



talking about...

October 2011

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Moral and Constructive Business

"It's not personal, Sonny. It's strictly business."

... Michael Corleone in the movie, "The Godfather"

How many times have you heard someone say something similar to the above quote from The Godfather? I know I have heard it many times over the years and often as a justification for some action that is clearly going to cause someone some harm.

Hearing Michael Corleone's quote again recently, raised a question for me. How well are moral issues dealt with in organisations today?

The idea of moral action involves taking decisions and acting in a way that minimises harm to those involved. Moral dilemmas occur when we have to weigh situations where someone is going to get hurt regardless of the choice we make. The question at stake is who will get hurt and how much will they be hurt. The situation in "Sophie's Choice" where a mother has to choose which one of her children will die is a classic example of a moral dilemma. The resolution of a moral dilemma is often very challenging and can be very painful to the person who has to make a choice.

In the 1980's Frederick Bird and James A. Waters looked closely at ethics in business and their work seems as relevant today as it did then. Bird and Waters found that it was very challenging in a business environment to act in a highly moral way. They found that raising moral questions within an organisation posed three key threats to it:

1. A threat to harmony
2. A threat to efficiency
3. A threat to the image of power

These threats can be seen as potentially impeding the authority of the organisation's leadership and its profitability. In other words, for an organisation to do well, it is important that employees not cause any disruption and simply get on with the job. To do otherwise is a threat. This view often makes it very difficult to raise conversations about moral concerns within organisations.

No doubt there has been significant attempts to address the moral questions found in organisations, mainly through regulation and cultural change programs. However, it is also fair to say that these attempts have not been overly successful. A case in point is the ongoing extent of bullying in the workplace, where often a blind eye is turned to bullies.

Although the majority of people in most organisations are rarely making life and death decisions, they are constantly making choices where someone will be disadvantaged, hurt or even lose their job. Issues such as equal opportunity, harassment, safety and so on are part of the everyday landscape in organisations. These concerns are in counterpoint with

the constant drive for profit - a diminishing of which can be seen as harming the shareholder.

Michael Corleone's quote speaks to a way of allowing the person who is hurting someone to feel ok about their actions. It is a way of saying, "Heh, don't blame me. It is not my fault. It is just business. I have to do this." It is also a means of shirking the responsibility of causing someone pain.

Bird and Waters found that, for organisations to maintain their moral compass, there had to be ongoing and frequent conversations about the morals of the business. This allows for those involved to recognise the impact of their decisions in a way that is more aligned with the organisation espouse values. It also can encourage individuals to take greater responsibility for their decisions and actions.

In many ways, it seems the main priority of conversation in organisations today relates to financial concerns and outcomes. There seems to be comparatively few discussions on how to resolve moral dilemmas. Maybe the balance needs to change.

"What you want to be eventually, that you must be every day; and by and by the quality of your deeds will get down into your soul."

... Frank Crane (1873-1948) US actor & director

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9504 3558

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au



Talking About LinkedIn

We now have over EIGHTY people participating in our LinkedIn conversations and you are invited to join in. Each month, we will be discussing our newsletters in more depth and also regularly invite you to consider other questions that we pose. You can find us at <http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=3716581>

A Bit of Storytelling!

Another one plucked randomly from the internet. Not sure if it is true but it is not hard to believe it could be. Or is that just me! ...

Tipper Gore discovered that her husband's great great uncle, Gunther Gore, was hanged for horse stealing and train robbery in Tennessee in 1889.

The only existing photograph shows him standing on the gallows. On the back of the picture is this inscription: "Gunther Gore; horse thief. Sent to Tennessee Prison 1883, escaped 1887. Robbed the Tennessee Flyer six times. Caught by Pinkerton detectives, convicted and hanged in 1889."

After letting President Clinton's large staff of professional image consultants review this discovery, they took the following actions to assist Al's campaign to become our next president. They decided to crop Gunther's picture, scan it in as an enlarged image, and edited it with image processing software so that all that is seen in the final picture is a head shot. Along with this enhanced photo, the accompanying biographical sketch was sent to the Associated Press:

"Gunther Gore was a famous cattleman in early Tennessee history. His business empire grew to include acquisition of valuable equestrian assets and intimate dealings with the Tennessee railroad company. Beginning in 1883, he devoted several years of his life to service at a government facility, finally taking leave to resume his business enterprise with the railroad. In 1887 he was a key player in a vital investigation run by the renowned Pinkerton Detective Agency. In 1889 Gunther regrettably died suddenly during an important civic function held in his honor when the platform on which he was standing collapsed."

"Tomorrow is the most important thing in life. Comes into us at midnight very clean. It's perfect when it arrives and it puts itself in our hands. It hopes we've learned something from yesterday."

... John Wayne (1907-1971) US Actor

Our Web Site

More articles and information about our work can be found at our web site, www.talkingabout.com.au.

Thanks to the good work of Ryan Chittenden, our web site has recently undergone, and is still undergoing, a transformation. We invite you to take a look.

Subscribing to talking about

Do you know others who might be interested in reading our e-zine? If so please feel free to send them a copy or ask them to register by sending

an e-mail to newsletter@talkingabout.com.au.

To unsubscribe from this e-zine, simply reply to this e-mail with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject area.

Copyright © 2011
Talking About Pty Ltd
ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9504 3558

