



# HONESTY, INTEGRITY & TRANSPARENCY IN THE FITNESS INDUSTRY

Discover how honesty, integrity and transparency have become the new fundamentals to business leadership.

**K**en Blanchard once stated, "honesty is telling the truth to ourselves and others... integrity is living that truth." If this is correct, then what are the current truths that are being projected throughout the active living industry?

Prior to COVID, the industry battle-cry was about growth with messages consistently touted around the benefits of active living, to engage the deconditioned population. It was honest in bringing forth the benefits of exercise, and transparent showing a correlation between active living and extended life expectancy. Along the way it voiced the importance of connecting with others, community, results, recovery, and the need for diversity with regards to exercise routines.

Today, mixed messages are being put forth. "Stay at home." "This one machine is the end-all!" Or "Technology will take care of everything." In a nutshell, let's monetise social distancing as best we can.

There is always a fragile balance between doing what is right and doing what is best; and there is no doubt that desperate times can produce desperate measures. But the real question is where the line is drawn. Today's narrative – or truth – is vastly different than it was 18 months ago. An example of this is a former club owner who could not sustain his business due to the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. He once scoffed at home gym products but today he is selling a "magic" fitness mirror. His truth has changed.

So, what is the truth for us now? How honest is the industry being with itself, its members, and each other? Honesty can be defined as the "willingness to listen and discuss options and strategies that apply to the diversity of our clubs", but is that actually happening? Whom do we rely on for direction?

In the midst of a crisis the truth can be missed in the "fog" of war; meaning, different states, or even regions or towns, have had varying mandates, and continue to do so. In the United States, IHRSA has been a reliable advocate in the past, but during this tumultuous time the President of IHRSA resigned and the Board's Chairman stepped aside, leaving a large gap in the organisation. The early messaging to "stay open" was loud, when in many cases it was strategically not sound to try and operate at 10 to 25 per cent capacity. Many independent clubs couldn't afford to let alone know how to.

Transparency in decision-making promotes accountability, and provides important information as to what leadership is, or was, doing. The truth is transparency was slipping even prior to COVID.

Our industry MUST be known for its integrity. While being honest is often perceived as being harder than being transparent, I would suggest maintaining integrity may be the hardest core value of all to sustain.

The truth is simple. The fitness industry was grouped with bars, gaming establishments and casinos during the pandemic, and was as close to being considered "essential" as Tic Tacs are considered medicinal! General rules for small boutique fitness entities were similarly applied to multi-purpose clubs because political decision makers were not informed about how different each type of entity really is. Instead of being looked upon as a resource, the industry was a pariah... a breeding ground for COVID. While our industry leaders shouted, "we must stay open!", to do so took such a financial toll that it sounded the death knell for over 20 percent of existing clubs in the States.

I'm intrigued with where we go next. What truths will be put forth? How does OUR industry find common ground and collectively come forward with



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honest and transparent best practices? IHRSA acting President Darden has been a remarkably steadying influence, which I applaud; but important long-term decisions must be made without bias, and that's hard to do when you're in a temporary seat. There are some relationships that are connected to other facets of the industry that are politically and/or financially motivated that may not be the best for our industry.

The integrity of the industry moving forward, will be dependent upon how transparent future leadership is. And this applies no matter where you live. That is the truth. ♦