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## Situational Ethics and the Art of Dishonesty, Cheating, and Lying

The cover of a *Success* magazine some years ago shouted out its lead story, “*The Art of Deceit.*” The story touted a new book leading the best-seller list in Asia (in Asia it’s called *American Thick Black Theory*, in America it’s called *Thick Face, Black Heart*). The young author had assembled witticisms from ancient Chinese military commanders into a manual for business people. Her book focused on how to create deceptive strategies to win in the marketplace.

Summing up her ideas, author Chin-Ning Chu says, “*I talk about the positive aspect of the Taoist philosophy ... and apply it to success. My book shows how winning is about self-conquering ... You bring forth this divinely ordained power within you.*”

People are paying \$1,000 a head to hear her stories; to learn how to win by deception. In fact, the list of her corporate clients looks like a *Who’s Who* of the Fortune 500.

I’m ashamed that she can make a dollar in the United States. I wish there was such a lack of interest in her methods that she would take a cue from our marketplace and peddle her wares elsewhere. But wishing will not make it so. If it isn’t this author it would be another. It seems there is always someone willing to compromise principals in order to make a buck, and when they find out how easy it is, they offer to teach their success formulas to others (for a fee of course).

Having learned the techniques of deception to win in the marketplace, is it a very big jump of faith to think that these people will turn their skills inward to their peers climbing the corporate ladder or their bosses? Not to me. I see back-stabbing deceptive practices in the workplace all the time. One wonders why there is even a need for training in this skill.



## “New Age” Management

Madame Chu, Shirley MacLaine, and others like them are trying to tell us that we are all gods. There are no absolute rights and wrongs. Our values are whatever we want them to be. This message is New Age through and through.

Chu’s own words condemn her. In the article, she referred to these methods as simply the application of Taoist philosophies. Taoism is a 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. religious work ascribed to Lao-Tzu. The philosophy is outlined in the Tao-Te-Ching. It focuses on mythology, spirit possessions, and the quest to become one with Tao (a metaphysical absolute derived from a personal god). Does this sound like the philosophy you want to run your business?

Chu’s comment about how winning is about self-conquering and bringing forth a divinely ordained power within you is more Eastern religion packaged for New Age believers. Nowhere in God’s word do you find a reference to you and I becoming a god. Regardless of the amount of self-conquering, the only divine nature in us comes from the Holy Spirit.

## Situational Ethics

Situational ethics is when people rationalize their behavior until they believe that what they are doing is right.

The first Biblical example comes in Genesis 3. Eve is lounging around the garden on a nice warm day when this crafty fellow comes along and asks her if she’s sure she shouldn’t eat from that tree in the middle of the garden. Eve says, “*God says I’ll die if I eat or touch that fruit.*” The crafty fellow says, “*Oh you won’t die, but if you eat it you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” Eve swallowed this rationale hook, line, and sinker. She talked herself into believing that it would be OK to disobey God. She wanted to be wise like God so she ate the condemned fruit and talked Adam into trying it. Thus, Adam and Eve became the first recorded case of the end justifying the means or situational ethics.

Another example of situational ethics is described in Proverbs 7. A father is teaching his son through a story of another young man. He described the scene, “*For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, and I saw among the naïve, I discerned amongst the youths, a young man lacking sense*” (Proverbs 7:6-7). The father is describing a man young not only in years but also in spiritual maturity. A man who has not yet made up his mind about the values he will hold in his life. It is clear from the story that the danger to the young man is his not having made up his mind about his values. Without his values to guide him he is open to compromise, and compromise is the first step to a situational ethic.



More recent examples of situational ethics in world history include men like Mussolini and Hitler, or the kids on the street who think it's alright to kill someone wearing the wrong color jacket who strays into their neighborhood.

Factory workers, managers, and executives are all prone to situational ethics. The factory worker teaches his child that it is wrong to lie, but when the boss says, "Did you forget to grease this machine?" he lies and says "No, not me boss!" because he doesn't want to get fired. An executive tells his child it is wrong to steal but brings home pencils and pens from the office.

## Results of Situational Ethics

Situational ethics; dishonesty, cheating, and lying because the ends justify the means occur in every company every day.

A company, a division, a work group, or even a single individual can be affected by a situational ethic. Whole companies are known for their results at any cost philosophies. Otherwise, good companies may have a division executive who puts so much pressure on his people to perform that they bend the rules and he looks the other way. Individuals may risk breaking rules just to get ahead.

In all these cases, people think that the end justifies the means. They think the situation allows them to make up new rules.

Allowed to continue, situational ethics will result in destructive behavior, poor performance, distrust, disloyalty, low levels of motivation, low productivity, and ultimately, poor profits.

## Biblical Ethics

Deception is being dishonest, it is purposely misleading people, and it is willfully cheating in the attempt to win. The Bible is exceptionally clear on the subject of deception. God was giving Moses laws to give to the people of Israel when He said, "*Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another*" (Lev 19:11). You cannot get much clearer than this. For those that chose to ignore His Laws, God promised wasting diseases, fevers, famine, and slavery to foreign nations. The reward God promised to those that followed His laws included bountiful harvests, peace in the land, success in battle, and fruitful families (Lev. 26).

Peter, writing to Christians said, "*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you his holy, so be holy in all you do...*" (I Peter 1:14-15). Peter is encouraging us to be set apart to God, to be morally pure.

In simple terms, a Biblical ethic is integrity. The root of the word integrity is *integer*, meaning "Intact, untouched, whole." Leopold Kronecker said, "*God made integers, all else is the work of*



man.” In his book *The Integrity Crisis*, author Warren Wiersbe wrote, “*God wants to make integers; Satan wants to make fractions.*” God wants us to be whole, Satan wants us to be divided.

Biblical ethics provide reliable standards that promote consistent ethical behavior, increasing productivity, trust, loyalty, high levels of motivation, and ultimately, higher profits.

## **Total Integrity Management**

Dr. Millard MacAdam, the creator of the *Total Integrity Management System*, likens Biblical ethics to a fence.

The first step is to dig deep ethical post holes. This requires that we know and understand what the Bible says about ethics.

The second step is to set your posts firmly in the soil. We need to memorize scripture that will guide primary ethical issues in our lives.

The third step is to select and install solid rails on our fence. These rails form the boundaries of our ethical behavior.

The fourth step is to check and maintain our ethical fence posts and rails on a regular basis. This last step is very important. Mom and Dad taught us it was wrong to lie, cheat, and steal yet it happens in business all the time.

Dr. MacAdam suggests that we establish PACT groups to help us check and maintain our ethical fence. PACT is an acronym for *Performance Accountability Commitment Team*. A PACT is a group of people who are committed to maintaining Biblical ethical standards, they agree to check each other, and they help each other through coaching and counseling.

## **Getting Started**

Dr. MacAdam identifies six steps that we can take to begin the process of establishing Biblical ethics in our lives.

***Vision/Mission.*** Develop and communicate to others a personal vision/mission statement. This vision/mission statement should include the values we will uphold in our lives.

***Assess Alignment.*** In a real soul-searching effort, assess how your current behavior aligns with the values set out in your vision/mission statement.

***Identify Alignment Problems.*** Stealing pencils from work is a symptom of an ethical problem. What is the real problem? Is it that you’re mad at the company? Do you think they owe you something? Make an effort to dig deep to get at ethical problems not just symptomatic behavior.



**Establish Improvement Goals.** Create clear character performance improvement goals just like you might for any other part of your business life. A character improvement goal might be to stop pilfering company assets, making personal long distance calls on the company telephone, or fudging your expense report.

**Monitor Results.** For the most part, an analysis of your results is up to you. You're on the honor system. Every few weeks you should review your goals and think about how you've done. Are you doing well? Did you slip a few times? Even better though is to discuss your successes and failures with someone you trust; a spouse or a close friend.

**Establish a PACT.** Seriously consider becoming part of a Performance Accountability Commitment Team. A PACT can help you through mutual support, coaching, and counseling. It's great to be able to ask a team member how they handled a particular problem. We don't have enough time to make all the mistakes ourselves so it's nice to be able to take advantage of others' learning.

I've stressed writing things down and telling others about your goals. There is a very simple reason. I want you to succeed! Educational surveys consistently show that if you write your goals down you have a 50% higher success rate than those who don't. If you tell someone about your goal your success rate is 75% higher. If you keep in touch with someone about your progress your success rate reaches 85%, and if you directly monitor your and others' progress the success rate reaches 90%. You deserve to be in the 90% group!

## One Final Thought

I doubt any of us would say that we want to be deceptive or that we want to lie and cheat. But deception, lying, and cheating are an everyday occurrence in business. We have become so desensitized that, too many, certain levels of deceit are acceptable. White lies are OK as long as the end justifies the means.

Not too long ago a young man was accused of dodging the draft, smoking pot, and cheating on his wife. He was elected President of the United States. There's no way around it; ethics are not as important as they used to be.

Jesus tells us, *"You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16 NAS).

When it is dark, turn on a small flashlight. See how even a small flashlight penetrates the darkness? You are a small light penetrating the darkness. Let your light shine before men!

