

Promoting Integrity

THE removal of corruption in society will only come about through the advancement of people of integrity.

A purge of the system – as carried out by successive governments – does little or nothing to stop the rot which has become endemic in our system of governance. Instead of removing corrupt people, a purge often serves as an opportunity for those in power to appoint friends and acquaintances in obviously political pay-outs.

It is also an opportunity to remove people seen as enemies – personal or professional – for no reason other than that their beliefs do not comply with those of the ruling elite.

In situations such as these, the system of government and governance becomes rife with abuse.

Political appointees believe they have the ears of their sponsors and do whatever they like, often circumventing rules and regulations in order to implement pet projects and policies.

Workers, fearful of losing their employment, fail to speak up and expose corruption as it begins.

By the time the corrupt practices are exposed the damage has been done and it is the ordinary worker – not the political appointee – who often shoulders the responsibility for the abuse of office.

Unfortunately, integrity has come to be seen in this country as trouble-making, upsetting the apple cart or an act of spite.

There are many who believe that there is no harm in allowing people to get away with bending the rules.

Indeed, many openly encourage the bending of rules and finding loopholes in the system.

This allows parents to find places in schools when their children fail to make the grade.

It allows people to find jobs for which they are otherwise not qualified.

And it allows friends to jump the queue when others are forced to wait for hours or days for service.

When have we used our contacts to hasten processes, grease the wheels of the Civil Service machinery, open a back door or two.

This is the most common form of corruption in Fiji today.

By allowing it to happen, we encourage even greater abuse in all levels of the public and private sector.

Corporate systems of governance must be put in place to ensure that people can speak up without fear about the corruption which exists in this country.

More importantly we must each learn to follow the law and act with integrity at all times.

This may cost us some friends and make life a little difficult but it will, eventually, make Fiji a less corrupt place.

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Transparency International Fiji

Netani Rika – Editor, The Fiji Times

December 2008

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The media has a role to play in the improvement of integrity in society by ensuring that our leaders are people of integrity.

Each time our leaders break the rules or act in non-transparent ways it is our duty to expose their misdemeanours.

This must be done without fear or favour, without personal or political bias and without malice.

It is never easy to do this in a country which is so small and in which everyone knows each other.

Our reporters are young and feel immense pressure from those in power.

Our leaders know full well how young reporters can be placed under pressure by politicians, by family members and friends.

And that is why journalists – above all – must be people of integrity themselves.

For it is unfair of us as practitioners of a noble profession to expect one rule of others and another for ourselves.

We are judged by our readers, listeners and viewers every day.

The media must allow coverage of as many political views as possible and give people of all religious and political persuasions a voice.

That's never easy.

Depending upon who is in power, we will always be accused of taking one side or not exposing the other enough.

However, over the past 21 years the media has attempted to call for:

1. Better stewardship of public funds
2. The accountability and integrity of our leaders
3. Justice and equality for all
4. Better housing, education, health services
5. A code of conduct for Civil Servants and Members of Parliament
6. A Freedom of Information legislation
7. Protection for whistleblowers
8. An end to poverty and efficient use of resources – natural and human.

We have called in the past for a Freedom of Information legislation which allows public access to information on the subjects I have just mentioned.

This is the right of the people.

We have tried to encourage the Fijian people to speak out when their chiefs step out of line.

Indeed, it is our hope that by our persuasion a new generation of Fijians will emerge which will dare to promote good governance and integrity in traditional and religious leaders.

The media must remain steadfast in exposing our leaders whenever they step out of line.

At the same time we must maintain a respectful distance from our contacts and – sometimes – our friends.

We must be people of integrity and insist that our leaders do the same.

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Over the next 12 months we will begin an overt campaign which we hope will inspire people of integrity to step into politics which has been seen for too long as a dirty area and an opportunity to make money.

At this points in Fiji's history, more than ever before, people of integrity, people who are willing to live by the rules and serve the people must step forward and take up the leadership challenge.

And the voters must insist that integrity of leadership – not some political carrot based on race – is the measure by which we should judge our leaders.

If we fail to do this, we condemn ourselves and the country we love to a disastrous future.