

Whistleblowing II

WHY ARE PEOPLE AFRAID TO BLOW THE WHISTLE?

A reminder: “If employees are not surprised when misconduct occurs, or there’s a discrepancy between how employees view top executives’ adherence to ethical behavior and how managers perceive themselves, then the company is not moving towards a positive outcome.”¹

An ethical company should encourage its employees who believe that there has been ethical misconduct to come forward and report it. But there is a great deal of data that suggests that in many companies, employees see misconduct and do not report it.² Here are some ideas to consider for a company whose aspiration is to be ethical. They come from an article entitled *When courage is encouraged on the job – How workplaces can motivate employees to take a stand when trouble brews.*³

Employees will blow the whistle if the wrongdoing they have observed is serious; they feel that telling somebody about it will actually make a difference; and they feel they are going to get some support from their colleagues and from the organization for doing that.

They will also come forward when they know exactly where to go with allegations and when they do not have to confront a supervisor face to face. Companies often encourage employees to talk first with their supervisors, which may in fact be a deterrent.

People who truly believe in what their organizations are trying to accomplish seem to be much more willing to take risks on its behalf.

Good managers who explain via case studies, training sessions and newsletters how exactly a value such as integrity or compassion ought to be expressed will get the best results. Then workers are likely to take principled stands because they will not need to hesitate or wonder how to live out their values.

The bane of workplace courage is intense pressure to deliver short-term results. When quarterly numbers are extremely important, workers may be forced to choose between doing what’s right in the workplace and protecting the career that puts food on their table at home.

So, management must actually reduce the need for courage by welcoming challenges with respect to ethical conduct.

In the end, the real reason that even good workers do not come forward is when they are pretty sure their organization is not going to listen to them.

¹ Cynthia Waller Vallario, *Is Your Ethics Program Working?*, Financial Executive, May 2007;

² Ethical Resource Center’s National Business Ethics Survey, November 28, 2007.

³ G. Jeffrey MacDonald, The Christian Science Monitor, January 26, 2009.