



WOLF CALLINGS

Four Ways to Keep Your Integrity When You're in a Tough Spot

The subject of ethics comes up pretty frequently in the news lately. We've seen scandals raging around ethics in both government and private corporations. Sports, education and entertainment also seem to have a good share of ethics issues as well. Why is it that this subject keeps coming up if we already know we should do the right thing and make prudent decisions about our actions?

While reading or watching the news, we are often outraged over described or implied ethics violations. We seem to know when the behavior of the "other" has gone beyond a threshold of what is ethical and what is not. So, why is it that individuals don't see this threshold before taking questionable actions? Aren't we, most of us, good people who want to do the right thing? Do we simply fall prey to an inability to see our own motives as suspect? Perhaps we rationalize that our circumstances are somehow special or mitigating.

We all willingly join institutions; corporations, churches, clubs, non-profits, schools, governments, and other groups. When joining, there is always an implied contract, and often an explicit one that we sign. Usually this contract covers a wide-range of issues including values and ethics which we agree to honor. It's just like being a nation of laws; organizations are creatures of "laws" or rules too.

WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN RULES

Many times these rules are subtle, and you can look for them in any sentence that starts out "Around here, we do/don't..." We don't make fun of the CEO. We do include staff people in all our steering groups. We place more priority on answering the customer service phone than in doing administrative tasks. And my personal favorite, "Around here, if you don't work at least 50 hours a week, you are considered a poor performer." And this is in a company where the employee handbook says that the standard workweek is 40 hours.

A-ha! Sometimes the unwritten rules actually override the written rules. Doesn't that send a message? Are the ethics rules really "suggestions?" I don't think so. Then why are some people comfortable breaking the rules while others are not? Perhaps the two sets of people are following two different sets of rules. The Written and the Unwritten? People are just grown children after all, and how many of us have heard our parents' say "Do as I say, not as I do"?

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I was not too enthusiastic about the workshop until I learned you were the facilitator. You have a friendly and engaging manner that never sounds like a lecture or like a pep-rally motivational speaker.

– A state worker

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PUT YOUR ACCOUNTABILITY SKILLS INTO PLAY

What's the best way to keep your personal integrity in situations where Written and Unwritten rules apply? Put your accountability skills into play. Below are four ways to keep your integrity intact when you find yourself in less than desirable situations:

- **FIRST:** Recognize that you are fully accountable for being in the organization in the first place.
- **SECOND:** Confront the issue head-on by taking it to the source. Take written rules to unwritten rule source and point out the difference. This may be pretty high up in the organization. If it's too high for you, go to step 4.
- **THIRD:** offer to be a part of the issue resolution and if you can be comfortable with the resolution, support it fully and relax. If not, go to step 4.
- **FOURTH:** And this is certainly the hardest step. If you find yourself here, it's time to put your money

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where your mouth is and leave the organization. It's not ok to bad-mouth, rationalize, subvert or remain taking the low road in any way. I believe we have an implied contract, "I willingly joined this group, and if it doesn't suit me, and it won't change in spite of my best efforts, then the honorable thing for me to do is to leave." This is real accountability, and it takes courage. But when this is the potential outcome, you will work harder to help the organization improve if you really love where you are.

BOTTOM LINE?

It's up to you to be accountable for where you are, and it's just possible that where you put yourself is not the best fit for you. And the organization doesn't have to be "wrong," it just may not right for you. ▲

Having trouble balancing your organizational plate? Perhaps you'd enjoy having a clear path set through the chaos, and a workable ongoing method for ensuring that the strategic-but-not-urgent subjects get addressed before the operational-fire-fights? There can be a lot of value, for low cost, in examining how your organization balances priorities. Let's talk! Call 360-264-5082 today for more information or to schedule an appointment.

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