

Creating an Honest Business Culture

Written by Steve Marr

Thursday, 10 November 2005 01:00

The Bible offers guidance on how to establish and maintain integrity

The massive malfeasance at Enron, WorldCom and hundreds of other public companies has landed hundreds of executives in jail. In addition to these public examples, less publicized but equally important slips in integrity occur. As a result, not only do the businesses themselves get harmed, but the entire free market receives a black eye. That is why creating a culture of honesty and integrity is a key for any business. Following an orderly process will help ensure that integrity

Step one is to clearly, and openly, communicate to every colleague that your business is built on honesty and integrity. Temptation will creep in, but we need to choose in advance that we will wholeheartedly be honest. King Jehu "was not careful to keep the law of the God of Israel with all his heart" (2 Kings 10:31 NIV) while Joshua "followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly" (Joshua 14:8 NIV). Joshua received God's full blessing, while Jehu did not.

Step two is to start with ourselves. We must be sure to communicate the importance of integrity, and personally follow through. Colleagues will listen to our words and see our actions. If, to protect our image or other interests, we blame others when we goof, those we lead will follow that example. King Solomon instructed, "Put away from you a deceitful mouth..." (Proverbs 4:24 NASB)-. We need to ensure that the words coming out of our mouths are honest.

Third, ensure that messengers with bad news are not "shot." Paul wrote, "Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16 NASB). I worked with an executive who would explode when told that a client had been lost, or a mistake was made. As a result, most folks would dread discussing issues or problems, and would try to sweep problems under the rug. In one case, an accounting glitch led to the loss of one client and caused several others to complain. Because the issue was covered up, largely out of fear, the problem was not given high priority for correction- as a result, more customers were lost. King Solomon also wrote, "It

Creating an Honest Business Culture

Written by Steve Marr

Thursday, 10 November 2005 01:00

is an honor to receive an honest reply" (Proverbs 24:26 NLT). When we create a culture where staff believes they can, and must be honest, then we actually become honored.

Fourth, establish a culture of expecting staff to proactively look for problems, and not look the other way. Moses wrote, "If you see your neighbor's ox or sheep wandering away don't pretend not to see it" (Deuteronomy 22:1 NLT). We need to encourage, and we need to insist that folks raise any issues proactively. I had a client that employed commission sales people, and gave them a free reign to get business. He became concerned that some were making promises that could not be kept to get business, but he failed to investigate further. Over time, the company lost an outstanding reputation in the market, and many of the new customers left, disappointed. Had he investigated diligently, he could have corrected the sales practice much sooner. Silence gives sanction to sin.

Fifth, protecting integrity is everybody's job. For example, in another company, a credit manager became concerned when a large number of customers refused to make payments because they had received merchandise they had not ordered. The credit manager quickly learned most of these customers originated from one branch, and brought the issue to senior management. After investigating, the CEO learned that the branch manager intentionally over-shipped to reach quarterly sales numbers. The manager was dismissed, and a major scandal was nipped in the bud.

Finally, encourage a culture of confession. Joshua said, "Make your confession and tell me what you have done" (Joshua 7:19 NLT) and Solomon wrote "People who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them, they will receive mercy" (Proverbs 28:13 NLT). When confession is encouraged, you will get more honesty. Treat these confessions as learning opportunities, and ask in the future what could have been done differently to avoid the problem. In addition, ensure that disciplinary action is always more firm when problems were not confessed before discovered by you.

Steve Marr, Your Christian Business Coach