

When Will We Confront the Real Crisis?

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The pervasiveness of the current economic crisis, as well as the environmental crisis, the energy crisis, the educational crisis, the health care crisis, the looming social security crisis et cetera, are all screaming, “Something is terribly wrong!” How many even larger crises will we create before we finally face the real issue – lack of integrity!

Certainly, we need to respond and initiate programs that will rebuild confidence and restore credit availability. However, if all we do is “fix” symptoms without also confronting and actually dealing with the underlying cause – lack of integrity – any “solutions” forthcoming, regardless of the billions spent, predictably will be inadequate, short-lived and wasteful. Even more insidious, the crisis will only go underground, morph and assuredly return with ever-greater vengeance.

Integrity is the ability to respond, versus react, with needed action *in the moment*. It is being spontaneously response-able. It has nothing to do with imposing “righteous” rules, waiting for a “better time” or doing what is “popular”, “safe”, or “politically correct.” It is responsible action – Now!

There are no shades of grey with integrity. Though we may be generally people of integrity, at any particular moment, we do the right thing or we do not – we have integrity or we do not!

Man-made crises are, with rare exception, the result of some lack of integrity. When we deny ownership of this, we forego our ability to do anything about it, become victims of our own irresponsibility, feel powerless and project blame onto others. The cycle deepens – the crises expand.

Our integrity is both the essence and the wholeness of who we are. It is vital to our growth and sense of well being/security. It directly relates to our level of emotional maturity and thus ability to contribute to the world and ourselves. It is the foundation of our values, principles and character, and therefore underlies all our attitudes and behaviors. Nothing is more important

Programs, policies and philosophies, as important as they may be, are *secondary* to our integrity. How often do we ignore this and support politicians/employers/associates, regardless of their integrity, because their “promised” (fill in the blank) would benefit our self-centered interests/concerns? These are the reactions of children, not the responses of emotionally mature/responsible adults. We need to grow up!

Acting with integrity, though regarded by many as naïve/impractical, is vital to realizing our fuller potential. Not doing what we know is right, no matter how “justified,” always has limiting and hurtful consequences – no exceptions. As “inconvenient” or “politically incorrect” as it may be, it is imperative that we confront the fundamental issue of the lack of integrity.

There are no innocents here. Less we forget, everything we do does have an effect, positive or negative, on the whole of which we all are a part. Our actions do matter. All of us, whether by our ignorance, indifference, greed or cowardice, have contributed to this crisis.

We are upset with Wall Street and the politicians and they certainly appear to have a significant role in creating/contributing to this situation. However, they are our “representatives” – a reflection of us. They could not exist without our complicity in one form or another.

Responsibility always starts at home. Addressing the issue of holding those irresponsible accountable, is both appropriate and necessary. However, of senior importance is the creation of environments where assuming greater *personal* responsibility is encouraged, expected, honored and rewarded.

We need to look at those issues we have been complaining about and/or waiting for someone else to handle and sincerely ask, “What can I do, how can I help, how can I contribute?”

If we as individuals are not willing to assume greater levels of *personal* responsibility, then “responsibility” becomes little more than an exercise in irresponsible finger pointing. Nothing of substance changes and the crises magnify.

If we, and our representatives, can honestly look at how we rationalized not doing what needed being done, how we, directly or indirectly, contributed to or allowed the current situation, we will have begun the process of moving toward greater responsibility - and its companions, personal empowerment and emotional maturity.

Then and only then, will we be in a position to make truly positive transformational change. This is the source of personal fulfillment. This is the essence and measure of great leadership.

The world needs mature leaders, at all levels and occupations that demonstrate integrity and proactively create environments where integrity is, in fact, the standard and the priority. Our emotional maturity/integrity, not our social/political persona, is the single most reliable indicator and predictor of our intention, honesty, courage, willingness and ability to see the big picture, be fair and equitable, make the tough calls and deliver what we promise.

We need to assess the presence of integrity in ourselves and in whom we choose or allow to lead us. Society’s emphasis on appearance, often at the expense of substance, and the pretences and facades that such emphasis encourages, pose significant challenges to that assessment.

The consistent extent to which any entity – individual, group, organization, political administration, society, or culture – demonstrates presence, authenticity, compassion and accountability provides a strong indication of that entity’s level of emotional maturity, i.e., responsibility – precisely what integrity is.

Let us use this crisis to confront our avoidances and be more consciously responsible for our choices including with whom we associate and support. The planet’s well-being depends on the integrity we live NOW!