Yes, we all know that we should all do the right thing because it's right. But let's get down to business. As managers, there is real professional power and payback in taking the high road. If people respect you, trust you and believe in you, then they will, in most cases, help do your bidding.

- Your manager will help you be successful in your current role and maybe even help you get promoted to your next role.
- Your staff will work hard for you, because they know you are working hard for them.
- Your peers will take you at your word and hopefully provide you the same straightforwardness and honesty.
- If your department provides services to others within the company, those you serve will trust that your actions are for the good of the company and the departments you serve.
- If your department provides services to paying customers, these customers will tend to return and buy more products because they know they are being treated fairly and honestly.

Talking the high road also allows you some protection when taking a strong stance on a controversial topic. That is to say, your critics may not agree with you or like your stance on a
specific topic, but it will be hard for them to disagree with you on an ethical basis. From a negotiation perspective, this provides you two huge advantages:

- First, negotiating based on your ethical conviction is illustrating your willingness to do what’s right.
- Second, you will very possibly win your negotiation because, even in business, it’s hard to argue with doing the right thing.

Upon graduating college, my first boss told me something that has resonated with me to this day. He said that if you stay in the same profession long enough, it will seem like there are only a few hundred people that do what you do and everyone knows each other. Truth be told, this was a little bit exaggerated, but ultimately very true. As your career progresses, you personally touch hundreds, even thousands, of other professionals. They include your peers, staff, vendors, customers, people you meet at conferences, and others you have touched as part of your professional activities. If this collective group of people believes you to be honest, ethical and fair to others, this professional network can help you find new jobs, give you advice on how to handle difficult situations, and help you find exceptional people to hire.

I know that none of us are perfect. What if you accidentally do the wrong thing? There is an expression “The air of impropriety” meaning that even if what you did is not illegal, unethical or dishonest, it somehow that shady. If people view this incident this way, they may actually believe you to be dishonest and unethical. So what do you do if you make a mistake of this type and accidentally do something wrong that could be viewed as dishonest or unethical? What I do is own up to it and try to make it right. I would suggest you also do the same.

You see it all the time with politicians, sports figures, and others in the limelight. Those who continue to deny their wrongdoing always seem to be dealt with the harshest in the press and in the collective minds of us all. Those who immediately come forward and admit their wrongdoing certainly still have to deal with the penalties of their transgressions, but generally speaking, these penalties are not as severe or as long lasting.
As a manager, you should keep this lesson in mind regarding your actions and when counseling those on your staff regarding their actions, and remember, the true long term power of taking the ethical highroad.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- Taking the ethical highroad makes good business sense; it helps you expand your personal network and gives you an advantage when negotiating business issues.
- If you accidently do something that looks unethical, owning up to it sooner rather than later can reduce the severity of the repercussions.

Until next time, manage well, manage smart, and continue to grow.

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