

This section from principle 6 is excerpted from
Divine Wisdom at Work: 10 Universal Principles for the Enlightened Entrepreneur

Principle 6

Live Your Truth: Time for an Integrity Checkup

*Always do right.
This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.*
Mark Twain

Most of us would say we act with integrity. We pay our bills and our taxes and we don't cheat on our spouses. When it comes to integrity at work, the little things count too. In the last month, have you made up excuses for not returning phone calls or missing deadlines? Have you ever received an invoice from a vendor that was less than you agreed on and didn't dispute it? Do you inflate figures or results for the sake of a sale? Did you do something wrong to someone and refuse to apologize for it? Do you tend to be late for meetings or come unprepared? Have you ever set a goal—a promise to yourself—when you thought you didn't deserve it and, therefore, never achieved it?

When our thoughts and actions are out of alignment with the truth, we waste precious energy and tarnish our reputation. By increasing your level of integrity in thought, word and deed, you will transform all your relationships, including the one with yourself.

*I have found no greater satisfaction than achieving success through
honest dealings and strict adherence to the view that,
for you to gain, those you deal with should gain as well.*
Alan Greenspan

What Do You Value?

Charles Brewer founded Atlanta-based MindSpring Enterprises on his own in early 1994 and, by the end of that year, the company was up to eight people. He took it public two years later and helped grow it into one of the largest Internet service providers in the country. Brewer became legendary for setting the standard of customer care through a clear, compelling set of core values and beliefs.

“At MindSpring, those values were more important than what our line of business was,” he says. “We could have been a cheese manufacturer. If you aspire to be different

or better than the status quo, the place to focus on is authentic values. Everything builds on them.”

MindSpring went national in 1996 when it bought PSI Net’s individual subscriber business. Part of the deal was that MindSpring took over a call-center facility in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. All at once, MindSpring’s number of employees and customers nearly doubled and so did its revenue. There was one problem. The employees at the acquired company hated their jobs.

“It was a miserable place to work,” Brewer recalls. “There were no core values, and their primary instructions were simply to handle more calls. They were literally answering the phones and hanging up on customers to increase their numbers. It was bad, but we knew that the people working there did not want to do such a lousy job.”

So MindSpring sent a “cultural emissary” to Harrisburg to share the core values and beliefs and the MindSpring way of doing things. “Almost immediately, there was an amazing change in the place. The same people, with the same facility, began to deliver superb support. All that really changed was the values and what was expected of them. Within a few months, Harrisburg was equaling or even beating Atlanta on all our measures of quality and quantity. For the people there, it was a really wonderful experience. They loved doing great work! The Harrisburg story is one of my favorite memories of the whole MindSpring experience.”

Brewer warns, “Most people want to accomplish something great with their work and are willing to put in the effort to make that happen. But there is an insidious tendency in organizational life that keeps people from doing that. So you have this paradox with lots of individuals who really want to do great things coming together in organizations that unwittingly make it impossible to do great things. I think the only way to rise above this not-too-impressive status quo is through a focus on the values as the primary foundation of the company.”

How can you effectively use core values and beliefs to set a higher standard in your business? Brewer shares this advice:

- 1) **Spread the word.** “Once you craft your core values and beliefs, you must write about them, speak about them and hold them up as what you aspire to every day.” At MindSpring, these principles were everywhere: posted on the walls, printed on the back of business cards and articulated in Brewer’s homey letters emailed to customers. Weekly meetings began with a recitation of them. Each decision was made and communicated with a reference to them.
- 2) **Choose the right people.** “At hiring and promotion time, make sure the people you choose live by these values. Leaders who don’t believe in and model these values can be deadly to your company.” When appropriate, be as selective with clients and vendors.
- 3) **Create mechanisms and metrics that support your values.** “Say one of your values is ‘respect and trust for the individual.’ If you have an extremely detailed policy on travel expenditures and lots of detailed review and checking on

expense reports, then those procedures are undermining that value. The actual mechanisms of the company say ‘we don’t trust you’ even though the values statement says we do trust you. At MindSpring, we just asked people to be frugal and they were spectacularly frugal!”

Brewer credits *Good to Great*’s Jim Collins with influencing the way he does business. “Collins and William Lazier wrote a little-known book called *Beyond Entrepreneurship: Turning Your Business into an Enduring Great Company*. They encourage business owners to focus on five dimensions: leadership style; vision, values and corporate culture; strategy; innovation; and tactical excellence. It’s simple and short and the most important business book I’ve ever read.”

Following a \$4 billion merger with EarthLink in 2000, Brewer soon resigned as chairman and director, selling all his shares in the company. He is now the chairman of Green Street Properties, LLC, a real estate development company he founded in 2001 with two partners. The company focuses on creating “healthy, loveable communities” in urban environments. He’s back to eight people and the same core values and beliefs.

*It's only when the tide goes out that you learn
who has been swimming naked.*
Warren Buffett

Get Real

Be honest about what you can’t or don’t want to do. We all have services that we enjoy performing and, as an added bonus, are also the most profitable for us. And then there are other things we are asked to do that we struggle through. They can cause resentment and negative energy and result in a sub-stellar outcome. No one wins. These are the ones we should either eliminate or delegate to others.

Though I offer a full range of marketing services, from media publicity to promotional writing, what I love to do best is write testimonial quotes and success stories, or case studies. These marketing tools open doors and close deals by selling my clients’ products and services through the words of an objective third party—their clients and customers. I make it easy by providing my clients with instructions on how to ask permission to be interviewed and, on the back, a form for them to write down the contact information. I charge a set price per piece so they know what to expect. It’s a profitable service that is fun to do since I get to hear how much these companies appreciate and respect my clients and my clients get to see it in writing, which boosts their morale as well as their sales.

I avoid event planning like the plague. There are too many miniscule details and unanticipated variables—like weather and competing activities—that decide the success or failure of a company anniversary party or a holiday open house. Other people live for this kind of work and that’s a good thing.

*Be who you are and say what you feel,
because those who mind don't matter,
and those who matter don't mind.*

Dr. Seuss

Do you ever compromise your values to try to “fit in” or because of “what others might think?” One of my favorite sayings, which I wish I had known when I was a teenager, is: “When you’re 20, you worry what other people think about you. When you’re 40, you don’t care what other people think about you. When you’re 60, you realize that other people were never thinking about you at all.”

Keep it Simple

Make sure all your written agreements—from contracts to employee policies—are easy to understand, fair, legal (with the least possible legalese and fine print) and enforceable. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of your attorney, accountant and other professional advisors and consultants to prevent misunderstandings.

Model the behavior you desire from others. Though it may be tempting, refrain from indulging in gossip. Its insidious nature can destroy businesses and lives. Remember this bit of wisdom from Eleanor Roosevelt: “Great minds discuss ideas; Average minds discuss events; Small minds discuss people.”

In *The Power of Ethical Management*, authors Ken Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale offer a simple method to determine whether the decision you are about to make is right or wrong. Ask yourself, “Would you be proud to see your actions from this decision published on the front page of your local newspaper?” Hmmm.

Four Agreements

In *The Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book*, shamanic teacher and healer Don Miguel Ruiz shares a personal code of conduct he learned from his Toltec ancestors. The Toltec ruled much of Maya central Mexico from the tenth to twelfth centuries. They were scientists and artists who formed a society to explore and conserve spiritual knowledge and practices. They considered science and spirit to be the same since all energy, whether material or ethereal, is derived from the same source and governed by the same universal laws. The Toltec tradition is based upon three masteries: awareness, transformation and intent.

The first agreement is “Be Impeccable with Your Word.” Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. The second is “Don’t Take Anything Personally.” Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality. Third is “Don’t Make Assumptions.” Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. The fourth is “Always Do Your Best.” Under any circumstances, simply do your best and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret. Do you agree?