

# Chapter Six

## Living *with* Integrity

Life is full of agreements in every area. Let's just look at a typical day and see all the different kinds of agreements that influence how it goes.

In the morning, we get up and turn on the TV to see the news or fire up the iPad to check e-mail. We have an agreement with a company that provides these services, and we tend to get hopping mad when they fail to deliver, even if there's a reasonable excuse, like a storm.

Many of us then go to work or see clients.

Although we often have nothing in writing, there's a tacit and very important agreement in which we promise to provide certain defined services in return for monetary compensation. If we start to slack off on the job, we'll get fired, and if our employer refuses to pay — or we decide they're not paying enough—we'll soon be working someplace else.

Most of our days include significant others. The agreement between parent and child isn't spelled out in writing, except for adoption, and maybe it should be. When we participate in creating children, there's an implicit commitment to take care of their needs until they can take care of themselves. So we do our best to pick the kids up on time after school, and we do what we can to prepare them with education and good values to become fulfilled adults.

In return, most of us feel some responsibility for helping our parents if they need us in their declining years. Sometimes, that involves no more than a weekly phone call, but during a health crisis, it may make more demands on our time and energy.

If we marry, our commitment with life partners is more formalized, but informal arrangements between couples also deserve to be honored. These agreements involve everything from the simplest tasks (picking up takeout Thai on the way home from work, going to a Saturday-night party, making sure the lawn is mowed) to the most profound: honoring our partners with sexual fidelity, expressing our love, and staying at their side through good times and bad.

Although the links may not be as deep or as lasting, many people have important

connections to friends made over the course of a lifetime. Some of our commitments in this area are simple: we agree to play tennis on Sunday or meet for coffee in the morning. But the commitment becomes much more complex as the friendship grows. There's an unspoken promise to listen to each other's joys and sorrows, offer companionship and support, and share our delight in life with each other.

How people perform in relation to these various commitments says a lot about their character, in particular characteristics like trustworthiness, conscientiousness, loyalty, honesty, and compassion. Think of the people you know. How do they measure up? If they have these qualities to a high degree, you probably already feel the good fortune of having them in your life. Can you say the following about your friends?

