

PROTECT YOUR SUPPLY LINES

By Rick Boxx

One of our consulting clients typically experiences lean winter seasons because business is slow during those months. Some time ago, as we reviewed and evaluated the company's projected cash flow for the winter, it became evident there would be difficulty in paying suppliers on time.

Many companies in situations like this choose to ignore their suppliers and pay their bills when they can, dodging collection calls, making up excuses, or simply lying to delay making payments that are due. My client, however, desired for suppliers to know how much they are valued. He recognized how important they were to his company and did not want to jeopardize the relationships with them.

After discussing the circumstances, and recognizing the difficult financial period that loomed ahead, we all agreed open communication was the best, most caring and considerate thing to do for their suppliers. The client openly told the truth about his company's situation and was able to work out payment terms with suppliers that all parties involved found acceptable and beneficial.

As a result, rather than compromising important relationships, they were protected – and even made stronger – so as business improved in the spring, everything returned to normal. There was no need for apologies or excuses. My client had understood the danger of taking relationships for granted.

This makes practical sense since the timely response of suppliers is essential for us to meet the needs of customers. But how we treat everyone associated with our businesses – including suppliers – also reveals the values and principles by which we operate. The Bible speaks strongly about the importance of maintaining integrity and sensitivity to all the people and entities that patronize and serve us. Here are some examples of what it teaches:

Strive to remain truthful and forthright. As the adage reminds us, honesty is the best policy, and nowhere is this more applicable than in business relationships. *"These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace"* (Zechariah 8:16).

Deception can create irreversible damage. Sometimes it might seem expedient to mislead, or even "shade the truth" to avoid a difficult situation, but when the truth is revealed it can harm relationships in ways that cannot be repaired. *"The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out"* (Proverbs 10:9).

Never make commitments unless you fully intend to keep them. In trying to secure and retain business it can sometimes be tempting to tell people what we think they want to hear, even if we cannot guarantee to fulfill our promises. In speaking to His followers, Jesus strongly

denounced such behavior. *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, do not swear at all... Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'..."* (Matthew 5:33-37).

Protect your "lifelines." Good suppliers, like good customers, are indispensable to the success of any business. We should give each the proper care and attention they deserve. Do not risk losing them. *"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds...the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field..."* (Proverbs 27:23-27).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When faced with a dilemma, such as not being able to pay bills promptly, are you – or your organization – sometimes inclined to avoid being completely truthful to suppliers or others to whom money is owed?
2. Why do you think people are sometimes reluctant to be honest about circumstances confronting them?
3. What is the importance of integrity in business? How might short-term shortcuts, to avoid potentially unpleasant conversations or interactions, have long-term consequences?
4. Think of promises – or "oaths" – you have made, assurances you have made to suppliers or customers: Have you ever made a commitment you knew at the time you probably would not be able to fulfill? Explain your answer.

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

Proverbs 14:5, 20:25; Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 15:1-6; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 5:1-3