Honesty in workplace, open communication go hand in hand

By ELIZABETH N BROWN
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"We struggle mostly with ourselves as we debate whether or not to speak up in meetings, confront a co-worker who we have issues with, or approach a supervisor about unreasonable expectations or to clarify instructions," said author Steven Gaffney. "That conflict between what we want to say, and what we actually feel we can say, causes great stress."

Galford agrees. "(Dishonesty) is less about doing bad stuff. It's more about not doing the things that should be done," he said.

"I fundamentally think that the people in the business world are well-intentioned, but I think people sometimes forget their mission, forget their priorities and lose track of the long-term in pursuit of the short-term," Galford said. "The fundamental question is ... is it bad motives or bad judgment?"

Bad judgment and poor communication account for much of the dishonesty in workplaces, according to Gaffney. "We do a seminar called 'The fish isn't sick, the water is dirty.'" Gaffney said. "The environmental water, the communication water in the workplace gets muddied, and if you're not careful, people can get their tools to clean up the environment, to get the issues resolved, then everything else improves. The No. 1 way to get these issues resolved is to be up front and honest."

The rewards of honest communication in the workplace are not just esoteric. Honesty can actually help reduce work-related stress, according to Gaffney, who said that most of the conflict that occurs in the workplace is internal and has nothing to do with the company itself. "We struggle mostly with ourselves as we debate whether or not to speak up in meetings, confront a co-worker who we have issues with, or approach a supervisor about unreasonable expectations or to clarify instructions," said Gaffney. "That conflict between what we want to say, and what we actually feel we can say, causes great stress."

"The solution," Gaffney added, "is to do what most people are reluctant to do: Be honest. Honesty really does work."

Honesty can work in attracting clients as well, said Galford. In his work as a consultant, "it became very clear ... that the differentiator for clients was not in the quality of the service that firms provided, but much more in the level of trust they had in the individuals and the trusting relationships they had with the people who were advising them," he said.

"There are a lot of banks you can go to for a loan, but there are relatively few bankers who you will trust," Galford said. "There are 'x' number of good rental car companies, supermarkets, lawyers, accountants, but we go to the ones we trust."

Galford will be the keynote speaker at a Dec. 5 workshop and luncheon presented by the Council for Ethics in Economics. The event takes place at the Confluence Park Restaurant in Columbus. To register or obtain more information, visit www.businessethics.org or contact Lisa Mueller at (614) 221-8661.