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Holding Up The Mirror

You may be thinking that this is an unusual title for 'Thoughts on Leadership' this month. However, it is an important subject and something that I also find challenging from time to time.

You know what I like when someone accuses you of something that is not true or of an intent that was not your intent at all. As leaders we are faced with this frequently. Just look at politicians, they face it all the time.

I always find it difficult to deal with. Anyone who knows me also knows that I am straight with people and what you see is what you get. I don't have a lot of time for people who say one thing and do another. Most importantly, if I hold a position within an organisation or association, I do not play 'the behind the scenes games', or 'closed network', or 'inner circle'. I believe that this undermines integrity with people and creates unnecessary bad relationships.

Yet despite always behaving in this manner and being known for being a very straight person, I occasionally get people who doubt something and make an accusation against me. At the time I find it very painful and I am disturbed that people should think that of me. I ask myself what I have done to deserve that?

The truth is, the person is often someone who knows very little about me, if anything at all. They make an assumption based on their perception of the world, their experiences and in many cases based on how they would behave if they were in that situation. In other words it says more about them that it says about me.

As a leader you know that sometimes you need to have 'thick skin' that enables you to deal with the false accusations made about you and the people who judge you by their own issues or perceptions of the world. At the same time you need to be able to be sensitive to what people are thinking and, most importantly, be able to recognise when you are giving them grounds for their thinking (even if it is not true).

At these times I believe that being true to yourself is what is most important. Being able to hold up the mirror to yourself and look yourself in the eye and know that what you do are the right things for all concerned and it is done with respect.

But it is not enough to just say, "*I believe it is right*". Can you still look yourself in the eye and say, the way I have approached this has been with respect for the people concerned? Do I take into account their position and experiences?

Holding ourselves accountable is very important in developing integrity with others. If you can't hold yourself to account, how can you expect others to be accountable for their actions. People look to you as an example of what it means to be trustworthy, honest and responsible. Without the ability to be honest with ourselves, we lose the ability to be objective and make sound judgements that can move our organisations, our families and even our countries forward.

It is a fine line that leaders need to walk. On the one side the need to be compassionate and understanding and consider the opinions of other people. On the other side the need to move things forward knowing that people are not going to agree and be happy with your decisions. Your ability to walk this fine line will be constantly tested and challenged. It will endure the challenge when you have already held it up to the mirror and challenged yourself.

So for this month I ask you to consider the following questions:

- What do you do each and every day to build your integrity with people you deal with and especially the ones you want to lead?
- Can you be totally honest with yourself?
- Can you be totally objective about yourself?
- Can you truly recognise the mistakes and learn from them?
- Can you truly look yourself in the mirror, look into your eyes and say that you are doing the right thing for all concerned?

And finally:

- Can you talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
- Walk with Kings and not loose your common touch,
- Never allow foes or loving friends to hurt you,

And ensure that all men count with you, "but none too much"?

Have a great month.

To the hundreds of people from New Orleans and St Louis that joined us this month as well as the people from around the world, welcome and if you would like more than this written text, then download the spoken thoughts on leadership where I go into more depth. I hope you have enjoyed my thought for this month.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Biddle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Paul