

The Whispers Are Screaming

By Ed Morler, MBA, PhD

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, or the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. — Charles Darwin

The Situation

We hear whispers; we sense and *know*—“*Something is amiss.*” However, we do not want to bother—so we don’t. Ignored, they persist; they become louder, turning into shouts of frustration. Still, we do nothing—for then it is even more inconvenient. Avoided long enough, the shouts become **screams of crisis!**

Greed is obvious at all levels of society. Its underlying insecurity, though often hidden, is always present. We sense sadness, anxiety, frustration, anger and rage. We observe continuing: dishonesty, fraud and betrayals of trust; intolerance; poverty; wars; terrorism and genocide; massive environmental problems and more. We despair at humanity’s indifference. We fear for the future. *All are messages screaming for change.*

Yet, *we resist change because it initially generates confusion, doubt and fear.* Nevertheless, those are what we must have the courage to face if we want to grow up and be responsible. Doing so is empowering, but whenever we repress those messages, we have problems. Continuing problems are symptoms—symptoms of irresponsibility.

Responsibility is the ability to respond. Responding is facing what is in the moment and, with the resources available, doing one’s best to improve the situation. In a dynamic universe, where the one constant is change, enforcing any status quo (repressing change) ensures stagnancy and inevitably, death. Nothing stagnant can be responsive.

Reacting, in contrast, is the explosion (hostile and out-of-proportion relative to the stimulating incident) of accumulated *repressed* emotions and behaviors triggered by a similar (often-minor) current incident. Responsive behaviors contribute to harmony. Reactive behaviors are indications of some state of overwhelm and a corresponding inability to respond (be responsible).

Historically, whenever a population did not respond to the messages screaming for change, it ensured its own collapse along with it a cry for “strong” leadership to clean up the mess; often some form of dictatorship with its own agendas, prejudices and rationalized abuses.

Unless we change direction, we will end up where we are heading. —Chinese Proverb

How many more Roman Emperors, Medieval despots, Hitlers, Stalins, Pol Pots, Mugabes? How many more Dark Ages and “never again” Holocausts? How many more Cambodias, Bosnias, Rwandas, Darfurs? How many more disappearing species? How many more Enrons and WorldComs? How much more hurt, pain and destruction before we *get the message?*

Same choices create same results. How sane, much less responsible, are those choices when they continue to create behaviors that now literally endanger the survival of life on the planet? We must grow up!

We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humankind is to survive. A problem cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created it. —Albert Einstein

Certainly, we must deal with the crises we created or allowed. However, it is critical we do more than “fix” symptoms. We must go deeper. *Until we do, we can reliably predict continuing and growing crises.* As confusing and politically difficult as it may be, we must muster the courage to address the underlying cause—*lack of integrity!*

Integrity is spontaneous responsibility. It is facing whatever is present (“good” or “bad,”) now, and responding, now, to the entirety (wholeness) of what needs addressing, now. It is spontaneously living essence values—those fundamental core qualities that add depth, dimension and meaning to our lives—love, empathy, caring, compassion, allowance, forgiveness, contribution, et cetera! Integral to it is authenticity, the foundation of trust and real communication.

Transcendent values like trust and integrity literally translate into revenue, profits and prosperity. —Patricia Aburdene, author, *Megatrends*, 2010

With integrity, there are no shades of grey. We may be generally people of integrity, but at any particular moment, we have it or we do not.

Any crisis, any dysfunctional symptom, can be an opportunity for growth for it is a hint to where, we, personally, need to look deeper—find where we have not been responsible—and be more responsible.

Emotional maturity is the willingness and ability to be responsible and live essence values while dealing with the vicissitudes of life. Both integrity and emotional maturity are about being responsible. One does not exist without the other. Being emotionally mature means having integrity. Lack of integrity equals emotional immaturity and vice versa.

For all of man’s evolution and considerable technological accomplishments—psychologically he is still very immature. —J. Krishnamurti

Our technology is now growing at a logarithmic rate potentially capable of resolving many issues—but *only* if applied responsibly. However, humankind’s chronic history of self-centered, irresponsible, destructive behavior has not changed over millenniums. Far too often, we continue to behave like spoiled children in older bodies indifferent to or expecting others to be responsible for the consequences of our actions.

We run from confrontation, we hide from accountability and we ignore or excuse breaches of integrity. Imagine what we could create if we were actually responsible. —James Davis

Until we break that chronic pattern, until we truly grow up, no technological advances, no matter how sophisticated can save us—the *potential consequences of our continuing immaturity are orders of magnitude more dangerous than ever before*. The fundamental issue is about growing up, becoming emotionally mature. To do so, we need to be clear on the values that define our ideal and our corresponding principles. Principles are our personal boundaries of behavior of what we will and will not do in moving toward our ideal. *Character* is the frequency with which we adhere to our principles.

In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.
—Thomas Jefferson

Keep in mind however, that only when those values are truly essence values will we act with integrity, be emotionally mature and make a positive contribution. Hitler had values and principles to which he adhered vigorously. However, his values were the opposite of essence values and we know the result.

Morals, often confused with integrity, but in fact distinct from it, are codes a group consider acceptable behavior of its members. What one group considers moral another may consider immoral. One can be highly moral, follow all the rules, and have no integrity.

What is morality in any given time and place? It is what a majority then and there happen to like, and immorality is what they dislike. —Alfred North Whitehead

Rules have their place and value. However, they cannot compensate for a lack of integrity; their over emphasis actually stifles it. This is a major problem largely ignored because of naivety (do not understand the issue), confusion (do not know what to do about it) and/or avoidance (do not want to deal with it). Until confronted, little will result no matter how well intended the rules and the efforts to enforce compliance to them.

Rules cannot substitute for character. —Alan Greenspan

When we act with integrity, we are, and we feel, at one with essence qualities. We recognize that we do have an impact for which we are personally responsible and accountable. We are, and we feel, empowered, loving and complete (integrated).

When we lack integrity, i.e., when we push responsibility “out there,” we lose touch with essence values and qualities, the very things that provide substance, depth and meaning to our lives. Our principles become meaningless and our character a joke. Overtly or hidden, we are a liability to the environment. We become victims of our own irresponsibility—always. We feel empty and under the façade, powerless. Fear, separation, loneliness, jealousy, envy and rage are the resultant default driving forces.

By our own choices, we create crises, we whine, lie and manipulate. We blame someone or something else. To that someone or something, we surrender our power, our dignity and our self-respect.

When an environment of integrity is missing, chaos abounds and bad things happen, including losing a sense of the meaning and value of integrity itself.

—General Jack Chain, USAF (Retired)

To compensate, we compulsively, and *insatiably*, look elsewhere for acknowledgement, approval, and acceptance. Lack of integrity is the primary source of chronic anxiety, depression and unhappiness. No social, political or financial “success,” no matter how “significant” or acknowledged by others can compensate for its lack. Its absence *ensures* a frustrated and unfulfilled life. *There is nothing more important than our integrity.*

I look for three things in hiring people. The first is personal integrity, the second is intelligence, and the third is a high energy level. But, if you don't have the first the other two will kill you. —Warren Buffet

Though integrity is always a personal choice and act, it is never isolated; for each individual is an inseparable (integral) part of a larger whole. Whatever we do affects the whole of which we are a part. If we hurt some part of that whole, as part of that all-inclusive whole, we hurt ourselves. If we love another, we have more love in our life. Many acknowledge this. Few live it.

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. —Jesus of Nazareth

On Leadership

Leadership is about motivating others into new arenas. Great leadership is doing so with integrity as its senior and fundamental priority. That takes courage. Lincoln, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are examples. In the absence of integrity, great leadership cannot exist, only egotistical pretences of it. Integrity, emotional maturity and great leadership are inseparable.

Leadership is not rank, privilege, titles or money. Leadership is, ultimately, responsibility, and it is the ultimate responsibility. —Colin Powell

Managership is about execution and attainment of goals. Great managers do that exceptionally well. Integrity may or may not be present.

The world values and rewards great managers, not necessarily great leaders. What the world needs, more than ever, are great managers who are also great leaders.

Current examples of publically acknowledged great managers are CEOs Ed Breen of Tyco, Mark Hurd of Hewlett Packard and Jeffery Immelt of General Electric. History may also credit them as great leaders. That evaluation will be—beyond financial accomplishments—of their success at facilitating environments of integrity.

Who is responsible for the leadership we experience? We are! *The integrity and maturity we observe in our environment and in our leaders are reflections of our own integrity and maturity.* The “leadership” we have, in any context, is the leadership we create or allow. A crisis of leadership is always a crisis of integrity—our integrity. It is a message that we *personally* need to be more responsible.

The Means

The future of the planet depends on us individually, as well as collectively, being more responsible. *Fortunately*, recent advances in understanding human motivation offer more effective means than ever before to facilitate expanded responsibility. For example, we now have a much greater understanding of emotions, their relationship one to another, their associated attitudes and behaviors, the range of perceived reality for each emotional state and the ability to facilitate first ourselves and then others to higher states.

These are the foundation of skills that help establish rapport, motivate and lead individuals, groups and organizations to increased levels of responsibility, maturity and integrity—skills that raise productivity and morale. The purpose of the book, *The Leadership Integrity Challenge: Assessing and Facilitating Emotional Maturity*, is to provide that awareness and skill building foundation.

Moving Toward Integrity

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. —Margaret Mead

Remember everything we do has impact. By committing to greater personal responsibility, utilizing whatever resources we do have, large or small, we dramatically expand our ability to deal with the many symptoms of our personal and collective irresponsibility. Our contributions do matter. We can make them in many ways: through our position, our votes, our purchasing power; taking the time to support causes we believe in; communicating our concerns directly to corporate and political leaders, et cetera.

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility. —Vaclav Havel

We can help create a saner, more loving world. Simply notice any lack of responsibility, be responsible—and empowered. The choices are abundant—the opportunities many. *Imagine the possibilities.*

Who is up to the challenge? Are you? Future generations will know.