

Stephanie Parks Essay:

The bare framework of a house stands empty and defeated. Its timbers, still fresh and golden, wait in silence. The jagged edges of a sheet of plastic snap in the wind, hopelessly trying to cover the wide expanse that would have been a cozy family room. This is the fate of many houses whose owners have been victims of contractor fraud scams, in which the carpenter would charge his clients a down payment and then desert in the middle of the project. The once ambitious, optimistic family is left cheated out of thousands of dollars and has their trust torn to shreds.

Stories like this one come up all too regularly at my family's dinner table, because of my father's being in the construction trade. The number of similar occurrences is surprising in a town of Norfolk's size, especially as so many small-town construction businesses are family-owned. These local mom-and-pop companies, built from the ground up often on little more than a dream, rely on the trust and loyalty of their hometown customers to generate a profit continuously. Home businesses are a major part of both a community's and the nation's economical scheme; this country could not function without the role they play, including the jobs they provide and the competition they create. However, in cases like the one above, when trust of small business is ruined and its reputation for quality is damaged, the entire city's economy is affected. Integrity and ethics play a role in the local industrial economy by allowing faith in small businesses to flourish, therefore, providing the opportunity for growth.

The definition of integrity I still remember from grade school is "doing what is right, even when no one is looking." This description sounds noncommittal, especially with the gray area of exactly what is right or wrong. However, this simple definition is quite straightforward and is a true test by which to measure integrity. My cross country team is a perfect example. Through many months of intense dedication, sacrifice, and blessings, we were able to win back-to-back state championships for our school. Our team firmly believes that taking care of the "little things" was a huge factor in our success. We did not cut corners during workouts; we pushed each other on runs that could have been taken easy; we took more care in our diets and our rest. At a meet, our spectators did not see all of these small factors, but they did see the success that resulted from them.

Ethics are essential in every facet of life, including sports, school, and business. The principles of honesty, accountability, and fairness allow people to cooperate in a variety of situations and permit true progress to take place. Just as families rely on their contractors to build a house with integrity both in the framework and in the dealings, businesses everywhere rely on their customers' support to expand and excel. Integrity allows dreams-of a new home, a state championship, or a successful business-to become a reality; and in the process, made stronger and more reliable for the future.