

Leaders & Success

BE HONEST AND DEPENDABLE

Resist Integrity Erosion

10

Tempted by power, prestige and money, plenty of otherwise honest and upstanding folks have abandoned their usual code of ethics in a moment of weakness.

There are ways to avoid that trap.

Experts offer up this bit of advice: If you don't lie or cheat on the small things, you won't be corrupted by the larger temptations.

"The erosion of a person's integrity is rarely quick and spectacular as in a Hollywood blockbuster," said Adrian Gostick, co-author of "The Integrity Advantage." "It usually occurs as a gradual slipping of standards that is hard to spot – and hard to stop – until it reaches a devastating end."

Slippery Slope

Gostick uses the accounting scandals of Enron, WorldCom and others to illustrate this slippery slope theory. Forty years ago, he says, a public company was expected to keep the books in a strict manner. Those standards gradually eroded.

Warren Buffett, chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway Inc., warned investors of the coming fallout for two decades in company reports. Even respected businesses run by some very good people, he said, were fudging to make quarterly numbers. That fudging, he said, would eventually give way to fraud.

The problem, Gostick says, is that the potential rewards for shareholders grew so big that executives felt justified in taking any means to secure them. "It was only a short leap from there to justifying bigger rewards for themselves."

That's why Frank VanderSloot, CEO of Melaleuca, a \$500 million consumer products company, teaches his workers to always take the high road. "Little things count," he told Gostick. "Like when someone calls in to talk to a manager, and (his) assistant says (he's) in a meeting when (he's) not. It's the little things that your employees notice. So we teach employees that we never lie. The assistant may say the manager cannot take the call right now,

IBD'S 10 SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Investor's Business Daily has spent years analyzing leaders and successful people in all walks of life. Most have 10 traits that, when combined, can turn dreams into reality. Each day, we highlight one.

- 1 HOW YOU THINK IS EVERYTHING:** Always be positive. Think success, not failure. Beware of a negative environment.
- 2 DECIDE UPON YOUR TRUE DREAMS AND GOALS:** Write down your specific goals and develop a plan to reach them.
- 3 TAKE ACTION:** Goals are nothing without action. Don't be afraid to get started. Just do it.
- 4 NEVER STOP LEARNING:** Go back to school or read books. Get training and acquire skills.
- 5 BE PERSISTENT AND WORK HARD:** Success is a marathon, not a sprint. Never give up.
- 6 LEARN TO ANALYZE DETAILS:** Get all the facts, all the input. Learn from your mistakes.
- 7 FOCUS YOUR TIME AND MONEY:** Don't let other people or things distract you.
- 8 DON'T BE AFRAID TO INNOVATE; BE DIFFERENT:** Following the herd is a sure way to mediocrity.
- 9 DEAL AND COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE EFFECTIVELY:** No person is an island. Learn to understand and motivate others.
- 10 BE HONEST AND DEPENDABLE; TAKE RESPONSIBILITY:** Otherwise, Nos. 1-9 won't matter.

but we do not make up stories. We will not say anything that is untrue."

Maintaining Standards

VanderSloot, named Ernst & Young Northwest Entrepreneur of the Year in 2001 and Idaho's Business Leader of the Year in 1998, says that when people get away with the small deceptions, it leads them down a dishonest road. They justify what they've done, and soon it becomes easier to justify even fraudulent behavior.

Leaders who maintain their integrity throughout their careers decide early that they'll never break their personal code of con-

duct, Gostick says. Those he's spoken with use the phrase: "A line in the sand."

People with integrity, they say, "draw a line in the sand at some point in their careers and are not willing to cross it, no matter the benefit, no matter the threat."

Sadly, VanderSloot said, "the person is rare who has said, 'Regardless of how much it is to my advantage, I'm never going to say something that is not totally accurate.' I think most people want to believe that of themselves, but when really put in a bind, they'd be willing, without too much pressure, to say something that was untrue." **Robin Grugal**