

WHAT IS INTEGRITY?

Sunday

February 22, 2015

I just had an interesting conversation with one of the guys on my tier. He's a lifer, and just received the Parole Board's "seal of approval" regarding his suitability for parole. Of course, in California, that doesn't amount to a hill of beans, seeing how the Governor denies final approval on most dates, as proven by the Governor overruling the Parole Board's recommendations for release on parole at the last moment, and despite being a model inmate throughout his entire incarceration. Because he's a lifer (sentenced to a life sentence), he's required to participate in the LTOP program (Long Term Offenders Program), classes which deal with a myriad of issues relating to topics like victim empathy, substance abuse, victim impact to successful integration upon release, just to name a few.

In one of his classes his teacher provided everyone with a written definition on integrity, in which it states that integrity is doing the moral thing, the ethical thing, the right thing, even when no one else is looking. Okay, I can see that, and I agree with it, but then the teacher goes on to say that this means blindly following **all** of the rules and regulations set forth prison and in society, regardless of your personal moral and ethical values. According to her, morality and ethics be damned. If the rules and regulations say to do "ABC," then you'd by God better be doing "ABC," and in that order, or you don't have integrity.

I don't know how my readers feel about this, but I for one couldn't disagree more. History has shown us, on more times than we can count, that morality and legality don't always coincide. For example, things like slavery, women owning land, voters' rights for women and blacks, equal rights for homosexuals, even oral sex all used to be illegal, but that doesn't mean it was immoral. In fact, in many of those cases, a good argument could be made that following the law was, in and of itself, immoral, and therefore, indicative of a lack of integrity, despite following the law.

Integrity, in my opinion, has less to do with blindly following the rules and regulations and more to do with disobeying those rules and regulations when they're in direct contradiction with your morals and ethics. Anyone can do the right thing, especially when people are watching or there are consequences for disobeying, but not everyone has the integrity to stand up for what's right, especially when being watched, or worse, when threatened with consequences for disobeying.

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