

Consequences

A man was hired as the Manager of a group of highly skilled technicians whose work consisted of calibrating sophisticated testing equipment. This service business should have been financially successful, but wasn't. A substantial reorganization was needed, but so too was a reacquaintance with appropriate ethical standards.

Instead of writing an ethical tome, the Manager established three values for himself and the group: Stand for Quality, Demonstrate Integrity, and Honor Our Commitments. They also adopted principles, which included Treat Our People with Dignity and Respect; Passion for Customer Satisfaction, Meet and Exceed Customer Requirements, Support the Direction of the Business, Team Players, and Open and Honest – and the group talked about the Values and Principles at each of their frequent meetings. Among the many qualities that they aspired to as a superb team was to have mutual respect and admiration for competence, values, commitment and the person as a person.

In reaching an understanding on Integrity, they talked about giving your word and honoring your word; doing what you say you will do when you said you would do it, and being accountable for any mess that was caused. They talked about ethics and morality being enabled by integrity, and that giving and honoring your word was enabled by the ethical rule and moral code in the culture everyone lived in at work.

Spurred on by its values and principles, the group turned its business around from one that was losing money to one that had added substantially to the profits of the company.

The team's star technician was also a team leader whose responsibilities included regular performance reviews of his team members and recommendations for adjustments in their pay. It was a requirement that the team member sign the performance review form.

One day, one of the star technician's team members went to Human Resources to report that he had received a pay raise but never had the required performance review. "How could this be," asked the HR manager. "I saw a Review Document with the line guy's signature on it." But it was not the employee's signature; the signature had been forged by the star technician/team leader who, when confronted, admitted that the performance review had not been conducted. "I was busy with my work, I ran out of time, and I wanted to get 'line guy' his pay raise," the team leader said. "I intended to tell him what happened, but I never got around to it. I am really sorry."

A forgery? The manager could no longer trust his team leader even if he was a star technician. "All my employees know that I preach the company's principles and values," the manager said. "Had I overlooked this breach or just let it go, I would have lost everything I had worked to achieve." He fired star technician.

The message: No matter how simple or elaborate an ethics program is, it has little or no value unless there are meaningful consequences for ethical violations. Without that needed discipline, any ethical program will be seriously crippled and totally bogus.