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ETHICS 3.1

Ethics and Success

A United States study by the Johnson Group shows that American companies that pay attention to ethics — such as Coca-Cola, IBM, Kodak, 3M, Xerox and department-chain store J.C. Penney — grew at an average rate of 11.3% a year between 1950 and 1990. Almost double the average annual growth rate of the Dow Jones industrial average of 6.2% during the same period.

If we assume from this and from other studies that ethics is fundamental to healthy, long-term survival, it would be an advantage to understand exactly what “ethics” are and how both businesses and individuals can apply this knowledge to their daily routines.

Can we take this one step further and suggest that if ethics is misunderstood, one has almost no chance of becoming successful? And staying that way.

Ethics are often confused with morals. My dictionary defines morals as “relating to human behaviour, especially the distinction between good and bad, or right and wrong behaviour”. As judged against what? The laws of the land? No, you can do plenty of unethical acts without ever breaking the law.

My dictionary also defines ethics as “the philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct...”

Yet, in my opinion, moral decisions are judged against a person’s ethics. And these may differ from person to person. What I judge to be incorrect ethically, you may judge to be a perfectly acceptable practice. Therefore it follows that ethics cannot be enforced.

While you may be able to convince another person to follow guidelines founded upon your ethics, by authority or fear of sacking, he can follow your guidelines initially but have no compunction in taking shortcuts, or may even act in a way diametrically opposed to what you had hoped to achieve, if he perceives you won’t find out. His ethics are different from yours and applying your ethics to his actions has changed nothing.

Laws and morals are decided by groups, ethics are decided by individuals.

Your ethical code is set by yourself. Your ethics can be labelled by others as honesty, honour and integrity.

A strong sense of ethics goes hand in hand with a long-term survival concept. A long-term survival concept gives us a sense of consequences. If we have no sense of consequences, we have no interest in long-term survival, we are free to do irresponsible and possibly even destructive things.

Let’s look at the difference between being an ethical person and being “nice”. You could step in and help a friend do something he thought he was not capable of, or did not have the courage to do himself. Most people would think that a nice thing to do. However, is it in his best interest given a long-term viewpoint? If he faces a similar situation in the future, has your being nice helped him to try it on his own? Have you ultimately helped make him be more able and more capable as a being? Or have you actually supported him as an incapable being?

This situation is hardest when faced by those who have an addictive family member, one who constantly needs money or support which helps one continue one's addiction, all the while promising that one will stop, things will change.

Another situation is one most commonly unrecognised in businesses. Be alert when you hear, "It's quicker to do it myself. By the time I teach them to do it, I could've done it myself." Or worst of the lot: "If I give it to them they won't do it as well as I would anyway." See the document on delegation.

Let's look what happens when we breach our ethics.

Integrity is defined as "the quality of being unimpaired, wholeness". A person in this state would have unlimited joy, energy, enthusiasm, tolerance, creativity and responsibility. The very qualities that enable us to live life to the full and become truly successful.

So why would we be able to be less than all we could be? When we violate our integrity and breach our ethics, we become less whole. Our abilities are lessened. If we continue to breach our ethics those abilities are lessened even further and we have a person who has lost his enthusiasm, whose tolerance is low and has fixed ideas, is lethargic, is not happy or responsible.

As a being becomes more ethical, he will become more able and powerful. He will make those around him more able, and will become more confident in himself, less reliant on the good opinion of others. He will allow himself to be capable of creating big effects.

So what kind of unethical act are so insidiously undermining for us? Most of us will immediately think of the laws within our society. However, when you stop and think about it, a society with a lot of laws and rules is a society that is unethical. It is amazing that we need laws that make murder, child abuse, stealing or fraud illegal. When people can't be ethical, we

punish them and incarcerate them expecting them to be ethical when released. But as we have already discussed, it quite simply doesn't work that way.

Basically, what happens when we are unethical goes like this. We do something we shouldn't or fail to do something that we should. If we confront this and take responsibility for it, we are OK. If we don't, it's like a thorn in our side. We are constantly looking at it, carrying it with us and we begin to justify and rationalise our action, or lack of action. In order to accept our justifications we lower our confront, our perception and awareness. We are now less able, all our abilities have dropped a little. This creates more problems. We do more unethical things to solve these problems, make ourselves less so we can accept more justifications, and so on.

While we have bought into these reasons of why what we did is OK, we will have violated our basic integrity. Mess around with your integrity and you will feel bad. Of course, you will blame other things for that bad feeling and lower your awareness even further.

The more unethical we become, the less aware we are until we get to the point where we have no idea of right or wrong. We could kill someone and not perceive it as wrong. In fact, we could feel it was acceptable because life is hard, and we actually did the guy a big favour. See how it works?

If you confront what you have done or failed to do, you will feel clean about it and can take your attention off it to put it on to something else. It can't undo what's been done, but you will put it to rest. And instantly you are back on the upward spiral or becoming more able, more whole.

There is an ancient story of the Taoist monks who had taken a vow of never touching a woman. While walking through the countryside they came across a highly bred woman wanting to cross the river and having no means to do so. One monk silently moved forward,

scooped her up and carried her across the river. Nothing was said between them and they continued on their journey. The other monk thought on this for the whole afternoon and became upset at how easily the other monk could break his rules. In the end he could no longer hold it back. “How could you do that?” he burst out. “How could you pick up that woman when we vowed never to touch one?” The other monk looked at him and smiled. “I saw a human needing help. And at least I put her down at the other side of the river. You, however, are still carrying her.”

And this is how it is with unethical actions. We carry them with us, keeping our attention on them.

Here are some unethical actions which are more subtle than the obvious murder, stealing, lying and cheating.

- * Using the truth in a destructive way;
- * Agreeing with something when you really disagree;
- * Not doing what needs to be done, regardless of whose job it is;
- * Preventing someone from helping or participating;
- * Allowing someone to help or participate who is destructive or causes problems;
- * Doing something in order to avoid confronting something;
- * Thinking about it instead of doing it;
- * Breaking your word;
- * Agreeing to something even though you know you'll probably not want or be able to actually do it when the time comes;
- * Saying yes when you really want to say “NO”.

- * Attempting to be perfect or not to make mistakes. Or to expect this of others;
- * Focusing on problems and things that can go wrong;
- * Not acknowledging when you are doing things right;
- * Stirring someone up. If you stir it up and it hits the fan, you must expect to wear some of it.
- * Going through the motions. Not creating on the situation;
- * Grudgingly doing what you should, rather than what you want;
- * Saying something other than what you'd like to say in order not to confront;
- * Not making your future something which really gets you excited;
- * Failing to make those around you more able;
- * Ignoring people's gestures, communications and intentions.

Of course, we all have such good reasons as to why we do these things. Justifications, rationalisations and excuses cover up the breaching of our ethics. Listen to yourself carefully and learn to watch for that uncomfortable feeling that settles and stays with us when we are less than “whole”. When you “clean up” you will find your attention comes off the situation and leaves you feeling lighter and happier.