

DESTROYED TRUST DIFFICULT TO RESTORE**By Rick Boxx**

Have you ever considered how much we trust in the gasoline pump to tell us how many gallons or liters (outside of the United States) of fuel we have just pumped? Also, trusting the pump is properly calculating the price per gallon? When I was young I heard stories about gasoline stations manipulating pumps for personal gain. As a result, the petroleum industry and retailers became regulated to protect consumers.

If we want to purchase a used car, we are dependent on the salesperson's honesty to tell us about the vehicle – how it has been driven and maintained, problems it might have, the kind of fuel economy we can expect, and other things. When we go to an auto repair shop, unless we are mechanically inclined, we find ourselves at the mercy of the people working there. They diagnose the problems, tell us what will be required to fix them, and then inform us what it will cost. We must trust them.

But businesses related to motor vehicles are not the only ones that test our level of trust. Certain types of business lend themselves more to temptation than others because of the potential for misrepresenting product quality and quantity. Because of the necessity to trust the weights and measures used by the supplier are accurate, customers are often at a disadvantage.

As consumers we face a considerable challenge – whom can we trust, and how can we know for certain we can trust them? However, there also is a challenge for businesses, owners and employees. Will they yield to the temptation to provide less than expected, or charge a fee higher than warranted? In reality, short-term gains can easily lead to long-term losses. If you destroy the trust of customers and clients, "repeat business" that sustains an enterprise can disappear.

In the Bible's Old Testament, Leviticus 19:35 teaches, *"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights."* One reason for this teaching is that it is the right, ethical and moral thing to do. Also, once a person or business becomes known for dishonest practices, word spreads quickly.

I have known of several instances when a business unknowingly overcharged a customer, only to discover the error after the invoice had already been paid. The error could have been ignored, and the customer might never have known about it. But as one business executive stated, "I would know – and God would know."

Trust is critical in business. Sadly, just one indiscretion can wipe out the trust of your customers and destroy your business. The Bible repeatedly talks about the rewards of honesty and integrity, and the consequences of dishonesty and deceit:

Deception will be revealed. When one is not forthright and honest with a customer or client, the greatest fear is being discovered. *"The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out"* (Proverbs 10:9).

Dishonesty will destroy. Integrity provides security, while dishonest and unethical actions pose constant danger. *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity"* (Proverbs 11:3).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How do you determine if you can trust people with whom you do business?
2. Has there ever been a time when you discovered people at a company were being dishonest with you? If so, how did you respond?
3. Have you ever found yourself in circumstances where it would have been expedient to be dishonest or at least shade the truth to secure a sale or close a deal? How did you handle that situation?
4. What do you think of the biblical idea that maintaining a standard of integrity provides guidance and offers security? Do you agree – why or why not?

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

Proverbs 11:1, 13:6, 16:11, 20:10,14,17, 29:4,10; James 2:14-20