

OPENNESS: operational transparency * (Attribute # 3)*
Is appropriate information about your organization (and your society) readily available?

*from Bracher Center's [Eight Attributes for Building an Integrity-Centered Company](#)

By James F. Bracher

Earlier this week, a friend forwarded comments that have been incorrectly attributed to the world's richest person, Mr. William Gates III. In fact, this youth-centered counsel was written by Charles J. Sykes, author of the book *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write, Or Add*. Although Mr. Sykes never uses the word **Openness** or even describes **transparency**, he is very clear about what young people need to know to function, contribute and possibly prosper in today's world. His candidness and insights emerge from one who understands the real world and is willing to offer counsel based upon experience and not simply theory. Much of his advice seems to hit home for multiple generations.

He talks about how feel-good, politically-correct teachings created a generation of younger people with little concept of reality and how these inaccurate perceptions can set them up for disappointment and even failure in the real world. **Here are Sykes' fourteen points:**

Rule 01: Life is not fair. Get used to it. The average teen-ager uses the phrase "It's not fair" 8.6 times a day. You got it from your parents, who said it so often you decided they must be the most idealistic generation ever. When they started hearing it from their own kids, they realized Rule No. 1.

Rule 02: The real world won't care as much about your self-esteem as much as your school does. It'll expect you to accomplish something before you feel good about yourself. This may come as a shock. Usually, when inflated self-esteem meets reality, kids complain that it's not fair. (See Rule 01)

Rule 03: Sorry, you won't make \$40,000 a year right out of high school. And you won't be a vice president or have a car phone either. You may even have to wear a uniform that doesn't have a (designer) label.

Rule 04: If you think your teacher is tough, wait 'til you get a boss. Most bosses don't have tenure, so they tend to be a bit edgier. When you screw up, bosses are not going to ask you how you feel about it.

Rule 05: Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping. They called it opportunity. They weren't embarrassed making minimum wage either. However, they would have been embarrassed to sit around talking endlessly (about the latest fads and personalities) and not working all week-end.

Rule 06: It's not your parents' fault. If you screw up, you are responsible. This is the flip side of "It's my life," and "You're not the boss of me," and other eloquent proclamations of your generation. When you turn 18, it's on your dime. Don't whine about it, or you'll sound like the very generation from which you want your independence.

Rule 07: Before you were born your parents weren't as boring as they are now. They got that way paying your bills; cleaning up your room and listening to you tell them how

idealistic you are. And by the way, before you save the rain forest from the blood-sucking parasites of your parents' generation, try delousing the closet in your bedroom.

Rule 08: Your school may have done away with winners and losers. Life hasn't. In some schools, they'll give you as many times as you want to get the right answer. Failing grades have been abolished and class valedictorians scrapped, lest anyone's feelings be hurt. Effort is as important as results. This, of course, bears not the slightest resemblance to anything in real life. (See: Rule 01, Rule 02 and Rule 04.)

Rule 09: Life is not divided into semesters, and you don't get summers off. Not even (Spring or Winter) breaks. They expect you to show up every day. For eight hours. And you don't get a new life every 10 weeks. It just goes on and on. While we're at it, very few jobs are interested in fostering your self-expression or helping you find yourself. Fewer still lead to self-realization. (See Rule 01 and Rule 02.)

Rule 10: Television is not real life. Your life is not a sitcom. Your problems will not all be solved in 30 minutes, minus time for commercials. In real life, people actually have to leave the coffee shop to go to jobs. Your friends will not be as perky or pliable (as some of the cute and attractive "airheads" who have become celebrities).

Rule 11: Be nice to nerds. You may end up working for them. We all could.

Rule 12: Smoking does not make you look cool. It makes you look moronic. Next time you're out cruising, watch an 11-year-old with a butt in his mouth. That's what you look like to anyone over 20. Ditto for "expressing yourself" with purple hair and/or pierced body parts.

Rule 13: You are not immortal. (See: Rule 12.) If you are under the impression that living fast, dying young and leaving a beautiful corpse is romantic, you obviously haven't seen one of your peers at room temperature lately.

Rule 14: Enjoy this while you can. Sure parents are a pain, school's a bother, and life is depressing. But someday you'll realize how wonderful it was to be a young person. Maybe you should start now. If you choose to thank me, please know that you're welcome.

Addressing **Openness**, which means operational transparency, requires serious thinking and even more serious actions. In this article our focus is in two areas.

First, **Openness**, transparency, touches on *education*, as was presented by the 14 comments presented above in bold type. Students need to have confidence that their teachers are preparing them for the real world-whether it be for additional academic pursuits, a job in business or a career in the military. Young people need to know, have trust in those who are their guides, that what they are being taught and modeled, is based upon a success formula that can be followed. Sykes pulls no punches and neither should those who teach - formally or through association with youth, as parents, coaches, adult friends, family members or leaders and heroes to whom young people look for guidance, assurance and direction.

We owe those who depend upon us to tell them what we know as well as what we do not know. Our **transparency** can assist others as they learn to distinguish between well-meaning opinions and substantive knowledge, usually built upon experience. There is no substitute for the truth.

Our responsibility is to prepare the next generation (which often means continuing to work on ourselves) so that we are more productive and better citizens.

Second, **Openness** challenges those who provide our news to keep a watchful eye on what it is that they present. The members of the **media** are accountable for providing us with "real" news, the essential information you and I need to keep our freedoms. When those who bring us the news are forthright in telling us what we need to know, versus simply reporting what they hope we might want to know, then they become excellent stewards of the essential information that will keep us free.

Education, information and integrity are keys to our future not simply for younger people, but for every citizen. As another political season unfolds, at least in the United States, it is important to seek knowledge, truth and wisdom.

Recently, a university student sent the following question about **Openness** and enabled us to think, even more deeply, about the nature of operational transparency. The straight truth builds trust and offers a dependable pathway upon which to chart a constructive future. Here is the question and response:

Question: .

"OPENNESS: operational transparency"

Why do you feel that openness is so important in an integrity-centered company?

Response:

Openness in organizations encourages two-way communication. Leaders listen as well as talk. Sales professionals, managers, front-line employees and customers all know that the way relationships are built in a "give-and-take" culture builds trust. As a consequence, the politics of "manipulation" is replaced with a process of direct and immediate feedback - confirming the importance of helping one another, making a legitimate profit and sharing credit for success while energetically owning mistakes. Integrity-centered organizations - whether creating cash for profits or simply enhancing the impact of a not-for-profit endeavor - accept the importance of providing stakeholders with necessary and appropriate information.

Privately-held institutions, those not having outside investors, may manage their finances and their operations more discretely; however, their values and culture will always be visible. And, if they have been in business for a generation or more, their reputation will speak volumes about who they are and how they operate.

Many years ago, while consulting with a well-known entrepreneur, he offered the following advice regarding how to lead and manage. His words were: "Never do or say anything that you would not want your parents to know about." This may not be profound, but it could have modified the behaviors of many who find themselves and their companies on trial for illegal and inappropriate actions.

Openness does not mean foolish and irresponsible "giving away" of trade secrets or profitable business relationships. Nor does openness suggest that "skilled executives" are masters of secretive manipulations, always playing their hands "close to their vests." Integrity-centered organizations know that talented individuals require trust and deserve to understand the larger picture in order to leverage their talents in the best ways possible. Such forthrightness and

transparency are risky, but are not nearly as costly as not enabling those who are central to the enterprise to bring the best of their skills and abilities to bear on the projects that lie in front of them. Since human beings are not mushrooms, very few would seem to enjoy being left in the dark and simply having manure tossed on them until they could be harvested and consumed. Openness allows the sunlight to shine and bring life to the enterprise. Yes, openness is important.

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