

*Transcend 2005- October*

# *Transcend for Latter-day Saints*

*Edifying Latter-day Saint Elected Officials,  
Community Leaders, and Active Citizens*

*Session Seven, October 2005*

*The*  
**SUTHERLAND**  
INSTITUTE  
ADDING VALUE TO UTAH

**(Sutherland Note:** *The theme of the October session of the 2005 Transcend Series was “Ethical Fitness: Being an Authentic Leader.” Third, and last, among the Character sessions this year, the October session was designed to help elected officials and community leaders examine ethics, honesty, and truth in their personal and professional relationships. Our overriding goals were at least two-fold: 1) to provide a clarity of meaning to the ideas of honesty and integrity, and 2) to self-examine our lives within the context of those meanings.*

*The breakfast keynote was delivered by the irrepressible Fred Ball, vice-president of Zions Bank and 25-year former CEO of the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Ball focused his remarks on examples of integrity among people who have crossed his path over nearly 50 years in business.*

*The morning seminar and afternoon workshop were facilitated well by our esteemed colleague Quinn McKay, author of the new book *The Bottom Line on Integrity: 12 Principles for Higher Returns*. Dr. McKay is well-known for his previous books including *Is Lying Sometimes the Right Thing for an Honest Person to Do?**

*In our August letter we wrote of governing in Babylon and Zion and asked if Babylon (the world of transactions) simply requires Latter-day Saints to be merely honest? Is that it? Mere honesty? This October session helps to answer that question for Latter-day Saints. But before it does, we are led on a tortuous course through the meaning of mere honesty. October’s regular Transcend Series participants were sometimes overwhelmed and mostly surprised at what was revealed about their notions of honesty and integrity. It is a challenge in a fallen world for Latter-day Saints to be truly honest and have true integrity. – Paul T. Mero, president, Sutherland Institute)*

## **Honesty and Integrity in Spirit and Letter**

*Are you honest in your dealings with your fellowmen?*

Tough question, actually. I remember all of those temple recommend interviews while I worked on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.. “Brother Mero, are you honest in your dealings with your fellowman?” To lighten the mood a bit, and to otherwise obfuscate the true response, I would reply, “Well, you know I work for Congress, don’t you?”

Truth is that I wasn’t always honest with people, and even off of Capitol Hill my response would probably remain the same – no, I am not always honest with people. Fact is I don’t always tell the truth or I don’t always make it perfectly clear where I stand. President Boyd K. Packer, when asked by his wife if he liked the dress she was wearing, once responded, “Of all the dresses you own, I like that dress the least.” While he was clearly not lying to his dear wife, he felt to respond with some sensitivity. Why? Because he did not want to hurt her feelings, a perfectly natural thing for him to avoid regarding the person he loves. The rest of us do this to one degree or another all of the time.

Frankly, I think all of us would admit that lying is sometimes the right thing to do. Say you are sitting with your daughter who has just completed her math homework only to reveal, much to your chagrin, that she has got nearly all of the questions wrong. Every parent will handle this situation a bit differently, but every good parent will be very sensitive to the spirit of the little girl. You probably would hold back on the ugly truth – “sweetie, you couldn’t have done worse” – and instead patiently work with her to flesh out her understanding of those mistakes. Is it a lie (or dishonest) to not reveal completely the errors of her way? And if not, why not?

In politics, are we lying when we omit to provide all of the details of a situation or issue to a concerned constituent? Are we honest when we stand for one position only to vote the other way when the time comes? What does it say about our integrity when we know the saving truth about someone only to hesitate, if come forward at all, when we, too, might be implicated because of perceptions alone?

Politics as usual is a zero sum game of winners and losers. In this environment honesty is at a disadvantage. Another memory I have of my Capitol Hill days was of a former boss, a very decent, Christian man – a man known widely as “the last is honest politician” – and a man I love and dearly admire to this day. I remember sitting in committee during a very contentious meeting when the committee chairman (a despicable little man of the opposing party) took some umbrage over comments made by my boss, even to the point of gaveling a brief adjournment so that he might chastise him. The quiet and private conversation on the dias got very heated. The whispers had the intensity of words through a megaphone.

In the back and forth of it all, my boss did not know that he was in the wrong until, that is, it became clearly obvious that a fellow staffer of mine had misinformed him on a crucial matter. Once revealed, the opposing congressman demanded an apology on the spot and publicly. My boss, again, a man of near-super-human integrity, looked him in the eye and said, “You owe me the apology,” and then he turned his chair away.

My boss was in the wrong and so it was with some chutzpah that *he* demanded the apology. The staff who were present just looked at each other in dismay. It would have been an easy thing to do for him to quietly apologize and then magnanimously apologize to the committee. Over and done with. So why did a man of such great character refuse to do the right thing?

I asked him later. His reply has stuck with me ever since. “I would never apologize to that man. He stands for everything against goodness and decency. We clearly made a mistake. Now let’s make sure we don’t do that ever again.” At the time, his response sounded like, “Go, and sin no more.” But in hindsight, we were wrong and he, as our leader, should have acknowledged that to his opponent, even in the face of raw evil. Or should he have?

Day to day circumstances in our lives that beg honesty range from the sublime to the grotesque. Just who is that person of complete integrity? Think on this. Was it wrong for Nephi not only to kill Laban but to deceive his enemies and dress up in Laban’s clothes? Was it wrong for the Book of Mormon generals to spy on their enemies to gain a military advantage? Or what about Joseph Smith hiding the plates from adversaries?

Is all fair in love and war ... and politics?

Dr. Quinn McKay is the closest thing to an expert on these subjects alive today. For two years now, Dr. McKay has facilitated the Sutherland Institute October session of our regular *Transcend Series* on “ethical fitness.” And for two years now he has tormented every participant to their limits!

His latest book is titled, *The Bottom Line on Integrity: 12 Principles for Higher Returns*. While the book is written primarily for the business world it certainly applies to home and politics. In it he writes of these twelve principles:

- Rise above trite slogans that feed self-deception. (“Honesty is the best policy.”)
- Agree on a working definition of truth telling. (Is it true that everyone knows

when they are being dishonest?)

- Be wary of four devices of deception. (One, stating things that are not outright lying; two, overstating or exaggerating; three, understating; and, four, withholding information.)
- Recognize pressure as a major determinant of honesty. (The boss tells you to pick up the phone and tell the caller that he, the boss, is not in.)
- Be alert to incremental morality. (Seldom does a person jump from choirboy to crook.)
- Realize that everyone lives by two different ethical standards. (Moral ethics versus gaming ethics.)
- Develop the essential skills for personal integrity. (The skill of inquiry and the skill to convey the truth.)
- Resolve conflicts of principle: there are no gray areas. (...only principles in conflict.)
- Create a climate where wrongful acts can be reported. (Protect “whistleblowers.”)
- Understand the law of obligation. (Accept a gift, incur an obligation.)
- Know when a promise is a promise. (Under what conditions is your word your bond?)
- Allow that lying is sometimes the right thing to do. (The wife’s dress? Hiding Jews in the basement from Nazis?)

But for some reason, just as with our decisions to objectify our “enemies” rather than see them as people, lying and honesty are harder to discern in matters where the stakes are high. War, love, and politics each push our limits of minute-by-minute decency and trust.

So, are you honest in all your dealings with your fellowmen? I eventually left Capitol Hill. That is my answer. – PTM