Integrity: Doing the Right Thing Even When No One Is Watching

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I love this definition by C.S. Lewis and believe it to be one of the most simple but profound quotes: *Even when it is not the easiest or most profitable, doing the right thing is one of the most important guideposts for any business.* For instance, a veterinary clinic that prioritizes the health and well-being of animals over profit margins is a prime example of integrity in action. It is the foundation of trust, respect, and credibility. A veterinary clinic or industry partner can achieve significant long-term success and growth with integrity. But more than that, as business leaders, understanding and embodying integrity can empower us, giving us the confidence and motivation to lead our teams and the veterinary industry.

Veterinary professionals desire partners committed to transparency, fairness, and accountability. This is often gained through changing from a transactional to a collaborative approach. When leaders earn their customers' and employees' mutual trust and loyalty, they also make them feel valued and respected. This leads to a positive reputation, increased profits, and a sustainable business model for both parties. In other words, integrity is not just a moral value, but a strategic business decision that can lead to tangible benefits.

One of the most important aspects of integrity is honesty. While this seems like an obvious assumption, it isn't universally demonstrated. Nothing destroys trust in an industry relationship with a veterinary practice more than when inaccurate information is communicated or products or services are misrepresented, especially during a new product launch or when promoting deals on other products without being fully transparent. The consequences of such actions can be severe, leading to a loss of reputation, customer loyalty, and ultimately, business sustainability.

Fairness is also a core component of integrity. It's important to note that fairness doesn't always mean equality. A business must treat all stakeholders fairly, including employees, customers, suppliers, and shareholders. This means providing fair wages and benefits, offering quality products and services, and making ethical business decisions. Externally, fairness is even more essential for building strong relationships and maintaining a positive reputation with veterinary hospital leadership teams in a small industry and with very connected colleagues.

People who demonstrate integrity have another invaluable character trait in common—they hold themselves accountable. Business leaders must take responsibility for their actions and decisions. Although it is not easy, they must be willing to admit mistakes and take steps to correct them internally and externally with customers. This requires a commitment to transparency and open communication. When a business shows accountability, it builds trust and respect with all stakeholders.

Finally, consider how to demonstrate your business and brand integrity through marketing tactics. Transparency plays a crucial role here. Customers can very quickly be won and lost in how the brand is digitally represented. A business should routinely survey clients and internally review how the brand is being communicated and whether its integrity is clearly communicated. This means being open and honest about your business practices, product quality, and customer service. Transparency builds trust, which is a cornerstone of integrity.

The biggest takeaway? Integrity is a fundamental value that all businesses should practice. It is essential for building trust, respect, and credibility with stakeholders. Business leaders must commit to honesty, fairness, accountability, and transparency in all their dealings. Showcasing integrity through a transparent and open relationship with veterinary leadership teams, communicating through a consultative approach, and consistently demonstrating trust and integrity through brand marketing will create a long and successful reciprocal relationship.