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By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

From crooked politicians to business professionals, and even, clergy, personal codes of honor or ethics seem to be archaic to almost irrelevant. Professional associations such as the National Realtors' Association to the American Bar Association have their own ethics code or professional conduct rules. New members read, and in some cases, take an oath to uphold these ethics. Yet unethical realtors and lawyers still exist in these professions.

The answer to why there are unethical people is simple. Human behavior cannot be legislated. Humans must, by their own free will, have their own moral compass to always lead them in ethical behaviors.

Philosophers since early times recognized human behavior. They sought to explain, and then to enlighten, others about how to behave, how to treat their fellow human beings and how to live an ethical life. Let's time travel back to 399 BC to a well-known Greek philosopher and his "got ethics."

Socrates is known for willingly drinking hemlock because his fellow Greek citizens tried him for corrupting the youth of Athens and for failing to recognize the "State Gods." He is also known for his Socratic dialogue and for the "Three Filters" Test. The three filters, in reality, were questions to keep individuals ethical first in their thoughts because individuals have 100 percent control over what they say:

**#1 - Is what I say kind?** Socrates understood emotional intelligence long before Daniel Goleman.

**#2 - Is what I say truthful?** By speaking the truth with kindness, people are not engaged in rumormongering, or spreading what is now called, "fake news."

**#3 - Is what I say necessary?** How often for our own self-validation we must have the first, middle and last words? The old adage of "think before you speak" probably had roots in Socrates's third filter.

What would happen if individuals in all professions, from parents to CEOs, embraced these three filters as they interacted with their children and their employees? Would the homes and workplaces be better places? Imagine your own business. How often are unkind, untruthful and unnecessary words spoken?

For me, I know the third filter is the most difficult to consistently practice. Having mental thoughts, usually based on emotions, come to a screeching halt before I speak happens with great frequency. Many have witnessed social media as a place where this third filter is rarely practiced.

Now let us time travel forward 2,125 years to 1726 AD. Benjamin Franklin is writing his 13 virtues aka “got ethics” along with their precepts. He also creates a tool (worksheet) and process from which to adhere to those virtues while monitoring his progress each day of the week:

## How you behave as an ethical person is how you will behave as an ethical salesperson.

**1 TEMPERANCE:** Eat not to dullness. Drink not to elevation.

**Question:** Would the U.S. have an obesity problem if more people followed this simple virtue? Temperance is about moderation and self-restraint. Franklin used it for eating and drinking. Yet, there are many other behaviors that require self-restraint.

After debriefing several hundred Attribute Index assessments that look to the external and internal decision-making processes, one of the 78 core attributes is “self-control.” This attribute, or talent, is usually in the bottom 10% of over 90% of those I have assessed. Self-control is essentially self-restraint.

**2 SILENCE:** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling conversation.

**Question:** How much more productive would ALL communication be if people adopted this virtue? This virtue alone would eliminate not only all those filler words such as “like,” but, more importantly, gossiping at the water cooler.

**3 ORDER:** Let all your things have their places. Let each part of your business have its time.

**Question:** Would you need time management if you followed this virtue?

**4 RESOLUTION:** Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.

**Question:** What would happen to your to-do list if you practice this virtue daily?

**5 FRUGALITY:** Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself, i.e., waste nothing.

**Question:** How would your bank account reflect this advice?

**6 INDUSTRY:** Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions.

**Question:** What actions do you, or your employees, perform that are unnecessary?

**7 SINCERITY:** Use no hurtful deceit. Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

**Question:** How would this virtue positively impact the culture of your business or even yourself personally?

**8 JUSTICE:** Wrong none, by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

**Question:** Does this virtue fly in the face of “Do whatever is necessary to get the sales or order?”

**9 MODERATION:** Avoid extremes. Forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

**Question:** What actions, if restrained, would help to moderate or diminish negative behaviors?

**10 CLEANLINESS:** Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation.

**Question:** If habits are attitudes of thoughts (Zig Ziglar), then what unclean habits of thought do you carry each day in your interactions?

**11 TRANQUILITY:** Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

**Question:** What would happen if you focused only on what you could control, would you be avoiding what you could not control? Would that avoidance provide you more tranquility each day?

**12 CHASTITY:** Rarely use venery, but, for health or offspring; never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation.

**Question:** In today’s world, would sexual harassment be non-existent if people abided by Franklin’s precept for chastity?

**13 HUMILITY:** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

**Question:** As both Socrates and Jesus were considered wise individuals, what would happen to the quality of one’s interactions if he or she was more humble and less ego-driven? Just imagine how this would increase sales by leaving the “ego at the door?”

Finally, the third time leap is to 2010 when Harry Kraemer publishes his book *From Values to Action: The Four Principles of Values-Based Leadership*. Kraemer identifies four principles—think ethics—along with their precepts on how to behave as an ethical leader.:

**Self-Reflection:** The ability to reflect and identify what you stand for, what your values are and what matters most to you.

**Question:** What do you stand for? What are your values? What matters most to you?

**Balance:** The ability to see situations from multiple perspectives, including differing viewpoints and to gain a holistic understanding.

**Question:** Simply speaking, how emotionally intelligent are you? Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand another's perspective, recognize and understand one's own perspective and then manage both.

**True Self-Confidence:** More than mastery of certain skills, true self confidence enables you to accept yourself as you are, recognizing your strengths and your weaknesses and focusing on continuous improvement.

**Question:** Do you actually know your strengths? From again working with hundreds of coaching clients, well over 90% do not know what they do well.

**Genuine Humility:** The ability to never forget who you are, to appreciate the value of every person and to treat everyone respectfully.

**Question:** Are you a truly humble person? Socrates was because he treated his fellow Greek citizens with respect by drinking the hemlock. Humility is an ethical behavior.

When I wrote *Be the Red Jacket in a Sea of Gray Suits: The Keys to Unlocking Sales Success*, the first chapter is about ethics or values. How you behave as an ethical person is how you will behave as an ethical salesperson.

Do you have your own code of ethics or Values Statement? Over 20 years ago I penned my own "got ethics" and have them on my office wall to this day:

*By being the trusted authority, ADVANCED SYSTEMS' first commitment is to work WITH our clients while understanding their needs by delivering exceptional value that continually strives to render a positive return on the clients' investments of energy, money and time to our results-driven solutions. Our second commitment is to all individuals by recognizing, promoting and respecting their needs. Our final commitment is that our values of acknowledgement, creativity, faith, gratitude, intelligence, innovation, intuition, learning, patience,*

*quality work, reflection, respect, risk taking and thoughtfulness will be present in every interaction with our clients and even non-clients.*

Just think for a moment how much better not only the business world would be, but also, the whole world, if everyone "got ethics" and, more importantly, demonstrated those ethical

behaviors every day. Yes, just imagine the possibilities. **N**

*Leanne Hoagland-Smith is the Clarity Strategist, solving people and process problems. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she turns tomorrow's goals into today's results. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.*