

High School Division Winner

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### **Why Is It Important to Show Integrity When Working to Achieve a Difficult Goal?**

A popular phrase among many people is, “The end justifies the means.” This motto is especially popular among the followers of Niccolo Machiavelli, often hailed the Father of Political Science. However, such a catch-phrase can prove to be dangerous in many cases. Although one end may be good, doing something to achieve that goal without integrity can create one or more negative side-effects that can impede his followers’ future success. For this reason, integrity must be kept intact as a person works to achieve a goal, no matter the difficulty.

As every human being has already discovered, life comes with many struggles. When working construction with my first employer, Will, he always expected some kind of complication in his work. He would often say, “Nothing easy.” And when the inevitable complication came, he would shrug his shoulders and conjure up a way to work around the complication. He was always prepared to change or alter his plan.

On my first job with him, we were required to tear out carpet and lay hardwood flooring in the entire first floor of a two-story house. I recognized the difficulties that would come from this simple task before I entered the building. The owner of the house has five cats that were “fighting for superiority” by marking their territory and two dogs, neither of which had been potty-trained. The animals had been practicing their unsanitary habits over three years, and the carpets all around the house had been soaked through time and time again. As we worked at removing the carpets--armed with gloves, jeans, and long sleeves that summer day--we discovered a second problem. Over the years, many locations had become favorite relief spots for the animals, discoloring the floorboards beneath the carpet and insulative mat. The owner as clearly nose-blind to the concentrated scent of animal excrement and likely would not have noticed if we hadn’t brought to light the cause of discolorations. Nevertheless, we brought the issue to her, and were tasked to covering the floorboards with primer to shield the source of the smelly spots. Our third problem immediately arose when we were required to purchase oil-based primer despite Will’s professional suggestion to buy shellac-based primer. The oil-based

primer had a thinner consistency and lighter aroma that was no match against the powerful, piercing odors, even after three complete coatings. The owner, nose-blind still to her animal smells, was clearly clueless at this primer's failure to perform its duty. Thus, Will approached the owner and advised her once again to buy the shellac-based primer, and she reluctantly acquiesced. After another three coats of the stronger, thicker primer, the urine smell was masked enough for the four of us workers to be content and breathe deeply. We were finally able to begin laying the hardwood flooring. After doing so, we took one final precaution to prevent animal neglect to ruin more flooring: we sealed the hardwood, keeping the old, nasty past down for good.

Our finished product was beautiful if I do say so myself. Will and his team did the job well, despite the difficulties. The homeowner was very happy with the result. Many of the problems we faced could have easily been ignored; it took a committed sort of honor and integrity to fix them. Now, one may argue, "Well, the final result still justifies the means. You put in extra work, and the result was nicer than it would have been." That argument would be flawed. While we were working on the first floor, all the animals were quarantined on the second story, doing their same unhygienic business up there. Will was again employed to lay hardwood upstairs, and the animals were quarantined on the first floor. The owner made no attempt to potty-train seven animals, and they quickly began to desecrate the nice, new floor, beginning the gradual ruination of the fresh hardwood we had worked so hard to perfect. In the end, our means were in fact left unjustified.

Through this whole narrative, one may wonder where integrity came in. The answer is revealed through the response to every delay and difficulty in the process we faced. We had been hired to replace the dirty carpets and laminate flooring in order to get rid of the putrid smell the owner's guests no doubt complained to her about. Doing the minimum of just replacing the flooring would not have done the job. It took honesty, dedication, and focus to perfect the task set before us, not just hastily do the job and to escape that nasty house. Doing the bare minimum would not have been working with integrity. As Charles de Lint said, "When all's said and done, all roads lead to the same end. So it's so much which road you take, as how you take it." The end will be reached, but what truly matters and what people notice most is *how* the end is reached.