

## Hiring Cheaters?

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The odds are stacked against you. Somebody will probably join your company by intentionally tricking you into believing that they are better educated or knowledgeable than they really are. The disturbing news is that this type of behavior may be perfectly acceptable to our next generation of workers.

On Wednesday, I caught a segment of ABC's *Good Morning America* featuring Dr. Richard Weissbourd, a Harvard psychologist and author of the book *The Parents We Mean to Be*. He told the audience that today's teenagers believe achievement is more important than being a good person. He cites their inability to balance the importance of getting ahead, by making the team or admittance to the right school, with important character traits such as honesty and fairness. Not surprising, habitual cheating for personal gain is becoming commonplace and other studies bear out his findings.

The implications for business are serious. Cheaters have no qualms about misrepresenting their skills, lying to customers, misleading bosses, or risking corporate reputations for personal gain. When "me-first" thinking takes over, respect for others declines and teamwork suffers.

What can employers do to stem the tide and build integrity into their culture? Below are a few simple pointers:

- **Verify!** Always check references, confirm degrees and substantiate GPA's when hiring.
- **Encourage learning opportunities.** Don't let ethical muscles atrophy. Oklahoma has some wonderful programs that help leaders reinforce integrity in the workplace, including Strata Leadership's *Character First* and the General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute. There's also The Soderquist Center in nearby Arkansas. Several of our universities offer ethics courses that prompt individuals to think more deeply about values.
- **Model the behavior.** Youth are heavily influenced by their environment, so be sure that leaders and co-workers demonstrate the desired behavior.
- **Set limits and don't slouch on consistent reinforcement.** Don't assume that everyone is on the same page. Spell out your expectations for building integrity in plain language through orientation, communiques and in regular staff meetings. Celebrate significant, honorable behavior. Provide mentoring opportunities for meaningful engagement where ethical issues can be safely discussed.

Today's teenagers are eager to achieve. It's important for experienced business leaders to build on that desire by showing them the right way to accomplish their goals and demonstrating that integrity is the true measure of success.

*Shannon Warren is the founder of OK Ethics, a non-profit organization hosting monthly ethics forums in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. See [www.okethics.org](http://www.okethics.org)*