

## MORAL DECAY

I recently went out to dinner with a business friend who owns a medium sized manufacturing company with just over 50 employees. Over a couple of cocktails he started to express to me his frustration with his people. He claimed to pay them well, provides a comfortable work environment, and offers a respectable benefits package. Regardless, he wished his people were more dedicated and professional in their attitude. He yearned for the old days when there was more pride in workmanship (and you thought I was the last of the whiners). I've known my friend for a long time and know his management style; he works well with people and although he insists on organization and structure, he tends to empower his workers to assume responsibility as opposed to micromanaging them to death. Frankly, I know a lot of people who would love to work in his environment, yet he still had this problem of employee attitudes and asked me for my thoughts on it.

I told him what he was experiencing was a simple matter of moral decay. Regardless of the work environment he provided and his interpersonal relations with his employees, there are other forces at work, namely our eroding system of values. I explained the following to illustrate the point:

\* It used to be a person's word was his bond. If he made a verbal commitment, you could count on it. Today, lying and deceit are commonplace in just about every corner of our society. Consequently, our expectations to honor a commitment have been lowered and, even worse, we have lost faith and trust in our fellow man.

\* We used to have dedicated workers who cared about their work and doggedly saw a task through to completion. Now, we no longer associate our reputations with our work products. This may be because we have laws today making it difficult to reprimand or fire anyone regardless of their performance. Further, we now suffer from the "99% complete" syndrome whereby we never seem to finish anything with the excuse that, "*We'll get around to it.*" In other words, determination and pride have been replaced by indifference which erodes production and opens the door for competition.

\* We used to respect our bosses and were loyal to our companies. As long as you were employed by someone, you bit your tongue and endeavored to help the company succeed. For example, I knew a loyal Boeing employee who steadfastly refused to fly on anything but Boeing aircraft. Today, concepts such as corporate loyalty and respect are a thing of the past as employees no longer trust management, and management doesn't trust its workers, all of which leads to an inordinate amount of back stabbing and political maneuvering. It's no small wonder that today's employees are regarded more as free agents as opposed to team players.

To me, morality means giving of one's self, putting aside our self interests for the common good of all. However, if in fact such things as honor, courtesy, pride, respect, sacrifice, courage, dedication, commitment, loyalty, honesty, perseverance, integrity, and professionalism, are adjectives of the past, then we are indeed witnessing the moral decay of our society. Actually, it's rather remarkable we have progressed as far as we have as a species, but it makes you wonder how much farther we would be if we had the moral fortitude to overcome greed, corruption, and other vices. As Samuel Clemens correctly observed, "*Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.*"

Interestingly, American morality seems to change whenever we change presidents from one political party to another. I can think of no other single event which benchmarks a change in our culture than the passing of the presidential torch. Consider for example, the social changes incurred in the transition from Eisenhower to Kennedy, from Carter to Reagan, and Bush to Clinton. A change in Presidential party signals a change in social norms and moral priorities.

So what can be done about deteriorating moral values? You would think that our religious institutions would have a significant role to play here. Not necessarily. There are those who go to church simply to absolve themselves of their sins from the preceding week, not to correct any character flaw. After being "cleansed" they revert back to their indiscretions. No, we need to lead by example, reward accomplishments and truly penalize violations as opposed to looking the other way. There will always be those who are morally handicapped and persist in attempting to undermine our system of values, but we owe it to ourselves and our posterity to persevere. Our ability to surmount moral corruption defines who we are as a civilization.

Years ago, Arnold Toynbee said succinctly, "*Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder,*" meaning our social problems are actually self inflicted. If we can cause the problems, I would like to believe we are strong enough to solve them, regardless of the price to be paid. Going back to my friend's problem, what is needed is a little inspiration, hope, belief in ourselves, a little brother/sisterhood, and a legal system that doesn't stifle morality, but rather promotes it. Regardless of the magnitude of the job, from major to menial, workers must believe they are leading an honorable and worthwhile life. There is nothing wrong with ambition, as long as it doesn't lead to incessant politics. There is nothing wrong with personal achievement/recognition, as long as teamwork doesn't suffer. There is nothing wrong with criticism, as long as it's constructive, not destructive. Basically, we just need some common sense and respect for the human spirit.

So, the question comes down to this; Do we still possess the fortitude to do what is morally right? That is a question for each of us to answer and for

our heirs to judge.

### About the Author

Tim Bryce is a writer and management consultant located in Palm Harbor, Florida. <http://www.phmainstreet.com/timbryce.htm> He can be contacted at: [timb001@phmainstreet.com](mailto:timb001@phmainstreet.com) Copyright © 2008 Tim Bryce. All rights reserved.

Source: <http://www.seoscores.com/articles>