

Special Edition - Editorial

Business Ethics, Business Integrity, Business Loyalty

How many times have you said, what happened to the good old days? How many times do you wish that life was simpler? **When things are bad, have you reflected on the days of Ozzy and Harriet, I Love Lucy, The Ed Sullivan Show,** and Alfred Hitchcock? Those were times when life was much simpler and less complicated. It was a time that relationships, commitment, loyalty, integrity and ethics defined who a person was and what a business was. **It was a time when;**

- If you gave your word, regardless of the consequences, you lived up to your commitment.
- It was a time that friendships and trust were built over time, and;
- Those friendships and trust continued for many years.

Regardless if there was “a new guy in town”. In the old days, when a person shook your hand and you had a deal, you had a deal;

- You didn't need a fancy contract with every escape clause imaginable.
- You didn't need a string of attorney's to write the contract so ambiguously that it could be interpreted in 18 different foreign languages, and;
- Business ethics and integrity were the foundation of the relationship.

If you entered into a contract and it did not turn out as anticipated, you still honored those conditions because you gave your word. What happened to those days? What happened to honesty, integrity and loyalty? **Why did business become so complicated that a deal is only a deal until the deal changes,** regardless of the contractual terms? When did the business environment change to a point where people and relationships were not the foundation of a business?

What happened to shipper loyalty? With everything else in life, business cultures evolved; people evolved. **Somewhere along the line, something happened to change the dynamics of the foundation** of which our country was built upon.

I have been “blessed” in my business, to have relationships with many companies for 20+ years. Those customers (regardless of the circumstances) lived up to the terms and conditions of our agreement, regardless of the financial impact. **Those customers are successful, today, because they instill their value systems to their employees and family members.**

We have all had our experiences and our disappointments with customers and employees, and we've all dealt with the frustration and anger when that person, or that company, violated our trust.

Recently, somebody told me I was a dinosaur and I took that with great pride. That person stated, “You don't have to like someone to do business with them”. **In fact, he went on to say, “whether you believe that an individual is ethical or not,** if you can perform the service, you should take that person's money, **but you won't and that's why you're not a good business man.”**

I thought about his comments for a long time and then recognized that we all have value systems that we have to live by, whether it's on a professional or personal level;

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- I've always believed that once you make a commitment, regardless of the circumstances, you need to live up to that commitment, and;
- If somebody violates your trust, then you must re-evaluate the relationship.

Why did the business environment change so dramatically? Why has value systems changed so dramatically? I believe the answer is---business today has become much less personal. Communication is via;

- Email.
- Facsimile.
- Teleconferencing.

When you try to contact a customer, a perspective customer or a large corporation, you get a response from a machine, then a response from another machine, then a response from another machine and then you get a response on a voicemail.

If you try to file a medical claim, you speak to a machine that refers you to another machine, that puts you on hold for a half an hour, and then you speak to another robot. **After an 1 hour or 2 of trying to accomplish a task of finding a status report on a claim,** you still haven't talked to a "living person".

What I recognized is that our environment has become more impersonal which impacts the way we conduct business and the way we live our lives. We have also become more guarded. People don't trust people the way they used to; people violate trust on a daily basis and justify it because of circumstances. **Pressures to succeed are so intense, that (sometimes)** ethics, integrity and loyalty are cast aside to earn that extra dollar.

Our personal and business lives have evolved to be, so:

- Competitive.
- Driven, and;
- Materialistic, that many of the things that are truly important have been forgotten.

I'm not saying that this is in all cases, if you look at many of privately held family companies today, they've built their business and continued to build their business based upon honesty, integrity and loyalty. If you look at companies such as CRST, C.R. England, Crete Carriers, PAM Transportation, Warren Transport – **these businesses have been built the old fashion way. Block by block, brick by brick, commitment by commitment, with loyalty, integrity and honesty.**

The moral to the story is; sometimes you need to stand out from the crowd. My friend was right; I am a dinosaur. I have fired some of my clients because they breached my confidence. They breached their commitment, and/or they tried to take advantage of a situation. **In some instances, it caused me a substantial monetary loss. However, at the end of the day,** my grandfather instilled a very important lesson to me which was; "if a man does not keep his word, he is not a man".

My grandfather lived to be 88 years old; some of his comments would not be politically correct today, but what he was saying is; if someone violates your trust, if someone violates your confidence, if someone violates their loyalty and commitment to you (whether they are male or female) it has a direct bearing on the relationship. The issue is how you address that breach of trust. If you accept that behavior, you are only fostering that type of behavior. **If you take a stand, recognizing that it may impact you, financially and personally,** you have taken the proper approach.

A person's legacy is defined, not by how many assets they've accumulated, but a person's legacy is based upon the impact they have in their community and their family. Anytime you stand out in the crowd, people may "cast" stones, make accusations and, in some instances, even attack your credibility. **However, in those instances, that's because those people do not have the fortitude to take a stand.**

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "The Good Lord only gives you the challenges you can handle, learning from those challenges defines who you are".

(Andy Ahern)