

# Meeting the Demands of Reality

## An Interview with Henry Cloud

Dr. Henry Cloud believes integrity is often an overlooked or forgotten essential for leadership. In 2006, he wrote *Integrity*, to help managers and leaders develop the courage to meet the demands of reality. In this latest book, Dr. Cloud addresses six qualities that he believes determine an individual's success in business.



Dr. Cloud, a keynote speaker for CMA Palm Springs 2007, kindly took a break from his consulting and speaking schedule to talk to our readers about integrity and what that means, particularly to those working in Christian organizations.

**CMR: Dr. Cloud, what's on the top of your mind these days as you think about the managers and leaders in Christian organizations?**

**Cloud:** I'd begin by saying that truly great managers and leaders are the ones who, at a very deep level, are working on becoming whole, integrated people, more than honest, ethical and above board. There were a lot of ways in which the Pharisees were honest, ethical and above board. But they weren't very integrated in some of the deeper aspects of development that Jesus talked about.

Many times, management and leadership training focuses primarily on developing competencies within the industry, job skills, and becoming more knowledgeable about the business or even the niche of ministry you're in. In Christian settings, there's often a strong focus, broadly speaking, on character development and ethics. There's also an emphasis on a person's need to be faithful in growing spiritually.

But, my experience from 25 years of leadership consulting is that, oftentimes, the ways people *think* about character development and growth doesn't really get at all the dimensions that really need to be

addressed, in order for a person to be an effective leader. That's what this book, *Integrity*, is really about. In fact, my working title was "The Forgotten Essential of Leadership." What I'm referring to is the character development of the leader in areas beyond what we normally think about as character.

**CMR: What would be some of those aspects or areas you feel Christian managers and leaders tend to overlook?**

**Cloud:** The first aspect would be the leader's *ability to create and maintain trust* with the people they lead. A lot of leaders can establish trust in the beginning, through their vision and persuasive abilities. That's what a leader does. He or she says: "We can do this..." That same strength of persuasion, however, all too often becomes a force that gets in the way of their listening to or really understanding the people they lead.

Along the way, persuasion cannot be your only tool. You have to have more mature relational and emotional intelligence and the ability to connect with people in order for that trust to thrive. That's one of

the areas where leaders can and need to grow—to create and maintain trust, past the vision casting.

**CMR: OK. So what's the connection between trust and truth-telling, or integrity?**

**Cloud:** There are a lot of honest managers and leaders who'd never lie to anyone. Yet, they're out of touch with the reality right in front of them. They just aggressively force their view of reality on people within their teams and organizations. People comply out of fear, and no one ever stands up and says, "There's an elephant in the room."

In this situation, somebody has to ask, "What's wrong with our culture, that helpful feedback isn't flowing back to the leader for how he or she is leading?" It's a broken culture, so you start with that. You don't start by isolating or dumping that person. You bring wise people to help coach that leader to become someone who can build a team or organization where truth is what's desired.

Our organizations should be places where people not only give feedback, but where leaders would welcome it, and try to find the things that get in the way of people telling them that something isn't good.

**CMR: Can you give us an example of where there were honest people, but maybe not people of integrity as you describe it, and how that was harmful to the organization or business?**

**Cloud:** One thing I see repeatedly in Christian ministry is when people are very honest, loving and caring—so much so that they have difficulty confronting, disciplining and even firing people who have to go. I remember talking to a senior pastor not long ago. He was telling me about someone on his team in charge of a ministry that wasn't really going anywhere, yet everyone really loved that leader. The senior pastor didn't quite know what to do, because the area was an important part of the church's vision, but it just wasn't happening.

He asked me, "So, what do I do?" My question was, "Can you explain to me why he's in this position? It makes no

## 6 Essential Areas of Character

1. Creates and maintains trust
2. Is able to see and face reality
3. Works in a way that brings results
4. Embraces negative realities and solves them
5. Causes growth and increase
6. Achieves transcendence and meaning in life.

Taken from Henry Cloud's book, *Integrity*.

sense—it's not biblical or practical, which are always the same." The Bible talks very specifically that unconditional love and conditional approval are both true, both valid. But they aren't the same. We need to exercise courage to make the hard calls for disciplining and sometimes pruning. Our organizations are begging for it.

**CMR: It sounds like we think "being a nice" manager or leader is the way to go, and that's wrong.**

**Cloud:** It's hard to find "nice" in the Bible. You find kindness. A lot of times when you find people who are nice, they aren't being honest. The nice ones are the ones who flatter people. And we know what Proverbs says about that. If you can be kind and honest, you're going to look a lot like Jesus. But you may not always come off as so nice. It's hard to say some really tough things sometimes. You can say some things in a loving way, but people don't perceive you as being nice.

**CMR: So is it a sin to not confront? To not "take care of business?"**

**Cloud:** I think you can call "not confronting" sinful in a lot of situations. We know that sometimes it may be ignorance and immaturity. Whatever you call it, the result is destructive. Frankly, a lot of times leaders are more concerned about whether or not they're sinning than whether or not they're helpful and effective. That's sort of what legalists do. They think that if they aren't sinning, then what they're doing must be okay. But Jesus called them to a higher

standard.

**CMR: That's helpful. Now, let's change gears. What would an organization look like that's practicing some of the principles you mention in *Integrity*? What tells you an organization operates with integrity?**

**Cloud:** Well, three things come to mind. The first is they have an open system. In a closed system, people say: "This is our tradition, our way..." In the least destructive version, it's like an enmeshed family, and in a most destructive version, a cult. But healthy organizations are open systems that have outside forces coming in, and they're learning from them. Their leaders are getting out of the organizations and going to coaches, consultants, leadership training events, or back to do graduate work. In other words, it's not a closed system, and outside input is welcome.

A second thing I see is they have a structured development program with a good review system in place. They're concerned about growing and developing their people, and they spend time and resources on that. A good review process of leadership is in place. In a lot of organizations, you go to a personnel file to look at somebody's reviews, and you discover there's no file or it's empty! Or, if they are there, they aren't very helpful. They don't have benchmarks or areas of growth. They don't show how they're going to get from "A" to "B." There's no model or criteria to indicate if the person is growing or not. So they're swimming around in a vacuum.

Another thing would be internal language—everyone on the same page. Organizations that practice the principles in *Integrity* generally have an internal language that's been codified. It might be their values or growth paradigm they're working with, but you tend to hear a lot of them use the same words as they relate to these concepts. They become norms everyone's trying to live up to. That's a very positive thing. You'll hear catch phrases that have been well integrated into what they believe.

For instance, I was in an organization the other day where they were realizing a particular initiative wasn't working. One of the people said: "We just haven't gotten the right people on the bus." Well, I knew where that came from: Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. But when he said that in the meeting, everybody knew what he meant. That was a concept they'd talked about and trained people in. It had just become part of the management culture (i.e., that we need to be thinking about putting the people with the right gifts on the right team). When you see organizations that are develop-

ing and growing, you tend to see people who know what others on their team are talking about.

**CMR: Instinctively, we seem to know that meeting the demands of reality requires a lot of courage.**

**Which comes first, the courage or the integrity?**

**Cloud:** That's a really insightful question. I think it's both. Here's what I mean by that: the Bible uses this important word, "encourage." Encourage means we don't produce, for the most part, our own courage. Courage has to be put into us: "en" courage. So that requires that people be developed, supported and encouraged. They need to be pushed to gain the courage to meet the demands of reality.

I was teaching my four-year-old how to swim this summer. I was there encouraging her and shoving her a little deeper into the pool. She resisted because she was afraid. I was encouraging her. As she did that, and as she did the scary things, she finally got all the way to the deep end. But she would

have never gotten it just because I was encouraging her. She had to "get out of the boat and walk on the water."

The only way leaders are going to develop courage is by doing it, but rarely can they do it without being encouraged also. I think it comes from outside to inside and then inside has to go back to the outside.

**CMR: Do you have any homework or things to think about for folks who are planning to attend the CMA conference this spring?**

**Cloud:** Well, if people really want a homework assignment, they could read *Integrity* before coming and begin to look at these dimensions. Also, they can go to [integritybroadcast.com](http://integritybroadcast.com), then to the Resources tab and down to Study Questions, and look at those.

I look forward to being with you all at the conference.

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