

CHANGING AN ENTIRE INDUSTRY ONE PERSON AT A TIME

By Rick Boxx

Have you observed practices or policies within your industry you do not like, things that seem wrong or inappropriate, yet they persist because “everybody does them”? What would it take, do you think, to make changes and correct these questionable practices?

In Ken Eldred's book, *The Integrated Life*, he addresses circumstances like this, offering an illustration of some men that took a stand against unethical business tactics. Eldred tells about two London grocers in the Middle Ages that decided the practice common of that day – using dishonest scales and weights in measuring meat and other food items – was unacceptable to God.

What these men did was simple: They began testing and verifying each other's weighing scales and holding one another accountable for adhering to God's standards as expressed in the Bible, rather than bowing to the prevailing the standards of the day.

This was a bold move, even for that day, one that could easily have resulted in their small companies being forced out of business by unscrupulous competitors. Instead, God honored their commitment to integrity, and their faithfulness led to the formation of The Livery Companies, trade associations that have continued to this day and still hold their members to high ethical standards.

Why were these grocery store owners so determined to combat cheating customers through inaccurate measuring practices? They may have had numerous reasons, but one verse from the Bible, Proverbs 11:1, clearly teaches, *“The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.”* The men took this scriptural passage to mean exactly what it said and acted accordingly.

To avoid any confusion, or a contention that this verse was taken out of context, the same message is stated in slightly different ways elsewhere in Proverbs:

“Honest scales and balances are from the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making” (Proverbs 16:11).

“Differing weights and differing measures – the Lord detests them both” (Proverbs 20:10).

“The Lord detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him” (Proverbs 20:23).

A more general principle the men may have considered is the so-called “Golden Rule.” As Jesus told His followers, *“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12). The grocers might have realized they would not want to be cheated by someone using scales that measured goods they received inaccurately. But the bottom line for them was not profit – it was recognizing that ultimately they were accountable to God.

Perhaps the issues you have observed in your industry do not involve improper measuring practices. Maybe they involve promises and commitments that are not fulfilled, improper billing for products or services, or not paying financial obligations in a timely manner. You might think of other examples. But let me ask:

What would happen if you and some of your industry peers banded together to change or raise the ethical standards of your industry? Would you have the courage to do so?

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CBMC INTERNATIONAL: Jim Firnstahl, President
2850 N. Swan Road, Suite 160 ▪ Tucson, Arizona 85712 ▪ U.S.A.
TEL.: 520-334-1114 ▪ E-MAIL: mmanna@cbmcint.org

Web site: www.cbmcint.org Please direct any requests or change of address to: jmarple@cbmcint.org

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you, as is asked at the beginning of this "Monday Manna," ever observed practices or policies within your industry that you do not like, things that seem wrong or inappropriate, yet continue because "everybody does them"? If so, give an example.
2. What do you think about participating in unethical or questionable practices when they clearly are wrong? Is it hard to "go against the flow"? Why or why not?
3. In the case cited, two men in the grocery business agreed to take a stand together against improper measuring practices, holding one another accountable. What would be the value of more than one person acting on their convictions and supporting one another?
4. During the course of your workday, does it ever occur to you to consider whether what you are doing for a customer or client is what you would like them to do for you? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 10:9, 11:3, 14:5, 17:23, 19:5, 20:17, 20:25; Matthew 5:37; Mark 12:30-31