

Shakespeare, Ethics & Common Sense

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Editors's note: With all the recent goings on in Albany regarding the Speaker of the Assembly being indicted, and all the machinations from other elected officials on his resignation; some of us are left wondering out loud whether basic ethics in politics and business have been completely lost. We found this short article referencing ethics and what William Shakespeare might have thought:



If Shakespeare was alive today, he would already have penned a tragedy reflecting the lack of ethics as continuously reflected in procurement activities world-wide.

"To take or not to take -- that is the question. If I get discovered, I might suffer slings and arrows, however I might have amassed an outrageous fortune. There may be a sea of troubles it may cause, yet I can always (with lawyers) oppose and thereby end them!"

I have often had people come to me and ask how to proceed when a decision "path" is somewhat grey. I always ask them "How do you think this would play as a headline in a newspaper?" I always see a shocked look and they say, "Well, that would be taken out of context!"

The reality is no one asks for guidance on a potential ethical issue, unless their gut is already saying this shouldn't be done.

Yes, there are always two sides to every story, and the one that results in the best headlines usually wins; and this doesn't always mean it's the absolute truth, but perception is the reality.

To paraphrase Dr. Phil -- "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!"

Perception of reputation is the reality, and continuously individuals in both government and business flirt with the ethical boundaries. As Lady MacBeth discovered, you can't wash away the taint that results when it is perceived that ones' "hands are dirty".

Ethics is not rocket science. In most cases it is common-sense. If someone is faced with an "ethical dilemma", it implies that a problem exists that seems to defy a satisfactory solution. Yet most often times the dilemma is created by pressure from an outside source, and the inherent knowledge that it is not necessarily the "right" approach.

Procurement professionals need to embrace a standard that is above and beyond reproach and act as a role model within the business communities that they serve. It takes courage to be willing to withstand the slings and arrows of others, who may believe that cutting a few ethical corners is "expedient". In some cases, it may mean that you are willing to risk your job and position -- yet always remember if you lose your job because of an ethical stance, you have not lost your reputation or your career options in the procurement field, or any other field for that matter.

Most of us will inherently "know" if something crosses the ethical boundary. Go with your "gut."

If Shakespeare was alive today the denouement to his ethical tragedy would end thusly...

"Alas poor Yorick, I knew him well Horatio, a fellow of most infinite jest, of most excellent fancy, but we find him here after his misbegotten journey down the slippery slope of ethics -- alone, forgotten and vilified."

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