

Toldot 2013 - Business Ethics Part 2

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on November 2, 2013

This week we are continuing our series on Business Ethics and work related issues. Last week I said you could spend 150,000 hours of your life at work. Well someone here who is better in math than I am, said that can't be true. I had heard it said on the radio so I thought it had to be true, but it's not. Still the figure is somewhere more than 90,000 hours, or 40% of your life, but no matter how many hours it is, our work in many ways defines us. It identifies who we are, what we do, and often what we stand for as individuals. And if you were here last week, or read the sermon on line, you may remember that I spoke about finding your calling. We use the word "calling" in several different ways. We talked about the way that Gd "called" to Noah and to Abraham. It does not mean simply that Gd spoke to them; it means that Gd called to them to do great things with their lives. But that calling did not necessarily make life easier for them – in fact it presented them with greater challenges and they had to work harder. But, in responding to Gd's call they each found their own "calling"- they tapped into a well spring of gifts and talents that Gd put in them. And that gave them a sense of purpose and satisfaction and that made them happy. And that's what we all want as well. We think that the goal is to make enough money so that we don't have to work. But all research shows that people who are engaged in meaningful work that taps into their talents, and is appreciated by others, are generally happier than people who have no sense of purpose – even if they have a lot of money. That's why it is so important to find something that really feels like a calling; work that makes a difference.

Well, today I want to take this one step further and talk about another level of calling. How do you express your calling to others in the workplace? What is the tone you set in the relationships you share?

This week's Torah portion describes the scene where Jacob dresses up as his hairy brother, Esau, to get the blessings of their father. He enters into Isaac's tent carrying a plate of delicious food that was prepared by his mother and he says, "Abba, please sit up and let me give you something to eat." And his father, Yitzhak suspects that something is off, something is wrong. He asks to feel his sons arms and he utters the phrase, "Ha Kol, Kol Ya'akov – The voice is the voice of Ya'akov." "Va-Yadayim, Yaday Ei-sav" "But the hands are the hands of Esau." And Rashi explains that the "voice of Yaakov" has nothing to do with the sound of his voice. The twins actually sounded exactly alike. It had to do with his manner of speaking: the words that he chose; the tone that he used. It was pleasant, kind and gentle, it was a voice he could trust." And Yitzhak said to himself, "I was expecting the voice of my son Eisav, but this is the voice of my son Yaakov, perhaps something is a miss." But Isaac blesses him anyway. But still we wonder about what exactly Isaac heard...

We all have a voice – a voice by which we are known. It is our manner of speech; it is the tone that those around us expect from us. And we want it to be a voice of trust, of integrity and honesty. So we need to be conscious of both how we speak; the tone- whether it is harsh or calming, abrupt or patient, as well as the words we choose,

especially if we want to establish and reaffirm trust. And we have to be consistent in our personal message; that people know they are going to get the same you, with the same consistently high standards day in and day out.

Business today is all about trust. In today's business world, business is relational, not transactional. Relationships really matter; in fact, as we have come to know, in business, relationships, relationships based on trust, matter most. In fact, smart people in sales and marketing will tell you that the customer really pays you in three ways: In money, of course, but also in trust and in referrals. And it's only if you have the last two that your business is going to grow. So every transaction has long lasting implications for the future in ways you cannot anticipate. There is a ripple effect that goes on and on. And if that trust is broken, it's very, very hard to get back, even years later.

So part of this is being mindful of the way your voice sounds, your demeanor. But the larger part is the meaning, the integrity behind the words on which the trust is truly based, because that's what lasts. So the Torah deliberately gives us insight into what Isaac is thinking (we actually read his mind) to draw attention to this issue of trust. Jacob may have gotten away with it in the short run; he may have fooled his father, but that lack of trust is going to come back and haunt him again and again. He is going to have a hard time trusting and being trusted for the rest of his life. He will go on to marry into a family where his father-in-law deceives him. He will go on to raise children who will lie to him and deceive him and even do the same to each other.

In business, and in life, in ALL relationships, trust is an emotional commitment; it's not easily given and it can never be taken for granted, even in longstanding relationships. Getting people to give you their trust is not easy, and when it's gone it's very hard, sometimes impossible to get back.

Very often, when we are faced with difficult decisions, we struggle to know what is right. It's at times like that, in the workplace and in all relationships, that we must look past short term solutions and quick fixes and ask ourselves if we are willing to put in the work, the labor, the time and energy, to keep trust. It's not just good business; it's a good way to live our lives. Love and trust go hand in hand. So on one hand we need to be the kind of people others can trust. But on the other hand, we must recognize that people make mistakes. Good people make honest mistakes that challenge our trust. We need to be mindful of this fact before we withdraw our trust, before we allow suspicion to strain an important relationship. Trust is easily broken, but, in a sense, we can determine just how fragile that trust really is. We can push ourselves to a wider perspective that will allow us to be more trusting, particularly in the relationships that matter most.

As we learn to trust others, we learn to be more accepting, not just of them, but of ourselves. We pray for the confidence, the patience, the love and understanding to trust in others and to be the kind of people in whom others will place their trust as well...