

The "Grit" In Integrity

Sometimes what needs to be done is a really tough thing to do. Leaders have to terminate employees, unpopular things have to be said and so on. In such situations, people usually see what is needed long before they are willing to admit it to themselves.

The most successful executives are those who have closed this gap between seeing what needs to be done and admitting it. They read people and situations quickly, and act with remarkable effectiveness.

I am sure you have had experience of how you missed something which later seemed so obvious. You probably noticed that your mind got caught in what you hoped was there. The truth was too inconvenient to admit.

It takes an aggressive kind of honesty to see what is really there and act on it. This is the "grit" in integrity.

In working this with people, the most common reasons I find for missing what is there to be seen are: (1) concern for appearances and (2) fear of action. The way through such concerns and fears is not so much by effort or will power. I have seen people try to prod others with comments like, "You must be more bold" or some such. And of course nothing much changes.

The way through is a gritty desire for truth.

For example, I was working with an executive who was creating a new management structure. He synthesized differing points of view in the boardroom to propose a solution that seemed to make everybody happy. Only trouble was the new plan was too convoluted to actually work in practice. Obviously, to re-work this whole thing with his board was going to be immensely inconvenient. He struggled three days trying to convince himself that maybe it could work. But it had to be changed. As soon as he admitted the truth and accepted what needed to be done, the whole process—intense and challenging as it was—became fun to deal with.

A good coach can awaken the pleasure that is to be found in seeing and acting on what is true. Trying to make things look right and people feel good, avoiding sticking one's neck out, is such a hell in comparison with the pure joy of seeing and acting on what is there to be done. The simplicity of living all out.

When we get a taste for that, we lose our appetite for seeing only what we hope is there or what is convenient to see. We come to trust that, while what is actually present may at times be challenging, it will always be a whole lot more fulfilling.

About the Author

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