Truthfulness

Definition

Truthfulness is building trust by correctly representing the facts. A calculator that gives inaccurate information cannot be trusted. Similarly, someone who lies, cheats, steals, or deceives will lose others' trust.

Shine a Light

Just as doctors use bright lights to see what they are doing, truthfulness sheds light on the situation so that you and others can do the right thing.

Truthfulness often seems dangerous or harmful, but just as doctors need light to perform surgery, truthfulness is the only way to begin setting things right.

First, be honest with yourself. You might fool most people most of the time, but ignoring your guilt is like turning off the lights. You might gain temporary relief, but the problem remains and it will probably get worse. Face the facts and make things right to the best of your ability.

Leave the darkness of lies and deceit, and experience the freedom of living in the light.

Project

Answer the questions in the space provided.

Can you remember a lie you told as a child?

_____

_____

Why did you lie instead of tell the truth?

_____

_____

What new problems did you have after you lied?

_____

_____

How do you feel when a friend or family member lies to you?

_____

_____

The Broken Watch

A young boy's father came home with a beautiful pocket watch. The boy wanted to show the watch to his friends, so he snuck the watch out of his father's dresser and slipped it into his pocket.

At school, the watch fell to the ground and shattered. The boy picked up as many pieces as he could and put them back in his father's drawer that afternoon.

When his father discovered the broken pocket watch and asked who had done it, the boy was afraid and said he didn't know anything about it. This boy grew up to be the president of a lumber company.

One rainy night, he drove home on a winding forest road. As he rounded one curve, he came upon a boy on a bicycle. He slammed on the brakes, but the car did not stop in time. He heard a sickening thud against the front of his car.

In that split second, he had a decision to make. Instead of helping the boy, he backed up the car, drove carefully around the boy, and sped home.

The next morning, reports of the hit-and-run accident covered the local news. Another driver found the boy lying in the road and took him to a hospital. The town was outraged.

The lumber company president could not stop thinking about the night before. By noon, he drove to the police station and turned himself in.

The jury convicted the man and the judge sentenced him to twenty years in prison for fleeing the scene of an accident.

The man asked the judge, "What would have been the penalty if I had taken the boy to the hospital?"

The judge said, "I don't think there would have been any penalty. It was an accident. You would have done what you could."

When a reporter asked why a responsible businessman and father would leave an injured boy in the middle of the road, the man explained how, after lying to his father, he had continued hiding the truth, and this habit eventually led him to think he could make a terrible accident go away if no one knew he had caused it.

Discussion

Answer the following questions before discussing them as a group.

1. How would you feel if you had hit the boy with your car?

_____

2. Why did the man flee the scene after hitting the boy?

_____

3. Why is it important to own up to your mistakes?

_____

4. When is it difficult for you to tell the truth?
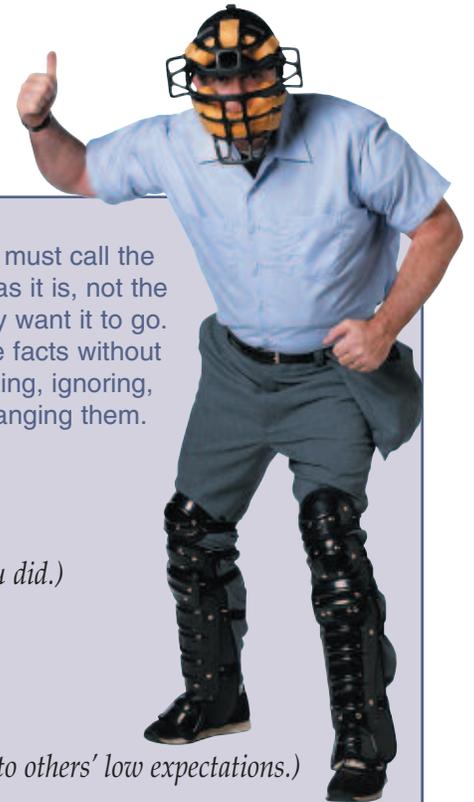
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Developing Truthfulness

1. Face the facts. The first step for developing truthfulness is accepting reality—as ugly, painful, or uncomfortable as it is. Have you done something wrong? Admit it instead of pretending it did not happen. Did someone wrong you? Do not make excuses for him or her.

2. Tell the truth. Some lie to avoid punishment, and others lie to make themselves look good. Whatever your reasons, do not distort the truth, hide information, exaggerate, or tell "little" lies. Ask yourself what really happened, not what someone wants to hear.

3. Do not cheat or steal. Respect others' property and do not take what does not belong to you. Even if you "find" something that does not appear to have an owner, check around before claiming it. Do not pretend something is yours when it is not.

4. Admit your mistakes. Instead of hiding mistakes, admit what you did wrong and ask for forgiveness.

Avoid tangling yourself in a web of lies. Tell the truth, even when it is hard.

Then think how you can avoid temptation to repeat the mistake.

5. Encourage truthfulness. Set a good example by speaking the truth and living a consistent life. Do not spread rumors or gossip about others. Support those who tell the truth when you know they are right.

Umpires must call the game as it is, not the way they want it to go. Face facts without minimizing, ignoring, or changing them.

Project

Be honest with yourself and stop blaming others or making excuses. Discuss the following excuses. What is the truthful response to each statement? Write other excuses you have used or heard.

- "It's not my fault!"
  (Ask yourself what responsibility you have in the situation.)

- "What I did isn't as bad as _____."
  (You can always find someone worse, but that fact does not eliminate what you did.)

- "My parents were a bad example."
  (That might be true, but what kind of example are you setting?)

- "I'm here just because I'm _____."
  (To whatever extent that is true, you must choose whether you will live down to others' low expectations.)

- "Everyone else does it. That's just what you have to do."
  (In reality, people often do the wrong thing because it is easier, not because doing the right thing is impossible.)

- "If only that police officer hadn't been watching!"
  (If you are doing the right thing, it does not matter who is watching.)

- _____

- _____

Balance Truthfulness

Like the tires on a car, truthfulness must be balanced so that it does not cause additional problems.

Sincerity

Do not lie or tell the truth in order to get something you want. Manipulating the system or working an angle becomes a viscous cycle. Those who play this game are not truthful because they only value truth when it benefits them.

When you tell the truth because the truth matters, you demonstrate the character quality of truthfulness.

Balance your truthfulness with other character qualities. Never demonstrate one quality to the exclusion of all others.

Responsibility

Identify what you should or should not say in each situation. Do not meddle in an argument that does not involve you. Do not assume responsibility to police others or report them for breaking the rules.

If an officer asks you a direct question about someone else, say, "I want to be honest, but I'd rather not answer that question. Could you ask him directly?" When you do say something, always tell the truth no matter who benefits.

Gentleness

The childish saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is far from true. Words can cause tremendous pain.

Do not use "truthfulness" as an excuse to say everything you think. If you have to tell something that is hard to hear, say it with respect and a desire to help. Do not ridicule others or rub the truth in their face. Remember *how* you say something is as important as *what* you say.

Role Play

Practice the following role plays. Try both parts.

Scene 1

Officer: "Hey, I have a question for you."

Prisoner: "Yes, Sir."

Officer: "Are there any drugs in your cell?"

Prisoner: "Well, I know I don't have any drugs in my cell."

Officer: "What about your cellmate?"

Prisoner: "Hmm, I can only answer for my own stuff. Maybe it would be best to ask him/her directly."

Scene 2

Prisoner 1: "Did you hear about Sgt. Harris?"

Prisoner 2: "What?"

Prisoner 1: "He got busted for beating up an inmate."

Prisoner 2: "Really? Are you sure?"

Prisoner 1: "That's what Jones told me."

Prisoner 2: "I think Jones already has something against Sgt. Harris, so let's not jump to conclusions."

- How does your tone of voice affect what you say in these role plays?

- Why is it better not to meddle in arguments that do not involve you?