

DOES INTEGRITY REALLY MATTER?

By Rick Boxx

A survey conducted by the Ethics Resource Center found 45 percent of the people in today's workforce have personally observed ethical misconduct in the workplace. This is a staggeringly high percentage, an alarming commentary on the current state of the business and professional world. Yet we seem to have come to accept this sort of thing as a normal part of business.

With the challenging and complex worldwide economy and business climate, we not only shrug at such behavior but also begin to tell ourselves we cannot survive in the marketplace if we play by the rules. "You do whatever you have to do to get – or retain – business," many people believe.

Sadly we have separated our faith from our work and left God out of the equation. But my years of experience in the business and professional world, both as a businessman and consultant, I have seen evidence again and again that integrity does matter.

It matters to God. The Lord has called His followers to raise the standard and become examples for those we work with and encounter every day. It matters – or should matter – to you and me. And it matters to businesspeople like Rita.

I met Rita at a conference. After we got acquainted, she confided she was struggling with a moral dilemma in her business. In her words, she felt "convicted" about a decision she was pressured to make.

Two years earlier Rita had entered into a partnership with two other people, neither of whom shared her faith in Jesus Christ. Over time it became clear many of the decisions her partners were making, without her support, were ethically questionable at best. In her heart Rita knew what she needed to do, but lacked the courage to do it. To not take a stand would require compromising her ethics and personal beliefs.

After hearing me speak to a group of business owners, however, Rita knew she had to uphold the biblical principles that she believed in, dissolve the partnership, and walk away from the business. I felt thankful for being able to connect with Rita and help her come to terms with the action God had clearly been asking her to do, even though it was difficult.

Rita knew her decision probably would not result in a change in her former partners' business practices, but realized how critical it was to live and work in a manner consistent with the faith she professed. The Old Testament book of Proverbs tells benefits of holding to high standards of integrity:

A sense of peace. *"The man (person) of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out"* (Proverbs 10:9).

A source for guidance. *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity"* (Proverbs 11:3).

A feeling of security. *"Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner"* (Proverbs 13:6).

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CBMC INTERNATIONAL: Jim Firnstahl, President
2850 N. Swan Road, Suite 160 ▪ Tucson, Arizona 85712 ▪ U.S.A.
TEL.: 520-334-1114 ▪ E-MAIL: mmanna@cbmcint.org
Web site: www.cbmcint.org Please direct any requests or change of address to: jmarple@cbmcint.org

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you personally observed ethical misconduct in the workplace? If you have, describe the situation – and the impact it had on you.
2. Do you believe that some degree of ethical compromise is unavoidable to succeed in business? Why or why not?
3. How would you respond if you were put into a position where you were expected to compromise your own ethical values and principles?
4. The book of Proverbs cites benefits of upholding high ethical standards and committing to an unwavering philosophy of integrity. Do these benefits, in your opinion, outweigh the possible gains of ethical compromise? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalm 1:1-3, 7:8-9, 26:1-11; Proverbs 12:19, 19:1, 20:7; James 2:18-26