you.

Because you as students are very able, you have great facility with words. You are able to define most common words and describe their meanings and contexts. I want to discuss a very ordinary word familiar to us all and even to those with much less experience and sophistication than most of you. Today I hope to speak also about some specific applications in addition to generalizations with which we expect you to be familiar and to endorse behaviorally and philosophically.

The word for today is *integrity*. I hope that you are not surprised, given my introductory statement by Brother Maeser. I hope also that you are not disappointed that I should choose this topic among the many deserving of our time and attention. At the outset, I believe that virtually everyone at Brigham Young University has a high level of integrity. I also believe that the attendant principles and practices of integrity are so important that all of us regularly need to think and act seriously on this topic. Although I am confident that you are in relatively high standing with respect to personal integrity, particularly when compared to the world around us, I am also persuaded that many of us overlook or fail to understand fully what it really means to have integrity in our lives. Because of where we are and who we are, I will frame my comments to the context of our university experience.

In my office I have a Merriam-Webster pocket dictionary that has been my friend and my guide for more than 30 years. I have larger,

more complete, and more current dictionaries, but this little paperback edition has been my companion and helper all of this time. Let me tell you what it says about integrity. I'll skip the part that describes it as a noun and also gives its relationships to other words with the same roots. There are three definitions given:

1. Soundness.
2. Adherence to a code of values: utter sincerity, honesty, and candor.
3. Completeness.

Other dictionaries and the thesaurus give additional words and nuances, but for my purposes today, these three definitions suffice nicely. Likewise, many Church leaders and others concerned with morals and ethics have delivered significant treatises on this topic. I recommend that you consider and study what others have taught as you target the applications to your own situation.

All of us are aware that we live in a general environment awash in moral relativism. Matters of honor, truthfulness, respect for others, and the like were often in the past understood to be hallmarks of an educated and cultured person—someone, for example, who might be viewed as a sterling example of a BYU student or graduate.

In more recent years—when we have had increasing examples of moral, ethical, and legal lapses in those of prominent status and stature—the basic values related to integrity apparently seem to some to be old-fashioned and perhaps even outmoded at the practical level. Although we—at least I—may be old-fashioned, the issue of integrity with all of its facets is not related to a particular age, time, place, or circumstance. Brother Maeser understood this, and we must as well.

I confess that I do not lose much sleep worrying about whether one of you might rob a bank or create a Ponzi scheme or become involved in any number of dishonest activities that plague our society. Please also understand that I do not believe you are immune to

any temptations—even those most egregious such as I have mentioned and others that are similar. Sadly, some few who might have been counted as part of our number have done some silly and evil things of great seriousness. Happily, such examples of these things are extremely rare.

It does seem to me that the issues of integrity are particularly important in the university setting and all the more so at BYU. We are here to seek knowledge and wisdom. We make clear statements to ourselves and to the world that we live in an environment that not only encourages but demands that what we do is in the context of our faith and best efforts to live gospel principles. Indeed, our final article of faith begins by stating, “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men” (Article of Faith 1:13; see also *HC* 4:535–41). In other words, we believe in integrity and all of its meanings—particularly the three definitions I mentioned that include soundness, completeness, and adherence to a code of values. At BYU we believe in the Honor Code. We preach it, we teach it, and we must practice it with soundness and completeness.

The relationship between knowledge and integrity is an old and important one. Almost 250 years ago, Samuel Johnson said: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful” (“*Rasselas*” [1759], chapter 41). Since you are all acquiring knowledge, we don’t worry too much that you will be “weak and useless,” but we are concerned that without impeccable integrity, your knowledge can become “dangerous and dreadful.”

Let me mention some integrity issues that seem to be much more common in our university community than they should be and that do give me pause. Although less dramatic and superficially less serious than the reports of felonies that fill the news media, they do give me concern, and I hope they do you as well. Before

I mention some specifics, let me share some dialogue from C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* that seems germane to this point. Screwtape, a senior and experienced devil, takes his role as a teacher very seriously. One of his students is his nephew, Wormwood, a young and inexperienced devil. Screwtape is trying very hard to help the young devil be more effective in his work. Now let me read part of a letter from Screwtape to Wormwood:

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. [C. S. Lewis, book 12 of *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 56]

Please think about Screwtape's premise and any potential personal applications as I mention a few areas or problems of concern.

Plagiarism

The definition is straightforward, but the practicalities seem to trip many people—including some of you. Basically, to plagiarize is to take or pass off someone else's words, ideas, or work as your own. As with most infractions, there are both blatant and subtle examples of plagiarism. To lift pages or paragraphs from published works or from the efforts of a classmate or anyone else without permission or citation constitutes plagiarism. Of course it is appropriate and often helpful to quote the works of others, but it is always necessary to give clear and adequate attribution to your sources. Some believe that using materials

from the Internet or obscure resources loosens the rules. It does not! Some consider it appropriate to change a few words or the sequence of a few sentences or paragraphs and then claim the product as original work. Again, think of the basic definition.

Cheating

A recent survey reported that three-fourths of high school and college students admit to some cheating on examinations (see Michael Behar, "Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics," *Wired*, March 2004, 60). Although we think of tests taken in school or the university, there are other dimensions of cheating as well. All are manifestations of the dishonest person. Certainly the faculty and other proctors of performance have a responsibility in this. It is important to realize that this is not a game and the definition of honorable success is not just that you were not caught. When you signed the Honor Code, you drew a chalk line around yourself.

Résumé Padding

Sadly, I believe *résumé padding* is a fairly recent term that is now widely understood. Some believe that it may be worth a calculated risk to suggest achievements not attained or other misrepresentations of a personal record. What is not always appreciated is that in doing so, a different record is being made that will follow the offender throughout life. Not only have people of prominence and others lost coveted jobs, they have been branded forever as people without integrity. That is a heavy but probably fair burden.

Downloading Music Illegally Online

One-fourth of Americans in one survey admitted to having downloaded music illegally, and the practice appears particularly common in the age group of high school and university students (see Behar, "Lies," 60). A partial reason may be that older folks typically

lack the technical expertise. It is also likely that “because everyone is doing it,” consciences may be soothed in ways described by Nephi—even though he probably was not thinking about CDs and DVDs specifically. You will remember from your reading that he generalized over many ways we might lose our integrity. Let me share this familiar verse:

And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. [2 Nephi 28:8]

Stealing

In one survey, 80 percent of workers admitted that at some time they had stolen supplies, material, or equipment from their employers or others (Behar, “Lies,” 61). This does not take into account the theft of time that occurs when we are late for appointments, class, or work or the time our thoughtlessness or selfishness may cost others. Some of our community who would never think of stealing a roommate’s watch or wallet occasionally find it convenient to leave unpaid phone bills or rent or other obligations for their associates to pay. You will all be aware of other small but important examples, should we take the time to catalog them.

Giving False Information

All of us misspeak on occasion. In our case, I hope it is because of an honest mistake or a faulty memory. When unintentional, we hope for correction or the opportunity to set the record straight as soon as we recognize the error. Of much, much greater concern is the intentional communication of false information. Most of you are regularly interviewed

by your bishops and less formally, but often more directly, by your parents. Although it is tempting to misrepresent the truth in some circumstances, a lie is a lie. More than 30 years ago, President Dallin H. Oaks told a BYU devotional audience, “A lie is not always told in so many words. It may be a creature of concealment or a misrepresentation by action or a half-truth” (30 January 1973, “Be Honest in All Behavior,” *Speeches of the Year, 1972–73* [Provo: BYU, 1973], 89). He then went on to quote Elder Richard L. Evans, who said:

*Truth or untruth is not always altogether a matter of literal language, but often of implication, of inflection, of innuendo, of subtle suggestion. A clever person intent on being untruthful can give a false impression, even when his literal words can little be called into question. [The Spoken Word, “Neither Lie One to Another,” *Improvement Era*, November 1961, 854]*

By the way, I learned from President Oaks’ talk that failure to register student automobiles on campus was a major problem way back then too. He felt, and I feel, that such behavior is just another form of lying.

Dress and Grooming Standards

As you know, I have spoken on this subject in significant detail. I do not propose to do so again except to certify that I believe adherence to the Honor Code, including the provisions related to dress and grooming, is a matter of integrity. Simply put, to sign your name in support of one standard and then to live another is just one more example of lying or promise breaking. Let me say how much I appreciate those of the tremendous majority who personally take this seriously and support others in making these sometimes difficult decisions.

All will recognize that this list of potential breaches of integrity is incomplete. In addition, there are multiple variations of those items I did mention that could be considered and were

not. Lest anyone feel any license to limit their personal integrity on the basis that a specific matter was not mentioned by me today, I will remind you of the words of King Benjamin:

And finally, I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them.

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man [and woman], remember, and perish not. [Mosiah 4:29–30]

Let me mention our Honor Code briefly. It is often portrayed by the media and others as a set of rules. Although it does contain specifics with respect to honesty, appearance, and general conduct, it is really much more. It is an attitude. It is a personal commitment to live life in congruence with gospel principles. It is our recognition of the importance of others in our university circle and the respect we have for them and their sensibilities, as well as for their rights and property. It is the chalk line we draw around our conduct and our thinking.

I have shared the counsel of King Benjamin. Let me now share the counsel of Shakespeare's Polonius, with which I suspect and expect you are all familiar. Although these lines found in the first act of Hamlet are directed to an audience of one, they apply to all, especially those of us privileged to be associated with Brigham Young University. Said Polonius:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*
[William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, lines 78–80]

In 1979 President Spencer W. Kimball addressed a devotional audience. Many of you, sadly, do not personally remember this great prophet leader, but many of the faculty and administration do recall his visits to our campus. He often spoke of the Honor Code and our unique responsibilities. On the occasion I reference, he again mentioned that he would speak about integrity even though he had addressed the same topic the year before. He said the following:

I make no apology for returning to that theme, because integrity (which includes the willingness and ability to live by our beliefs and commitments) is one of the foundation stones of good character, and without good character one cannot hope to enjoy the presence of God here or in the eternities. In this institution students and faculty commit themselves explicitly to abide by a code of conduct which includes both living by the moral precepts of the gospel and conforming to a dress and grooming code. Some purport to accept the moral standards as important and denigrate the other as trivial and as intruding on their freedom of choice. These people fundamentally misperceive the question, which is not whether the . . . code is wise, but whether they should consider themselves bound by a promise. It is not that such a code is forced upon anyone; there is free choice to come here or to go to some other institution which makes no such demands. . . . There is no disgrace in making that choice; it is a wholly legitimate option. But once having elected to come here and to participate in this community with its special calling to represent the Church and its highest standards, you must not compromise your integrity by promising what you will not do. By taking covenants lightly, you will wound your eternal self. [Spencer W. Kimball, BYU devotional, 4 September 1979, "Integrity: The Spirit of BYU," 1979 Devotional Speeches of the Year (Provo: BYU, 1980), 162]

You will not be surprised that throughout our history the messages of all our prophets

since Brigham Young himself and our university presidents too have been both clear and consistent on these matters. Given our time constraints today, I will draw your attention to just one more.

Ten years ago next month, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke at our campus devotional. I join with you in the wish that he had been our speaker today. While he was here on that occasion a decade ago, he entitled his comments “Codes and Covenants.” Listen to what he had to say about the Honor Code.

I remind you that the Honor Code of Brigham Young University was not initiated by the board and the administration. It is an outgrowth of the action of a group of students who felt strongly that the acceptance of a code of honor by those who attended this school would have a salutary effect upon all.

By an evolutionary process it has continued, with modifications, until it has become the standard behavior of those of the university and has been endorsed by its board of trustees. It is for all students to accept and agree to live by—a statement of principle concerning honesty, charity, purity, modesty, and commitment.

It is not an inflexible law written in tablets of stone. It is a code of conduct. It is a statement of principles. It is a guide and a reminder concerning expected deportment. It is no more than might be expected of any good Christian, and no less than might be required of one who comes to this great institution sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The code is a guide, not a rigid set of rules. It does not address every specific issue. It is a table of standards, set forth clearly enough that there can be no question concerning what is expected and yet flexible enough to allow some freedom in application.

It represents an attempt to express, in terms of expected behavior, the principles set forth in the thirteenth article of faith:

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to

all men. . . . If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things. . . .

*Is observance of the code too much to expect from any of us? I think not. Every one of you who is enrolled in this great institution and every one who is a member of its faculty or its staff is part of a family unique and unusual. You are, in a very real sense, a chosen people. You have been selected through a rigorous process and found to be deserving of what this institution has to offer. [Gordon B. Hinckley, BYU devotional, 18 October 1994, “Codes and Covenants,” *BYU 1994–95 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 1995), 36–37]*

I can report with great confidence that President Hinckley’s opinion on these matters has not changed. Although both gentle and considerate, he is clear and courageous in his stance toward matters of honor. I am convinced he expects no less from each of us.

Having spoken to you plainly about our standards and expectations for your behavior and conduct, let me now also speak as clearly as I can about our respect and affection for you. I am convinced that you are not here by chance. Although our admissions processes and standards are rigorous and even daunting, I do not refer to them. I refer to my absolute persuasion that you are here because heaven has helped you to be. You are not necessarily any better than some who do not share your good fortune of being a BYU student, but you are not insignificant by any measure. It is my prayer and expectation that, growing through your experiences and efforts while at BYU, you will step onto the stages of the world to make contributions that will far exceed even your fondest current expectations and dreams. You will have the high privilege of making real and substantive differences in your families, in the Church, in your communities, in your countries, and in your chosen professions. You will carry with you the light that you

have experienced and gained while at BYU wherever you go and however you serve in the years and generations ahead.

It is thus imperative that you go forth without substantial regrets or the consequences of poor decisions to limit your potential and your effectiveness. Central to all that you are and that you have to offer is your integrity. Preserve it, honor it, and protect it. If you do, it will preserve, honor, and protect you.

Many years ago I was faced with what I considered to be at the time a serious professional dilemma. In reality it was more like the need to choose between two very attractive alternatives with respect to my future career. I thought and prayed about the matter a great deal and discussed it thoroughly with Sharon, my wife. I frankly wished that I could have had the steady counsel, experienced frequently over the years, from my father about this matter, but he had died the year before. Because the decision facing me potentially had some

implications for my Church service, I sat with a senior, respected Church leader and sought his counsel. I weighed with him my alternatives and all of the potential considerations in detail. I waited for his direction or questions. After a moment he looked me in the eye and said, "Above all else, you need to protect your integrity." That is all he said, and it didn't initially seem to be responsive to my questions. As I thought about it, however, it almost immediately became clear what my best alternative was, and the test of time has proven it to be so.

As I conclude my message today, I bear testimony of the very special privileges we enjoy at BYU with their attendant responsibilities. This university has the protection and guidance of heaven, and we individually do as well—when we act as we should. Let my advice to you be that which I received from my trusted mentor: "Above all else, you need to protect your integrity." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.