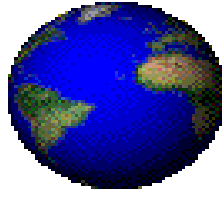


AUTHORITY



Career Concepts, Inc., experts in Career Transition/Management, Human Resource Consulting, Search, Executive Coaching, Training, Business Mentoring...www.careerconceptsinc.net

Volume 2, Issue 3

www.careerconceptsinc.net

July 2002

Your Company Ethics Testimony

Sharon Imperiale

How prepared as an organization are you to answer questions about your company's ethics policy? Recently, we have been asked how to avoid working for a company that may practice unethical business or accounting procedures. Job seekers are concerned about company sponsored investment plans, overstated profits that may cause future lay-offs, having to implement or administer non-traditional accounting methodologies, their marketability by having worked for a company in the headlines, etc. They wonder what they can ask and how, and will the interviewers be prepared to answer their questions? Some potential questions could include: Does the company have a written, formal ethics statement and an ethics office? Is there a formal and confidential channel to discuss concerns? Are concerns investigated and taken seriously? Who does the ethics office report to? Are employees able to challenge management decisions that they find questionable? Are employees oriented and trained on the company policy and on decision making and risk taking? Are the senior leaders viewed as ethical and honest and how do they walk the talk? How are violations dealt with and does it matter how senior the perpetrator is? Recently, one of our job search candidates asked some of these questions and, unfortunately, the interviewer was not prepared to answer them. That certainly does not mean that the company has issues; even if the questions were answered, issues could still exist. But there is some consolation in knowing that a prospective employer has taken the time to envision an ethical work environment and has an infrastructure that supports honesty and integrity, and tolerates employees who react to suspected improprieties. This is a new module to be added to interview training and all company interviewers should be prepared to satisfactorily answer these questions.

Career Concepts, Inc.
140 W. Germantown Pk., Suite 150
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462
800-214-7537

The Tale of Truth and Falsehood

Sharon Imperiale

Corporate America has spent an inordinate amount of time in the last decade establishing and internalizing corporate "core values." Values are at the center of discussions at meetings, interviews, board meetings, performance reviews, etc. Many are now wondering, is that "Talk Cheap?" With corporations and their respective officers taking a number to line up for the SEC and other regulatory bodies' investigations, distrust of Corporate America is growing. Have words like trust, honesty, integrity, openness—all corporate value descriptions—ceased to exist? I am reminded of a tale told to me many years ago about Truth and Falsehood. Once upon a time Truth, Falsehood, Fire and Water went on a long journey together. They came upon a treasure and decided that they should split the treasure four ways. Now we all know that Falsehood was deceptive and greedy. Falsehood wanted the treasure for himself. He told Water that Fire planned to burn the path and steal the treasure. He plotted with Water to put Fire out and he did, with a splash. Falsehood, as cunning as ever, also plotted with Truth, by telling Truth that Water had maliciously taken care of Fire so that he could have the treasure for himself. Appalled, Truth headed up the mountain with Falsehood, knowing of course that water cannot flow uphill. Once upon the mountain, Falsehood mocked Truth for being so gullible and trusting. He told Truth that he would destroy him and take the treasure for himself. Truth would not give up...they fought and fought, finally calling upon Wind to intercede. Wind, in all his wisdom, told Truth and Falsehood, that he could not declare a winner and that their destiny was to always struggle. He explained to Truth that many times Falsehood would win but Truth had to remain strong and rise and fight and rise and fight. Wind advised Truth to remain alert to the machinations of Falsehood. And so today, Truth and Falsehood still battle.

We cannot give up the fight to rebuild corporate trust and to believe that there are many corporations and CEOs that wear the shield of Truth. There are other words at the heart of values like discipline, accountability, courage, determination, etc. On July 9, 2002, President Bush addressed the nation on the rise of corporate scandals. He said, "Everyone in a company should live up to high standards. But the burden of leadership rightly belongs to the chief executive officer. CEOs set the ethical direction for their companies. They set a moral tone by the decisions they make, the respect they show their employees, and their willingness to be held accountable for their actions. They set a moral tone by showing their disapproval of other executives who bring discredit to the business world. Let's begin to hold each other more accountable, practice risk management and sound decision-making, especially in the delegation of authority." While the fight may seem never ending, Truth always wins more battles than Falsehood, especially with a good executive coach like Wind on his side.

Happy Birthday, USA!

Sharon Imperiale

As we celebrated another birthday of our nation, our government and the media reminded us of our continued vulnerability through warnings of potential terrorism. The events of September 11th hold constant in our minds and hearts. The fourth verse of *America, the Beautiful* is sung:

*"O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed His Grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!"*

Even as we question the intentions of our forefathers as they delineated the separation of church and state we remain one nation and live the patriots' dream. We are Americans through all the controversy and diversity that that embodies!

The Balance of Strength and Weakness

Sharon Imperiale

When interviewing, it is our tendency to focus on explaining our gaps, lack of specific experience, weaknesses, etc. In fact, most prospective job applicants spend too much time coming up with a weakness and trying to answer the infamous, “How would you describe one or two weaknesses of yours?” In order to effectively answer the question, it is important that we understand the concept of strength and weakness. Employers hire people based on their strengths and potential to positively contribute to the performance of the organization. They want workers that know how to maximize their strengths and are adaptable to change. Being adaptable to change can mean that an organization may need individuals to stretch, trying to better balance their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses. The key to change is knowing what weaknesses matter. You cannot change everything at once so a concerted effort to focus on changing the things that matter most is strategic. In effect, knowing where to focus your attention to improve your performance is your biggest strength. We do not advocate that you can survive on your known strengths alone. That would probably bore most of us and thus decrease our performance. We would have nothing to work towards. We do advocate being able to articulate your strengths to demonstrate your fit with the company or position where you are applying. If you cannot communicate on the phone, do not apply for a customer service job. This is a weakness that matters. Remember that weakness is not a bad thing. It is a developmental opportunity. That’s the key...if you are motivated to change, to hone your skills, to develop weaknesses, then you will. This is the basic concept of performance management. Motivating others to improve the skills that are holding the individual back from succeeding. Let’s turn that inside out: self-performance management is knowing what is needed to perform to the desired capacity, knowing where to improve to accomplish that, and motivating yourself to make the changes needed. You may need help and a reasonable expectation is that you will have a supervisor or coach to help you along. So what is your weakness?

For example, mine is not always knowing where to end an article, but I have been working on that based on feedback from readers. I realize the importance of brevity and articulation, and am trying to improve each time. I welcome continued coaching in this area of my performance but I also try not to be too focused on past performance to the detriment of future performance.

An Appreciative Approach to “Help Rejecting Advice Seeking” (HRAS) Behavior

Jacqueline Savoy & Patreece Thompson, MD

Let’s face it. You are a “helper” type of person. You entered your field, human resources, consulting or management, on some level to help others to grow, to help them get the job done, or to help them improve in some fundamental way. When people actively seek our opinion or recommendation, we are gratified, honored, and enthusiastic. It is no wonder then, that a profound sense of rejection, frustration and being set up assails us when we are the recipients of “Help Rejecting Advice Seeking” (HRAS for short) behavior.

The person comes to you for help because of your expertise. Once you have taken time to analyze his/her situation and proudly provide your assessment and solution, he/she immediately tells you why it won’t work, or why he/she will not follow it. In the worst case scenario, he/she may totally discredit your recommendation, saying they’ve received better advice from a close relative or friend. After such encounters, you usually feel beat up, drained, and harassed as if someone attacked you physically as well as mentally. Dread sets in at the thought of future encounters. This can be a source of stress particularly if you are in an important, long-term relationship with that person as client, colleague or employee.

How can you cope? The most important step is to appreciate that this person actually has the solution for his/her problem. Your job is to support him/her in that discovery and not to provide the answer. The following situation is an example of this.

Merry sought assistance in job search strategies because she was not getting many interviews with her own efforts. Her consultant suggested that the best approach was networking. Merry insisted on researching want ads, saying that networking never worked for her. After one or two sessions, the consultant realized that she was working with someone who exhibited HRAS behaviors. This was confirmed when the consultant shared her perceptions and observations in a neutral way and Merry replied that everyone told her that!

The consultant altered her strategy. First, she realized that Merry’s interaction with her was not personal so that she was able to feel less stressed in their meetings.

She then built rapport with Merry by finding areas where she could support her strategies and communicate that she trusted her judgment rather than give direct advice. Therefore, when Merry asked her opinion on a cover letter (that she had already mailed to prospective employers), rather than immediately criticize it, the consultant asked Merry’s opinion. Merry expressed pride with her letter and the consultant joined her in the positive effect. She then offered a few alternatives (not recommendations) for Merry to choose from for future reference. In subsequent interactions, the consultant solicited Merry’s ideas, reflections and solutions. She focused on having Merry describe times when she was successful in solving similar issues. The relationship became more collaborative. Merry’s frequency of interviews increased and the positive outcome occurred when she was hired, ironically, by responding to an ad.

In summary, when one encounters HRAS behaviors, these are the steps to take:

1. Maintain objectivity and don’t take the behavior personally. Most likely, the person interacts with everyone in the same manner.
2. If you want, and can be neutral about it, share your observation of your experience with the person, and see if they validate your findings.
3. Separate the person from the behavior. Every now and then you may also exhibit HRAS.
4. If the relationship is important to you, recognize that you (not the other person) need to change your approach.
5. Realize the person has the solution to the problem – you simply need to help him/her get in touch with past successes.
6. Suppress the urge to give advice. Present any insights/recommendations/advice as simple observations and possibilities (no matter how brilliant) in a neutral dispassionate tone. Check for understanding and validation.
7. Rather than seek clarity around the situation, have the person define what he/she really wants to do and what his/her wishes/expectations/hopes are (which is not for you to answer).
8. Always respectfully support the person’s desire to make autonomous decisions. If he/she persists in asking for advice, provide possible alternatives, and tell him/her to choose.

The next time you are caught in an HRAS situation, remember these steps and free yourself of the burden of being the solution finder.