

Integrity



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Most people would agree that integrity includes doing what you say you are going to do, although it is not always clear when you have said you are going to do something. Nobody wants or expects to be held accountable for everything they say in ordinary conversation, which is more like brainstorming than decision making. Statements made under the influence of alcohol are conditionally exempt, as are declarations made in anger, hysteria, delirium or confusion. The interpretation of when someone has said they are going to do something also has a great deal to do with the interests

of the interpreter, who may be your partner, child, colleague or customer.

I have a large cardboard sign with the title *Integrity* in my office and in couples counseling I use it to signify unambiguously when someone is making a serious commitment that they expect to be held accountable for. For the duration of the exercise, no statement or declaration can be regarded as binding unless the speaker is literally holding my cardboard sign, and I don't hand it over lightly. I begin the exercise by asking each partner to excuse the other from every commitment or obligation they think they have ever made to one another. Going forward from that clean slate, I recommend that they hold the sign immediately in order to promise that they will not sleep with any third party without prior notification. Commitments beyond that should be very few, and only regarding issues of genuinely vital interest to one or both partners. Commitments can be oppressive where freely given gifts, love and service are not. Trust me. Call me.

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