

[ETHICS AND INTEGRITY ARE NOT JUST WORDS]

MONDAY MAY 16, 2005

**When you say the world is bad, it's not the world, it's you.
So be what you want others to be with you.**

WORK WISE - A fortnightly column by Rahul Kapoor

The Oxford dictionary defines the word ethic as a system of moral principles. In today's context what does this word mean to us? Are we ethical in our approach in every thing we do?

Let me share with you some real life examples to articulate how easily some people can move out of their integrity and become unethical and how some stick on to their principles and create an image of a true hero.

The first example I want to share with you is that of a popular IT company. As their annual day approached, the assistant HR manager teamed up with his executive and decided to meet some masters of ceremony and party games specialists. They shared all relevant information about the occasion with them and asked them to structure the program and also come up with some team activities and games.

They went on to collect data from four such specialists and later rejected all of them on the grounds of budget constraints. They then presented these concepts to their seniors as their own and also went on to conduct all the same activities on the annual day. This may have earned them some brownie points and perhaps also helped them in their performance appraisal later. But they used unethical means to gain short-term success.

Another example is about an MBA coaching institute, which has its branches in over 5 cities in India. Two years ago a senior person joined this company as its CEO. He grasped the business very well and went on to build relations with his colleagues in a very short span of time. He became very friendly particularly with three people, all of whom were a few months old in the company. He shared his vision of floating his own company soon and offered these three people a share in the business if they supported him.

Within no time he and his supporters began to steal sensitive data from the company. They made copies of important documents and carefully managed to replicate the entire course content. One fine day, the managing director of the company was tipped about their misgivings by a well wisher. But it was too late by then and unfortunately there was no proof to prove the CEO guilty of his offence. Nevertheless, he and the other three employees who supported him were asked to resign. As expected the very next month the sacked CEO floated his own MBA coaching institute.

In the first case, we find that the HR manager and his colleagues are under pressure to perform and thus they resort to unethical means. And in the second case the CEO is driven by greed. Ethics or lack of it is evident in every profession. Greedy doctors

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recommend and perform unnecessary surgeries, lawyers bend the truth, auto rickshaw drivers tamper the fare meter and insecure managers never let good subordinates to grow. We often find people who cheat others for some short-term gains.

But then there is another breed of people as well. These are people who are driven by principle, those who value people and relationships. I came across one such person who is the COO of an organization, which hires over five thousand people. Recently, they moved into a new campus and had His Excellency the Governor of Karnataka as their chief guest. What followed after the formal inauguration ceremony was a nightlong cultural extravaganza. One of the activities was an inter-collegiate rock show.

I quickly thought to myself this is perhaps the easiest way to save money. Provide a platform to the youngsters and promote the show as an opportunity to showcase talent to a few thousand people. Anybody would buy the concept and agree to perform free of cost. Or perhaps even take part in the competition for the sake of a trophy or a certificate. But surprisingly, this COO had other plans.

He went on to announce a cash prize of one lakh rupees to the winners. In fact, with this kind of money they could have easily hired a professional rock band itself. When I spoke to the COO about the prize money, he said that his company likes to provide opportunity to youngsters and that they would rather spend this money in motivating the youth instead of hiring a professional band.

I still remember the excitement on the faces of the top three teams who shared the booty that night. There is no doubt that all the participating teams would have gone back with great memories of the evening and will also remember COO's gesture for a long time to come.

I also know of another very dynamic young entrepreneur who started an IT company and suffered huge losses. He could not pay his employees' salary for over two months and eventually had to close his business down. But one thing that I can never forget is that he called all his employees for a meeting and briefed them about the situation, he then went on to request everybody to cooperate with him in these tough times. In the last month of the company's operations he made arrangements to clear the dues of all those who needed the money most. Then he went on to pay the rest of them either in cash or kind. In fact, even after the business had closed down completely, he decided to take up a job as a technical trainer. He earned the money and cleared everyone's dues in less than six months time. Although, he lost money he earned lots of respect and admiration.

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In the first case the COO and the organization not only set a great example, they also motivated their people and encouraged talent. In the case of the young entrepreneur, he chose to fight tough times with grit and did not compromise on his values and principles.

Now let us consider the following examples - You visit a store to buy 10 CDs and the storekeeper by mistake bills you only for five. What would you do? You always pay a taxi fare of Rs. 75 from your house to your office. But this time the taximeter shows for Rs.40. What would you do? Your answers to these determine your approach towards life.

You can find both kinds of people succeeding in today's world, those who are fair and those who are not. Some times we wonder why bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people. Remember, life always squares out. To remain happy we should do our best to remain fair to ourselves and to others. When we cheat others, most of the time we are being dishonest with ourselves as well. We are also preparing ourselves to be cheated somewhere.

Ask yourself one question How would you like the people around you to remember you?