CHAPTER 24

FINDING THE WILL AND BATTLING SELF-DOUBT WITH AND THROUGH INTEGRITY

Integrity

This may be the most important chapter in the book. It describes one of the biggest challenges you will face and will require reflection and thought. The concepts in this chapter, like a championship team's training and practice, will lay the foundation for your success.

I am convinced that the most important element for an individual or team of any sort to achieve their potential is integrity—and that compromised integrity is one of the most common reasons organizations and initiatives fail to achieve their potential. Integrity means that our actions, decisions, and words align with our stated intentions and beliefs. I believe nearly every person wants to live with integrity, yet this is extremely difficult in our dynamic and complex world. The two ubiquitous ways that integrity is compromised are through arguing that the ends justify the means and through misaligning words, actions, and decisions.

The ends justify the means

There is a pervasive attitude throughout our culture and institutions that the ends justify the means. This usually doesn't entail an obviously

horrific action taken to achieve a desired outcome; rather, we accept some small level of compromise on our beliefs and values if the end result is desirable. Often, the compromise is small, and we hardly even think about it. But each small compromise of our values and beliefs slowly, and often unnoticeably, erodes our integrity.

When we allow a result to justify the means by which it was achieved, we have made a compromise. We face such situations regularly, and sometimes they are a necessary choice we have to make. But when the alternatives to compromise are worse and some compromised action absolutely must be taken, we need to understand the longer-term impact and take every precaution possible to mitigate the damage. If we don't pay attention and take these precautions, here is what happens.

COMPROMISE VS. COMPROMISED INTEGRITY

A compromise of ideas and methods is desirable, especially in an endeavor or process like overhauling a large system. However, compromising an individual's or organization's values, beliefs, or integrity must be avoided or mitigated in some way. The challenge, of course, is when there seem to be conflicting values and beliefs among the members of a team or organization. That's why it's so important to have consensus on the vision and beliefs of the team pursuing the new school design, as addressed later in this section.

Fortunately, there is significant consensus among people throughout the world on foundational values, as noted in chapter 7 and explored in depth in Rushworth Kidder's book *Moral Courage* (Kidder, 2005). This consensus means a team is unlikely to face regular situations where there is significant conflict among values and beliefs.

Every time we allow the ends to justify the means, we create barriers to trust and diminish the ability to achieve our individual and

collective potential. In every system that involves humans, whether a family or a federal government, allowing the ends to justify the means (even just a little) erodes trust among the people who make up the system or organization. It's often not noticeable, which makes it even more dangerous.

Over time, this mindset—that sacrifices will be made—becomes part of a system, and its members realize they might be among those sacrificed. People begin to wonder if they are at risk; maybe they will somehow be caught up in the next *means* that lead to some necessary *end*. Compromises become normalized, leading to more severe compromises later as trust erodes. Without the full trust of its members, an organization cannot achieve its full potential.

When there is no option that is clearly and completely within the scope of their values and beliefs, organizations and all their members must be open and honest about the situation and any compromise it requires. They need to be clear about the choices being made or actions being taken, their justifications, and the steps that have been taken to find acceptable alternatives.

Our hierarchical systems too often value leaders who "make the hard choices" without providing their rationale or showing concern for those who may be harmed. But organizations with integrity must take these steps if they want to achieve their potential. Often, in the process of trying to mitigate these actions, new solutions arise that no longer require compromising integrity. (For an example, see the callout box on Barry-Wehmiller.)

BARRY-WEHMILLER: BUILDING A BETTER WORLD THROUGH BUSINESS

In his TED Talk on circles of safety, Simon Sinek shares a story about the Barry-Wehmiller Companies, a group that supplies technology and services to the manufacturing industry. Sinek explains how the recession in 2008 took a toll on orders for this company. After seeing a 30 percent drop in orders, the company knew it had to reduce its payroll by $10 million to survive. The board of directors wanted to lay off a portion of its workforce. Company president Robert Chapman refused.

Instead, everyone in the company had to take four weeks of unpaid furlough. This was not ideal, but it spread the pain among everybody rather than force select people to face the overwhelming burden of losing their jobs. What happened next, as Sinek explains, was rather incredible.

People throughout the company realized some could readily afford a longer furlough, while others would struggle with the lost income of even four weeks. So these people started trading. Those who could afford to do so took a longer furlough so others could take a shorter leave. The company ended up saving $20 million and weathered a horrible situation while coming out stronger in the end by refusing to compromise its integrity (Sinek, 2018).

Misaligned words, actions, and decisions

Integrity is also frequently compromised through a misalignment of words, actions, and decisions. As with "the ends justify the means," this misalignment is usually not blatant and is often not even realized. Rather, it is usually due to lack of deep thought and critical thinking about how words, actions, and decisions align. When an organization has a set of stated beliefs but implements policies that are counter to them, integrity is compromised.

For example, many organizations express the importance of their employees or members and say they value their opinions, ideas, initiative, and commitment. Then they create volumes of rules, policies, procedures,

and consequences meant to ensure compliance. Despite their claims to care about the ideas of their employees, their organizational structure severely limits all but a few people from making meaningful contributions beyond their assigned duties.

This misalignment has become so institutionalized that we must proactively counter it. It is not enough to tell team members that we welcome everyone's opinions, ideas, and initiative; rather, we must seek out the opinions, ideas, and initiative of every team member and then listen and act on them. We must also acknowledge that those who are less vocal and forthcoming often have some of the best ideas and solutions. Such an approach strengthens the commitment of everyone on the team, which will be necessary to weather the challenges to come.

Building a foundation of trust

So what does any of this have to do with finding the willpower and courage to design and implement a new model of school? This enterprise will challenge stakeholders, who have different and sometimes competing needs and priorities, to abandon the only school model they've ever known and collaborate on developing something completely new. There can be no doubt about the sincerity and commitment of the team members. Everyone must trust everyone else, and everyone must be confident that there is integrity in their collective efforts.

Further, to achieve this collective trust, individual members of the group should know themselves and why they are involved. They need to have individual integrity. Individuals shouldn't give up their personal needs and priorities or those of organizations they represent; rather, everyone must be aware of and acknowledge each other's needs and priorities. Everyone should know where everyone else stands; they must have enough trust that they are willing and able to be vulnerable with one another.

If your team has a foundation of integrity, then you can develop the collective courage, willpower, and confidence to follow through on the design and implementation of a new school model for your community.

There are substantial rewards for maintaining your integrity. Besides contributing to the success of your efforts, being part of a team with real integrity and a shared sense of purpose is invigorating and exciting. You'll find yourselves looking forward to the work you're doing.

Courage

I have had the privilege of being in the presence of thirty-seven winners of the Congressional Medal of Honor—the highest award offered to members of the US military. I have read countless stories of Medal of Honor winners and the citations from their awards. The standard for receiving this award is the very definition of courage. A service member must have performed substantial actions that protected and saved others while facing a clear threat to his or her own safety.

Unfortunately, the Medal of Honor is often given posthumously because the acts for which the medal was awarded cost the life of the recipient. Medal of Honor winners, however, don't see themselves as heroes or their actions as necessarily courageous. Rather, they all say they were just doing the right thing, what they knew their fellow service members would have done in the same situation.

The world is filled with similar courageous acts by firefighters, search-and-rescue teams, police officers, parents, teachers, neighbors, friends, and total strangers who step in without thought for their own safety to do the right thing. In most cases—whether rescuing a fellow service member or fighting racial injustice—the cause being fought for is often clear and the alternative is unacceptable. However, in the effort to design a new school model, the alternative of keeping the current factory model *seems* acceptable to most people. Therefore, those who choose to become part of this movement will need the courage of their convictions that not only is this a righteous cause but also that the status quo is unacceptable.

If you and your team are not convinced the current model is substantially inadequate for the twenty-first century, you will much too readily

give up. That is the fate of most significant initiatives—an acceptance of the status quo or an easier alternative when challenges arise.

On the other hand, if you're convinced this change is necessary and our current model cannot meet the needs of our students, our communities, and our world now or in the future, then you know that replacing the current model is absolutely the right thing to do. That is where you will find your courage. Think about the children who have already been shortchanged by an out-of-date model, and consider how much potential has already been lost by graduates of factory-model schools and the loss to society of what they may have accomplished. Use these thoughts to strengthen your resolve and commitment.

Real courage comes from your personal convictions and is based in integrity. If you truly care about something, then you will live out that belief through your actions. If you believe in the abilities and incredible potential of all children and want to help unleash them because it's the right thing to do, then you will find the courage when you need it.

Will and willpower

Most of us think of willpower in the context of self-improvement—eating better, exercising more, saving money, etc. When we or someone else is successful, we often credit willpower. However, the critical element of willpower is *will*. Will is a reflection of the degree to which we believe in something. The greater our commitment to a value, ideal, belief, or idea—or a corresponding action or activity—the greater our will and our readiness to act accordingly. If we have sufficient will to accomplish something, we will find the willpower necessary to see it through.

Here again, integrity comes into play. Where there is strong, consistent integrity, the will of our convictions will be sustained and bolstered. When integrity is compromised, will and willpower falter.

Finding the will to soldier on in the face of adversity starts by figuring out who we are and what we truly believe. Unfortunately, we often allow our roles in life to define us, and we often allow others to define

those roles. We may base our actions and decisions on what others want or how we think they'll respond; or we act as we've seen parents, teachers, or mentors act. Over time, we adopt that definition without having given it much thought. In most circumstances, this works out fine, but the changes outlined in this book require objective reflection—a sort of internally directed critical thinking.

The will to design a new school model for your community will come from your belief in this cause combined with the integrity to make it part of your identity. You need to identify yourself as a "change agent" and become a champion for bringing improved learning, growth, and development opportunities to children in your community. You don't have to be highly vocal and visible, but you should be willing to use your talents and resources to further the effort.

When challenges and adversity arise, this identity will provide the willpower to keep going. The integrity of wanting to do the right things for the right reasons at the right time will overcome doubts and desires to quit.

The big concepts covered in this chapter—integrity, courage, and will—are bolstered through the support, example, and assistance of others. When we are part of a group committed to a common cause and to one another, the collective strength of the group becomes the strength of each member. The group becomes its own catalyst for ensuring integrity, courage, and willpower are always available in abundance.

Thus, it becomes essential that the team taking on the challenge of designing a new model of school for their community is formed with integrity and maintains integrity in all they say and do.