



“serving those who serve us”

June 2007 - Newsletter

Are You A “Boiling Frog” in Your Workplace?

There’s an old folk tale about a frog that hops out immediately after being thrown into a pot of boiling water. However, when placed in a pot of cold water that is being heated gradually, that same frog fails to sense the rising temperature and slowly cooks to death!

Unfortunately, many of us gradually fall into patterns of workplace misconduct that begin as seemingly innocent behaviors. Compare, for example, accidentally putting a pencil from work in your pocket (and hopefully returning it!) to intentional pilfering. This latter situation is whimsically described in the Johnny Cash tune entitled “One Piece at a Time” which describes an assembly line worker who acquires a fancy car one piece at a time by stealing small components over many years. It’s a cute song that will bring a smile to your face, but in reality it’s a ballad about *stealing*!

Researchers from the Carnegie Mellon School of Business recently revealed that under certain conditions, any of us can fall into a pattern of unethical behavior that escalates slowly and is apt to go unnoticed and unreported. When such acts become routine, both perpetrators and observers become invested in remaining quiet. In fact, in a recent survey of 418 employees conducted by the World of Work Institute, 19% indicated that they are faced with ethical decisions on a *daily basis*. These include behaviors such as:

- Overlooking supervisor or co-worker inappropriate behavior out of fear of receiving retaliatory discipline or a complaint in the personnel file.
- Covering up for a co-worker in an attempt to “help” (this is really “enabling”)
- Conducting personal business during work
- Running an occasional personal letter through the employer’s postage meter
- Fabricating an excuse for job performance deficiencies
- Booking off sick when not
- Actively participating in the workplace “gossip chain”
- Inappropriate Internet surfing on one’s work computer

Integrity has been defined as “doing the right thing when no one is watching.” If doing the right thing at work is a problem for you, we invite you to contact your Employee Assistance Program to discuss your personal challenges in a helpful, confidential and non-judgmental atmosphere.