

Integrity in the Marketplace

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Day One

Integrity in the workplace has become a hot topic. Corporate America recognizes the cost when there is lack of integrity on the job, and they're trying to figure out how they can put values and integrity back in our good 'ole American system.

It will only happen as individuals put integrity back into their personal lives and make it a high priority. And that will only happen when we are motivated from within, not from without. All the training courses in the world cannot instill integrity into a person's heart. That must come from a belief system that is committed to doing what's right, regardless of the cost.

If we do what's right only as a manipulative tool to get where we want to go, only because that's the "in" thing to do nowadays, we'll find ourselves waffling all over the place. Doing the right thing takes an internal value system and standard by which we operate. It takes absolutes.

If you don't have an authority and a standard by which actions and attitudes are judged, you will never have integrity—personal or corporate. Relative truth doesn't work; it's another name for compromise.

If I asked you what was the best book on business ethics, good customer service, and dealing with people on the job, what book would you recommend? Not too many people would ever think of the Bible as relevant to those issues, but let me tell you, it's the textbook we need.

God's principles, when practiced, will benefit anyone. That's because he's the Creator, he knows how things should work and he knows how people are motivated better than anyone else. He wrote the owner's manual. Whether a person or an organization recognizes God or his principles, when those principles are followed, they bring success.

Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor (Proverbs 21:21).

Pursuing righteousness and love—there's the secret to integrity. Righteousness simply means doing the right thing. If you and I are committed to do the right thing in every situation in our lives and to act out of love for other people, we will be people of integrity. Christians in the workplace should always have the highest standards of integrity—doing the right thing with love.

Day Two

When Christians demonstrate lives of integrity on the job, they become that Living Word witness to those around them that is stronger than any words they can ever say. My topic is Integrity in the marketplace. It's become a bottom-line issue for companies and organizations that recognize the benefits of integrity. But for a Christian, a life of integrity is a top-line issue: We are committed to doing the right thing because that's what Jesus would do.

Now, what I'd like to do is take two case studies where integrity is at stake and ask what the biblical way is to deal with them.

Case #1

Your departmental manager is not liked by any of the employees. She is very unfair, discourteous, and incompetent. Everyone in the department talks about her in derogatory ways all the time. You've been a part of that malicious talk at times. But you've decided you don't want to be a part of that character assassination any longer. **How will you keep from getting caught up in this office gossip?**

Here's a biblical principle to consider:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).

I will grant you in the world's view, gossip and backbiting would most likely not be considered unethical behavior, but God's Word makes it clear that it is. No unwholesome talk out of our mouths—that's the standard. This is not a moving standard; it remains steadfast regardless of the circumstances.

Now, how would you handle situations where others are talking about the boss behind his or her back? Here are some suggestions: Get up and leave if you can. Do it quietly, try not to call attention to it. But walk away if you can. Someone may notice, but that's okay.

If walking away is not an option, try changing the subject. Just find another topic and start in, rather assertively, talking about something else that is harmless and not derogatory. But do it as gently as you can.

And then, I would add, don't be afraid to say, "I don't think it's right to talk behind her back." Or perhaps, "Have you ever talked with her about this?" There may be occasions when you'll have to state your objections to the gossip. Again, do it as gently and non-judgmentally as you can, but you shouldn't be afraid to stand up for what you think is right.

Day Three

We're continuing our look into integrity in the marketplace. I'm going to look at another example of an ethical decision on the job and see how God's Word gives us direction.

Case #2

You work for a manager who has a large ego and feels threatened by anyone who makes suggestions for improvement. You have an idea that would improve efficiency, save budget money, and serve the customers better.

Your colleagues agree, but you must have your manager's approval to make it work. You're thinking of ways to make him think it's his idea, but you're concerned your plan may border on deceit and dishonesty. However, you're also concerned with getting the job done.

Is there a problem here with honesty? Is this manipulative? If so, is this wrong?

Here's a passage that will give us some guidance in this decision:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16).

As we practice integrity in a world that often doesn't, we may appear naive and simple—like sheep operating in a world of wolves. You may have felt that way on your job at times.

Remember, Jesus has sent us out exactly that way. If we practice integrity in every area of our lives, it may appear we are at the mercy of all those wolves. But as Jesus went on to say, we are not to be stupid in our dealings, but rather we are to be shrewd. Let me remind you shrewd does not mean deceptive or manipulative. Shrewd means "astute or sharp in practical matters."

Based on that principle, I would think you could find a way in this particular situation to present your ideas in a non-threatening way, dropping seeds here and there, and helping this difficult boss to come to your conclusion. Since the motivation is to do what's good for the customer, the company and the employees, shrewdness would lead you to find a diplomatic, yet honest way to have your idea accepted.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (1 Peter 5:6).

Allowing someone else to take the credit for what you've done is certainly a way to humble yourself. That's not easy to do, is it? We truly have to be motivated for the good of others to have that kind of attitude.

Day Four

Those of us who daily go to a job know very well what it means to face a world which often does not operate by Christian principles. I've been examining integrity in the marketplace. I'd like to present another ethical case study and see how a Christian should respond.

Case #3

A bright lawyer works in a prestigious law firm. She does her work exceptionally well, puts in many hours of overtime, and aspires to a partnership someday.

Since she is a Christian and a woman of integrity, she turns in exactly the hours she has worked, which she knows to be more than most, if not all, of the other lawyers in the firm actually work. Yet it appears to be less, because everyone else pads the hours on his or her reports.

She has an annual review coming up and she knows the subject will surface. Though her work is above reproach, she hasn't billed the clients for as many hours as others have.

What does she say to the managing partner who questions her about her hours? What will she do if she is "encouraged" to pad her hours? What effect could that have on her career?

Remember our guiding verse, Proverbs 21:21. Pursuing righteousness—doing the right thing—makes her course of action very clear. It is without question wrong to pad the hours, and she has done the right thing in turning in only what she has truly worked, no matter how it makes her look.

The question now is, how does she address this situation during her review? I believe she should keep the focus on herself and off others. There's no need to point fingers at others but simply to reiterate that she has kept accurate records and turned in actual hours.

If her management should explicitly ask or imply she needs to turn in more hours, she will then have to take a more direct approach, stating her principles if necessary. It's unlikely, especially in a law firm, that she will be explicitly asked or told to pad her hours.

However, if she doesn't comply, she's likely to find it is costly to her. She may discover promotions pass her up, performance evaluations are not fair, and that partnership she wants isn't offered.

Integrity can be costly. The good guys don't always come in first in the world system.

Day Five

Can you and I, as marketplace Christians, maintain high levels of personal integrity without adverse effects on our career? That's the question I'd like to address.

The answer to that question is we should never even ask the question. That may sound strange but let me explain. As Christians in the marketplace—or anywhere else for that matter—we should be so committed to doing what is right—pursuing righteousness—that the consequences of that course of action become inconsequential. It simply doesn't matter whether it has adverse effects on our careers or whether it advances them. In either case, we're going to do the right thing.

If that is your heart's desire, and if you go to God's Word for guidance whenever you face these sometimes less than clear situations, he'll give you guidance. And when you pursue righteousness and love, with pure motives and a genuine concern for others, you can be certain God will stick by his end of the bargain. As Proverbs 21:21 tells us, when we pursue righteousness and love, we find life, prosperity and honor.

I don't think that necessarily means prosperity by the world's measure, but prosperity in God's eyes. A healthy and prosperous soul is far more important than a prosperous lifestyle. And the honor may not come immediately; but if God has promised it, it will come.

Let me say to apply Bible standards in our lives on a regular basis takes more strength and power than any of us have naturally and normally. But the good news is Jesus Christ died and rose again, to provide for each of us the power we need to live supernatural lives—lives of integrity that care about other people and are pleasing to God.

Pray that verse in Proverbs 21:21 into your life: Lord, help me to pursue righteousness and love in everything I do. Help me to simply do the right thing, no matter what the situation is, no matter how alone I may be, no matter what it may cost me. Give me your power to make right ethical choices.

I can only imagine what would happen if every Christian in the marketplace started to pray that way every morning before going to work. I'm telling you, it would make a difference in our witness for Jesus. We might find ourselves out on a limb occasionally, but we're never going to be out on that limb by ourselves. Jesus will be with us, and he has promised we will prosper and be honored if we pursue righteousness and love.