

What Goes Around, Comes Around



by Jay Goltz

GOLTZ ON BUSINESS

Have you ever considered, or even struggled with, the question of what it means to be ethical in business? To have integrity? To be honorable? To be fair? Or maybe even to have a good reputation? Have you ever wondered if they are all the same thing?

Having integrity is an important attribute, not only for business, but for life as well. In business, ethics are sometimes more difficult to adhere to because of the dog-eat-dog environment. Integrity in business usually falls into one of the following four areas.

Customers. Have you ever scratched a customer's print, touched it up, and hoped no one noticed? It's easy—as long as you don't get caught. But if your customer does notice, you look bad—really bad.

I never wanted to be in that situation, so I've always told my employees that accidents happen, and that if one does, they should let me know what's going on so that we can work with the customer to fix it. At least then we can look the customer straight in the eye and feel good that we've been honest. This approach sets the tone for our business.

Vendors. I've been told several times by vendors that customers often say they've been "short shipped" so that they can get free merchandise. That's sad. I'd like to believe that it doesn't happen a lot, because as far as I'm concerned, it's no different from shoplifting.

Competitors. Yes, you can even "play fair" with competitors. I've had competitors call

my company during business hours to try to steal my employees. That's just being classless and shortsighted.

Or maybe you don't do things to your competitors that are unethical, but you intentionally try to cause problems for them. Not smart! It only inspires you competitors to be that much more aggressive.

Employees. Last but not least, if you really want to do a number on yourself, mistreat your employees. Don't give them the bonus you promised. Don't be fair when you fire them. Just remember, there's nothing worse than an ex-employee running around telling everyone all the bad things you did to them. It's even worse, because they are in the industry.

True, it's frustrating to pay people extra, whether it's a bonus or severance pay, when you feel they have already cost you too much. But you can't pick and choose when you will be honorable. It just doesn't work that way.

These, ladies and gentlemen, are the ingredients for your reputation. Nobody is perfect, and even if you are always honorable it doesn't mean that everyone is going to say only nice things about you. The fact is that some won't.

But a good reputation will pay dividends for years to come in the form of attracting better employees, having vendors help you, and enjoying a good presence in the community. And all of that is good for business.

A good reputation is worth a lot of money. Bank it!