



# The #1 Characteristic that Makes People Want to Work for You

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



I was waiting to board a flight a few weeks ago from California to Denver when I couldn't help but overhear a gentleman talking on his mobile phone sitting two seats from me in the boarding area. He was in his early-thirties, and wore a golf shirt with the logo of a well known high-tech company headquartered in Silicon Valley which I assume was his employer. Talking loud enough for the entire boarding area to hear him, and in what frankly sounded like an unauthentic deep voice, I couldn't help but listen. As I did, I heard him reprimanding one of his employees for a mistake he or she made in a sales call earlier that afternoon. He was doing virtually all the talking without giving his colleague any chance to discuss the situation. He wrapped up his diatribe by saying "Let's not let that happen again, okay?"

I thought to myself, I wonder if this guy has any idea how arrogant that sounded and how ticked off his employee probably is right now? And if he really wants to help his employee be a better salesperson, he needs to learn that leading isn't telling. This guy was all about criticism and seemingly void of listening, coaching, or empathizing skills.

As I was boarding the plane a half-hour later, I walked past this man sitting in first class. He was listening to his iPod and playing a game on his laptop. I thought, "wow, I wonder how much of his working time he spends entertaining himself? No wonder he doesn't know how to lead." I also wondered how busy he might pretend to be when he is around his team.

As I reflected on this situation, my focus turned to integrity. I suppose it's possible this guy could have been honest and of strong character, but if my intuition is right: 1) He gets his sense of power from his position, rather than his leadership competence. 2) Rather than trying to help his employees develop, he builds himself up by emphasizing their faults and failures. 3) He acts like a "company man" when he is in his management role, but cares more about himself than the company or anyone else.

Maybe I overreacted, but regardless of what this guy is truly about, integrity is key to effective leadership. People don't work as hard for someone that they don't trust or respect. If you say one thing and do another, even if it is only at slight odds with the expectation that you set, you will be perceived to lack honesty and integrity.

As part of my executive coaching work, I frequently interview my client's direct reports. Without a doubt, the hardest working people, and the highest performing teams, are those who work for leaders with integrity. The comments that I consistently hear about them are something like "[Person's name] is the reason I work so hard. I completely trust him. He always does what he says. He is honest, caring, and a man of his word. He is authentic. He genuinely lives his values."

This is backed up by hundreds of 360 assessments I've seen. Leaders who score high on integrity consistently score high in every other category on their leadership assessment. When people feel you are honest and do what you say, they trust you. They respect you. They have higher morale and are significantly more engaged in their work.

How do you score on integrity? If I interviewed the people you work with, how would they rate you? Would integrity be your top and most defining characteristic? Or would it be down the list somewhere? The answer to that question is the most revealing aspect of your effectiveness in working with people – whether as a leader, a salesperson, or as a spouse. The number one factor impacting your ability to lead, influence others, and reach the highest levels of performance is how respected and trustworthy you are.



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Don't worry about working on your communications skills, your decision making, your ability to delegate, or anything else until you get your moral fiber in order. Once you think, act, and speak with veracity and integrity, then turn your attention to other areas.

Think about your words and your actions. Are they always in alignment? If not, either change your words, or change your actions. Be real. Be honest. Don't compromise your integrity. When you can be completely trusted, the impact of your influence on others will take off. Your team's morale, engagement, and overall performance will reach new heights.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.activatingyourambition.com](http://www.activatingyourambition.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corporation ([www.alpinelink.com](http://www.alpinelink.com)), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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