

What Happened To Integrity?

Integrity is defined as “steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code”, according to www.dictionary.com. Synonyms: candor, forthrightness, goodness, honesty, honorableness, incorruptibility, incorruption, principle, probity, purity, rectitude, righteousness, sincerity, straightforwardness, uprightness, virtue. So, what happened to people’s level of integrity in the job-seeking market and in the day-to-day workplace?

Is the competition for new careers that fierce? Are we, as employers so critical of candidates that we make them believe they need to “bend the truth” in order to have a better chance of securing that ideal role than candidate number two? Take a recent example in a search we conducted. At the final step of the search, we conducted a thorough reference check, including educational credentials. Lo and behold, the university in question told us, “sorry, but they have a number of credits earned towards their Bachelors degree, but it is incomplete”.

When we reported this back to the hiring company, they in turn rescinded their offer of employment to the candidate. Why? As the hiring manager said, “It’s not because they didn’t complete their degree, because that’s not a finite requirement here. The fact that they lied about it speaks to their integrity, or lack thereof. We don’t want that type of person working for us.”

Here’s an interesting observation as well. I sat in on a meeting last week with a team of managers and their Director. The Director has over 110 indirect reports. On three different occasions, she prefaced a comment with “I wouldn’t tell my employee this, but”... and proceeded to tell us about one employee’s habitual lateness, another’s propensity for using foul language in the office, and another of her employees that had confidentially shared with her boss that she had once had a nervous breakdown. Does this type of manager think others will respect her for passing on comments like these?

In another case, an HR professional told of a situation where he had a new HR Manager join his company. Feeling comfortable with this new colleague, he confidentially shared information regarding an employee discipline situation with her in the hopes of receiving the benefit of their opinion as to action to take. The next thing he knew, he was called into the President’s office asking why he shared this information with someone else, when it was his responsibility to sort things out. Needless to say, there was a breach of trust that probably won’t ever be resolved between these two managers, let alone the company President’s feelings about this situation.

We also read about integrity in many company mission statements and annual reports. Didn’t Worldcom, Enron and others shake up this myth too?

The bottom line is, take the word integrity seriously; otherwise, others won’t take you at your word. This one reverts back to an old saying, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

Wolf is President, Wolf Gugler & Associates Limited, specializing in executive search and management appraisals for hardware and housewares Retailers and their Suppliers with offices in Canada and the U.S. He can be reached at (888) 848-3006 or via email to wolf@wolfgugler.com. Web site: www.wolfgugler.com