



THE OCTAGON CONFERENCE AT LIFE UNIVERSITY 2014:

INTEGRITY AND CITIZENSHIP

The Octagon Conference at Life University, April 24-25, 2014

The Octagon at Life University is a think-tank venue for exploring the content areas reflected in the Eight Core Competencies of the University:

- Integrity and Citizenship
- Communication and Relationship Theory/Skills
- Philosophy of Human Existence and Health Care Policy
- Leadership and Entrepreneurship
- Belief Systems and Performance
- Learning Theory/Critical Thinking
- Contemporary Scientific Paradigms
- Integrative Change

While these areas are not necessarily unique to Life University, what is unique is the lens through which the Octagon views them.

The Octagon “lens” is a philosophy of human life. In this perspective, human beings are self-evolving, self-developing, self-maintaining and self-healing entities who possess capacities and skills to learn, grow, improve and heal far beyond what most people realize. Inherent to this lens is the idea that wholeness, wellness, growth and healing are innate processes that are best realized with self-development and internal alignment. In the realm of physical health this suggests investigating the reasons why a person is not well, rather than merely focusing on their sickness.

For example, the western medical establishment focuses on the management of health risks, the control of disease, and the repair of disease-ravaged bodies. By contrast, the Octagon lens would have us promote innate capacities for health. By reframing the various dimensions of human life in this way, the Octagon seeks to reveal connections between these intrinsic capacities and human well-being that are too frequently overlooked or misunderstood. The Octagon lens therefore reflects the educational and clinical philosophy of vitalism upon which the university was founded, but employs this approach to further scientific and academic inquiry in an open, non-dogmatic way.

For 2014, the Octagon will examine how individual and social well-being can be enhanced through the development of integrity and citizenship. Life University’s perspective on integrity offers a starting point for this discussion: “Integrity provides the underpinning for the responsible exercise of our rights and

responsibilities as human beings. Integrity leads to empowerment and excellence, while a lack of integrity results in mediocrity.”

Much as we cannot foster health by merely constraining disease, we cannot foster integrity by merely constraining unethical behavior, or citizenship by merely punishing antisocial behavior. Rather, the support and expansion of all aspects of physical, emotional, social and spiritual health, including the cultivation of an ethical mindset and behaviors, diminishes the conditions and scope for disease and unethical actions.

The Octagon will therefore pose the question: If we wish to embody integrity and citizenship ourselves and transmit these to future generations because we believe they are essential components of individual and social flourishing, how might we best accomplish this?

To this end, the following sections serve as a starting point for discussion. First, definitions of integrity and citizenship are offered in order to achieve a rich, multi-layered and nuanced understanding that can serve as a basis for discussion. Second, the benefits of integrity and citizenship are explored, in order to identify why we would be motivated to cultivate and promote them as values. Third, specific practices are mentioned that may serve as vehicles for cultivating and teaching these virtues.

In taking this approach, the Octagon is informed by developments in positive psychology on the conditions and components of human flourishing as well as His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s promotion of “secular ethics,” namely the cultivation of universal or shared human values on the basis of common experience, common sense, and scientific inquiry. Integrity and citizenship would appear to be central components of secular ethics and of human flourishing. One of the specific goals of The Octagon with respect to integrity and citizenship is to help provide the groundwork for developing an academic Center for Peace, Compassion and Secular Ethics at Life University designed to focus on these issues, promote research and discussion around them, develop and implement programs that benefit specific communities, and disseminate information to the wider world.

What are Integrity and Citizenship?

‘Integrity’ comes from the Latin word *integer*, which means “complete” and “whole.” The definition of integrity therefore refers to a state of being complete, whole, or sound, and by extension refers to a person living in a way that is whole and that embodies moral values.

Citizenship, when understood as a virtue, refers not merely to the fact of being a citizen of a particular state, but rather to the way in which an individual relates to membership in a wider community.

These two principles are closely interrelated. Just as the health of the body depends on the soundness and healthy functioning of each of its parts, so too does the health of a community depend on the integrity of each individual. As Confucius said, “The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.”

This is because strength requires a unified community, which in turn requires trust, and our willingness to trust others depends on how much integrity we perceive them as having. As the great author Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote, “There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity.” A person of integrity is a trustworthy, dependable, reliable person who exhibits transparency in his or her words and actions. By being a person of integrity ourselves, we enable relationships of trust, which in turn enable communal flourishing. Moreover, having integrity gives us more confidence in relations with others, whereas being deceitful makes us prone to suspect deceit in others. As Michel de Montaigne wrote, “Confidence in others’ honesty is no light testimony of one’s own integrity.” Therefore persons of integrity exemplify citizenship, because through their integrity they contribute to the social good and bolster social trust.

In the present age of interdependence, where our well-being is so intimately tied to the well-being of others on economic, social, political and environmental levels, the highest level of citizenship comes from recognizing our relationship to the whole of humanity and to our global community. Each person in the world counts, and injustice to anyone diminishes everyone. Exercising our rights and responsibilities in a way that brings the greatest benefit and least harm to this global community is the essence of citizenship.

What are the Benefits of Integrity and Citizenship?

Integrity and citizenship relate to two of the core components of flourishing: psychological and social well-being. Integrity enables us to view ourselves positively with self-respect, and protects us against guilt, low self-esteem and self-loathing, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness, dysphoria and depression. Citizenship enables us to view others positively, increasing a sense of social connection and improving our relationships, which in turn bolsters our sense of safety, security, meaning in life and happiness. Integrity and citizenship are therefore complementary to our health on physical, emotional and social levels.

One of the reasons why integrity results in excellence and a lack of integrity results in mediocrity is the fact that we are social beings. We rarely accomplish things alone without the help of anyone else; rather, our greatest accomplishments are possible

through the support of countless others. Indices of well-being show that social trust and social support are much more important for happiness and flourishing than income. A person of integrity is a person who can have sound relationships with others, who creates social trust, who builds up social capital, and who can therefore achieve excellence and embody leadership on the basis of that social capital. Their transparency and the result of a life lived ethically means they have nothing to hide, and that allows them to face others without fear. President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office.”

A community of people who all lacked integrity and citizenship would be unhealthy on every level. Without a sense of trust, people would live in fear of each other, increasing stress and shortening lifespans. People would not cooperate or collaborate with each other, making group action impossible. Without citizenship, people would never compromise their individual happiness for the social good in any way, and sections of the population with less power and advantages—such as children, or those born into poverty—would be left to their own devices without any support from others. The social ills that would result from this would decrease the well-being of everyone in the community, even the wealthy and powerful.

Why Aren't Integrity and Citizenship More Valued?

A quick scan of the news that reflects on the increasing strident tone of social discourse, cheapening values, toxic self-serving business practices and the widening chasm between the economic classes around the world can be disheartening. It is hard to see where attributes of integrity and citizenship are visibly important, valued, and seen as means of addressing societal problems, inequities, conflicts and injustice.

What have we lost as these values and aspirational goals have become marginalized, cheapened, misused and abandoned? What harm have we incurred by not placing integrity and citizenship at the core of social values? Is it possible to re-imagine these being more widely prioritized and revered?

How Do We Foster the Development of Integrity and Citizenship?

Naming, defining and exploring the benefits of integrity and citizenship constitute the first step in developing them. In addition, there are specific skills and virtues we can cultivate that will contribute to integrity and citizenship, two of which are mindfulness and compassion.

Mindfulness means to be consciously aware of our experience. What threatens our integrity is the tendency to act out of strong emotions like desire or fear without

having sufficient presence of mind and self-discipline to prevent such action. Fear and temptation are chief obstacles to integrity, because they prompt us to sacrifice our own and others' long-term benefit for a perceived short-term benefit. Mindfulness is the cultivation of mental stability, calmness and non-reactivity to situations, creating a space and an awareness that enables us to make better judgments. As the noted psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor Viktor E. Frankl wrote, "Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." A sizable body of research suggests that mindfulness is a skill that can be cultivated, and that its cultivation results in measurable benefits to health and well-being. Mindfulness can serve as a tool that supports self-discipline and enables us to live the type of life we wish to live.

At its root, compassion is the wish to alleviate the suffering of others, based on a recognition of our common humanity. If we feel compassion for others, we will not want to deceive, disappoint, or harm them. This also supports us in becoming a person of integrity, since our way of relating to others will be characterized by transparency, openness and generosity. Although we all have a basic level of compassion for those near and dear to us, we can use our intelligence and refine our sensibilities so that our compassion extends in an unbiased way to include all people, based on a recognition of our shared humanity. When the scope of our concern extends to encompass others in our community, we exemplify citizenship, and when that concern includes all of humanity, we exemplify global citizenship. Similar to mindfulness, research suggests that compassion can be actively cultivated, and that this cultivation contributes to our health and well-being by decreasing reactivity to psychosocial stress and improving immune function, empathic accuracy, and hopefulness.

If we know the benefits of integrity and citizenship, and the ways in which mindfulness and compassion contribute to them, we will want to cultivate these values in ourselves, spread them more widely around the world, and teach them to future generations. The purpose of the Octagon conference will be to explore how this can be practicably done, both for the Life community and for the wider world.

Developing the Narrative: A Compass for Discussions

Over the course of the Octagon Conference 2014 we will be seeking to explore the following questions as a basis for the design of the Center for Compassion, Peace and Secular Ethics, as well as to have a common platform from which to function:

1. What is the current landscape of efforts—both research-oriented and practical—that explore the areas of integrity and citizenship, as well as the related areas of compassion, forgiveness, peace studies, secular ethics, and positive psychology? What conclusions derive from such an assessment?

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2. Can a common language be found across disciplines and perspectives with regard to the promotion of integrity, citizenship and secular ethics?
3. How might we describe what has been lost or not attained where these capacities have either eroded, not emerged or have not been adequately supported?
4. What goals might be identified from that gap analysis? Structured into what set of priorities?
5. What strategies and tactics might be appropriate and effective to achieve those prioritized goals? What would a SWOT analysis look like?
6. How might these be staged or phased as a Center for Peace, Compassion and Secular Ethics is established?
7. How might the effectiveness of these efforts be measured?
8. How might an effective community of engaged stakeholders be developed and activated?
9. What additional stakeholders should be considered for further efforts in these areas as the development of the Center by the Octagon project moves forward?

As we come together in this collaborative and collegial environment we have turned to the writings of various thought leaders and scholars who have spoken on these subjects from antiquity to the moment. We offer them to you as seeds for our discussions and as an acknowledgment of the importance of this work.

Quotes

Integrity (Miriam-Webster) “1: firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : incorruptibility 2: an unimpaired condition : soundness 3: the quality or state of being complete or undivided : completeness”

“Do not act as if you were going to live ten thousand years. Death hangs over you. While you live, while it is in your power, be good.” — Marcus Aurelius

“If it is not right do not do it; if it is not true do not say it.” — Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Relationship between Integrity and Citizenship:

“ A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate

from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive". --Albert Einstein

"In a room where
people unanimously maintain
a conspiracy of silence,
one word of truth
sounds like a pistol shot." — Czesław Miłosz

"Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of -- for credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again. The way to a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear." — Socrates

"Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful." — Samuel Johnson

"The greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively." — Bob Marley

"Now what is the level of a person of no integrity? A person of no integrity is ungrateful & unthankful. This ingratitude, this lack of thankfulness, is advocated by rude people. It is entirely on the level of people of no integrity. A person of integrity is grateful & thankful. This gratitude, this thankfulness, is advocated by civil people. It is entirely on the level of people of integrity." The Buddha

Benefits of Integrity

"Somebody once said that in looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if you don't have the first, the other two will kill you. You think about it; it's true. If you hire somebody without [integrity], you really want them to be dumb and lazy." — Warren Buffett

"According to Scripture, virtually everything that truly qualifies a person for leadership is directly related to character. It's not about style, status, personal charisma, clout, or worldly measurements of success. Integrity is the main issue that makes the difference between a good leader and a bad one." -- John MacArthur

So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it... --
Proverbs 2:20-21

Integrity as Self-Respect:

“I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have.” – Abraham Lincoln

“Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dangers of Not Having Integrity:

“There are seven things that will destroy us: Wealth without work; Pleasure without conscience; Knowledge without character; Religion without sacrifice; Politics without principle; Science without humanity; Business without ethics.”— Mahatma Gandhi

“I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.” – Frederick Douglass

“The truly scary thing about undiscovered lies is that they have a greater capacity to diminish us than exposed ones. They erode our strength, our self-esteem, our very foundation.” – Cheryl Hughes

Integrity, Compassion and Citizenship:

“Compassion and love are not mere luxuries. As the source both of inner and external peace, they are fundamental to the continued survival of our species. On the one hand, they constitute non-violence in action. On the other hand, they are the source of all spiritual qualities: of forgiveness, tolerance, and all the virtues. Moreover, they are the very thing that gives meaning to our activities and makes them constructive.” - H.H. the Dalai Lama

“As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races... Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions... This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they extend to all sentient beings.” - Charles Darwin

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?” — Eleanor Roosevelt

“Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.” — Martin Luther King Jr.

Integrity, Humility and Respect

"A person endowed with these four qualities can be known as 'a person of integrity.' Which four?

There is the case where a person of integrity, when asked, doesn't reveal another person's bad points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person's bad points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back...

Then again, a person of integrity, when unasked, reveals another person's good points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person's good points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back...

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Monks, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as 'a person of integrity.'" — The Buddha