



Bud Nippin'

Last month I wrote about weeding your Ethitanical garden. I urged you to weed them as they appear; so they don't become embedded systemically. It makes good sense from a gardening perspective, and is biblical as well. The Bible is rich with metaphors and often uses those associated with the land. Christ often used these examples to communicate His message to the people in language they understood. I received several comments from readers regarding the last article and was encouraged to hear them say what they read "made sense" to them.

In their sermons and lessons, pastors and teachers today also seek to employ the use of effective communication techniques. For example, pastors are schooled in the correct use of "homilies" or homiletics. I don't pretend to know all the academic foundations or tenets of homiletics, but I know that it is only effective when it improves our understanding of the Scripture and the lesson being taught.

What does this have to do with ethics, you might ask? Good question. We must employ that same diligence in communicating our ethics to the workplace. We do not need to spend thousands of dollars and man hours to develop codes of ethics that have been "wordsmithed" by a committee who spent days laboring over each word.

So how can we employ a simple, straightforward method of communication when dealing with today's ethical issues in the marketplace? Here are a few examples:

In January's article, we said weeds need to be quickly weeded out of the gardens before they take root. Simple, right? Well, let me demonstrate what I call "over communicating." This is a paraphrase from a writer addressing the same basic issue:

"Thus it happens in the affairs of State, for when the evils that arise have been foreseen, they can be quickly redressed. But when they have been permitted to grow in a way that everyone can see them, there is no longer a remedy."

The above is a quote extracted from *The Prince*, by Nicolo Machiavelli, 1515. Machiavelli, regarding the analogy for treatment of illness, goes on to say:

"...The medicine is no longer in time because the malady has become incurable; for it happens in this, as the physicians say it happens in hectic fever, that in the beginning of the malady it is easy to cure but difficult to detect, but in the course of time, not having been either detected or treated in the beginning, it becomes easy to detect but difficult to cure."

This type of communication is not what is commonly needed in effectively communicating ethics in the workplace. In lecture groups, as an exercise, I often have the participants craft codes of ethics. And, more often than not, they come back with wording similar to what we read from Machiavelli. We then spend the next hour trying to decipher what was actually being said.

At the end of the discussion I then offer them an alternative. I don't quote Machiavelli, but rather I offer them wisdom from one reliable source in the field of "philosophy." I introduce them to whom one writer calls the "Dalai Lama of Appalachia, the Guru of Good, the Soothsayer of the South, and the Buddha of the Blue Ridge"—Barney Fife. And what would Barney say when he caught someone guilty of a minor infraction of the law:

"Andy, you have to nip this thing in the bud! We can't let him get away with this! Nip it! Nip it in the bud!"

Simple, right?

The whole point of this article is to challenge you to keep formal codes of ethics or value systems in terms that are simple and understandable by the people for whom they are intended. In reality, we don't need Machiavelli or Mayberry. The Scriptures are the one standard by which anyone who claims to speak for God should be tested, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20, KJV).

If anyone is teaching you ethics, and they are not using the Scripture, beware. *Sola Scriptura.*

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