

The 24/7 Trap
Prepared for The Journal Record, April 26, 2016

Flying back from the beach last week, I found myself seated next to a young director of a pharmaceutical company. Matt was not a happy camper. In fact, he was having a very bad day at work.

While he vented, I listened. The details of the situation for this leader of an organization that conducts life-and-death clinical trials are not important. However, it was interesting to hear about the overarching errors that were made – by both Matt and his team.

Matt struck me as a thirty-something leader who clearly admired his current organization's CEO and the morals that individual demonstrated. Plus, Matt had a basis for comparison because he had worked for an unethical leader in a previous job and hated it. That could be why he was so passionate about ensuring his people understood the importance of integrity.

Unfortunately, the rub came when the wayward worker that Matt was challenging asked if he drank a beer or two before boarding. Now, the guy seemed perfectly sober to me. In fact, I would not have known about the beers had Matt not mentioned it himself. But, his timing in confronting this employee was not ideal. She probably heard about the drinks and was yanking Matt's chain. So, while Matt may have been off the clock enjoying a beverage, his employee was ready to use that information to discount his credibility. This brings up a point: *leaders are expected to behave according to certain standards all the time.*

Yes, that means 24/7. According to an Ethics Resource Center Ethical Leadership Report, workers judge their bosses primarily by personal character. They witness this behavior through personal interactions and sometimes off-site observations. You never know who is watching.

In Matt's case, he was learning that ethics is a full-time commitment. Leaders have to remain cognizant of how their actions might be perceived. As the ERC put it, "Leaders and companies need to recognize that the line between public and private gets less clear every day."

Webster's dictionary defines integrity as a state of "being complete and undivided." It means that while every leader makes mistakes, we must be clear on our values and consistently strive to act accordingly in both our personal and professional lives. As for Matt, I have no doubt that he has set an example – one way or the other.

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