

Guest Author Bob Cooper Talks About Ethical Leadership

✘ With the Republican convention now completed and the Democratic convention in full swing, it's interesting to observe how both parties attempt to brand their candidates as being the most reliable and trustworthy. As citizens we try to understand each candidate's policy positions, and decide whether or not we feel they will be able to deliver on these promises. In the final analysis, it often comes down to which candidate we believe is most trustworthy.

In business, maintaining a culture founded on high ethical principles is not only the right thing to do, it's simply the **smart** thing to do. Business consultant and author Tom Peters says –

“There is no such thing as a minor lapse of integrity.”

Let's look at the important differences between ethics and compliance initiatives.

Compliance programs ensure adherence to specific state and federal laws and regulations. Simply put – we must follow these guidelines or potentially receive a penalty. We know that if we drive through a red light we might get a ticket. Ethics has more to do with your moral compass.

Ethics takes compliance to the next level. It ensures that an organization lives its common values and principles, and does

the right thing, not because it is mandated to do so, but because it is the right thing to do. For example, holding staff accountable to treat each other with respect and fairness become part of the fabric of the organizational culture.

As a leader, you set the tone for high ethical behavior within your department or organization. The following are a few suggestions to build a positive ethical culture:

- **Communicate** core values and make sure every employee knows the organization's values, and lives these every day.
- **Ensure fairness** and consistency in all of your business practices.
- **Engage staff** in identifying specific behaviors that they all agree to support within the department. These will further support the core values of the organization.
- **Take corrective action** when a staff member does not show support for any of the organization's values. Acknowledge individuals who maintain high ethical standards.
- **Be a great model** of high ethical standards. Accept full accountability for your actions. Admit mistakes, and seek to find common ground. Do not look to blame others – seek win-win solutions.

Ethics is directly related to one's authenticity. It's about believability. It's about consistency. We have come to not trust many of our political leaders because they have often let us down. They have not lived up to the promises. They have sometimes crossed the ethical line, only to lead us not to trust.

As a leader you must not rely solely on your business knowledge and abilities. You must not fall into the trap of

believing political astuteness is enough. Talent and business savvy will serve you well if you are coming from a place of truth.

To build and sustain a high ethical culture – leaders must be willing to look in the mirror. You must look inside your heart and answer the fundamental question – Are you making a certain decision because you need to comply, or because it is also the right thing to do?

Political elections come and go. We are often unsure of whom we can put our trust. Politicians are often voted out of office either because of broken promises or a sense that they are not to be trusted. If you consistently live high ethical standards, and accept nothing less from your team, you build a culture that every internal and external customer will come to respect and trust.

It's a choice.

My hope is you choose to always do the right thing. It's living high principles even when you know that no one is watching.

*RL Cooper Associates' book "Heart and Soul in the Boardroom" outlines suggestions for leaders to develop highly respectful and ethical work cultures and is available in the **MMP Store!**. For additional information about all of our services, please visit us at www.rlcooperassoc.com*



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