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*“IF THE GAME RUNS SOMETIMES AGAINST  
US AT HOME, WE MUST HAVE PATIENCE  
TILL LUCK TURNS, AND THEN WE SHALL  
HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY OF WINNING  
BACK THE PRINCIPLES WE HAVE LOST,  
FOR THIS IS A GAME WHERE PRINCIPLES  
ARE AT STAKE.”*

*—THOMAS JEFFERSON*

*COMMERCE WITHOUT MORALITY.*

*—THE FOURTH OF  
GANDHI’S SEVEN SINS*



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# CHAPTER ONE

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VALUES FROM THE SANDBOX  
*Everything we need for today's marketplace  
we learned as kids.*



**G**rowing up poor in rural Idaho, I was taught to play by the rules. Be tough, be competitive, give the game all you have—but do it fairly. They were simple values that formed a basis for how families, neighborhoods, and communities behaved. My two brothers and I had something in common with the kids on the upscale side of the tracks: a value system learned in homes, sandboxes, playgrounds, classrooms, Sunday schools, and athletic fields.

Those values have not lost their legitimacy simply because I am now part of the business world, yet they are missing in segments of today's marketplace. Wall Street overdoses on greed. Corporate lawyers make fortunes by manipulating contracts

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and finding ways out of signed deals. Many CEOs enjoy princely lifestyles even as stakeholders lose their jobs, pensions, benefits, investments, and trust in the American way.

Cooked ledgers, look-the-other-way auditors, kickbacks, flimflams of every sort have burrowed their way into modern corporate economics. Many outside corporate directors bask in perks and fees, concerned only in keeping Wall Street happy and their fees intact.

In the past 20 years, investor greed has become obsessive and a force with which CEOs must deal. Public companies are pushed for higher

and higher quarterly performances lest shareholders rebel. Less-than-honest financial reports are tempting when the market penalizes flat performances and candid accounting. Wall Street appears more comfortable with the lucrative lie.

Although I am focusing much of my advice on business-oriented activities, the world I know best, these principles are applicable to professionals of all stripes and at all levels, not to mention parents, students, and people of goodwill everywhere.

In the 2004 U.S. presidential election, morality issues influenced more votes than any other factor, but a Zogby International poll revealed that the single biggest moral issue in voters' minds was not abortion or same-sex marriage. Greed/materialism far and away was cited as the most urgent moral problem facing America today. (A close second was poverty/economic justice.)

In nearly a half century of engaging in some sort of business enterprise, I have seen it all. I keep asking myself, perhaps naively so, why lying, cheating, misrepresentation, and weaseling on deals have ingrained themselves so deeply in society? Could it be that material success is now viewed to be more virtuous than how one obtains that success?

## Playing by the Rules

One might even be tempted to believe that the near-sacred American Dream is unobtainable without resorting to moral mischief and malfeasance. Nonsense. Cutting ethical corners is the antithesis of the American Dream. Each dreamer is provided with an opportunity to participate on a playing field made level by fairness, honor, and integrity.

In spite of its selectivity and flaws, the American Dream remains a uniquely powerful and defining force. The allure stands strong and steady, but never so feverish as in pursuit of material gain. Achieving your dream requires sweat, courage, commitment, talent, integrity, vision, faith, and a few breaks.

The ability to start a business from scratch, the opportunity to lead that company to greatness, the entrepreneurial freedom to bet the farm on a roll of the marketplace dice, the chance to rise from clerk to CEO are the feedstock of America's economic greatness.

The dot-com boom of the 1990s, although ultimately falling victim to hyperventilation, is proof that classrooms, garages, and basement workshops, crammed with doodlings and daydreams, are the petri dishes of the entrepreneurial dream. In many

ways, it has never been easier to make money—or to ignore traditional moral values in doing so.

Throughout this nation's history, a spontaneous and unfettered marketplace has produced thundering examples of virtue and vice—not surprising in that very human heroes and villains populate the business landscape. Yet, a new void in values has produced a level of deception, betrayal, and indecency so brazen as to be breathtaking.

Many of today's executives and employees—I would like to think the majority—are not engaged in improper behavior. Most of the people I have dealt with in four decades of globetrotting are men and women of integrity and decency, dedicated individuals who look askance at the shady conduct of the minority.

I have known enough business executives, though, who through greed, arrogance, an unhealthy devotion to Wall Street, or a perverted interpretation of capitalism have chosen the dark side. Their numbers seem to be growing.

The rationale that everyone fudges—that you have to cheat to stay competitive—is a powerful lure, to be sure. The path to perdition is enticing,

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slippery, and all downhill. Moral bankruptcy is the inevitable conclusion.

What's needed is a booster shot of commonly held moral principles from the playgrounds of our youth. We all know the drill: Be fair, don't cheat, play nicely, share and share alike, tell the truth. Although these childhood prescriptions may appear to have been forgotten in the fog of competition, I believe it is more a matter values being expediently ignored. Whatever the case, it is time for us to get into ethical shape with a full-scale behavioral workout.

Financial ends never justify unethical means. Success comes to those who possess skill, courage, integrity, decency, and generosity. Men and women who maintain their universally shared values tend to achieve their goals, know happiness in home and work, and find greater purpose in their lives than simply accumulating wealth.

Nice guys really can and do finish first in life.



I worked as White House staff secretary and a special assistant to the president during the first



term of the Nixon administration. I was the funnel through which passed documents going to and from the president's desk. I also was part of H. R. Haldeman's "super staff." As a member of the team, Haldeman expected me to be unquestioning. It annoyed him that I was not. He proffered blind loyalty to Nixon and demanded the same from his staff. I saw how power was abused, and I didn't buy in. One never *has* to.

I was asked by Haldeman on one occasion to do something "to help" the president. We were there to serve the president, after all. It

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seems a certain self-righteous congressman was questioning one of Nixon's nominations for agency head. There was some evidence the nominee had employed undocumented workers in her California business.

Haldeman asked me to check out a factory previously owned by this congresswoman to see whether that report were true. The facility happened to be located close to my own manufacturing plant in Fullerton, California. Haldeman wanted me

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to place some of our Latino employees on an undercover operation at the plant in question. The information would be used, of course, to embarrass the political adversary.

An amoral atmosphere had penetrated the White House. Meetings with Haldeman were little more than desperate attempts by underlings to be noticed. We were all under the gun to produce solutions. Too many were willing to do just about anything for Haldeman's nod of approval. That was the pressure that had me picking up the phone to call my plant manager.

There are times when we react too quickly to catch the rightness and wrongness of something immediately. We don't think it through. This was one of those times. It took about 15 minutes for my inner moral compass to make itself noticed, to bring me to the point that I recognized this wasn't the right thing to do. Values that had accompanied me since childhood kicked in.

Halfway through my conversation, I paused. "Wait a minute, Jim," I said deliberately to the general manager of Huntsman Container, "let's not do this. I don't want to play this game. Forget I called."

## Values from the Sandbox

I instinctively knew it was wrong, but it took a few minutes for the notion to percolate. I informed Haldeman that I would not have my employees spy or do anything like it. To the second most powerful man in America, I was saying no. He didn't appreciate responses like that. He viewed them as signs of disloyalty. I might as well have been saying farewell.

So be it, and I did leave within six months of that incident. My streaks of independence, it turned out, were an exercise in good judgment. I was about the only West Wing staff member not eventually hauled before the congressional Watergate committee or a grand jury.



Gray is not a substitute for black and white. You don't bump into people without saying you're sorry. When you shake hands, it's supposed to mean something. If someone is in trouble, you reach out. Values aren't to be conveniently molded to fit particular situations. They are indelibly etched in our very beings as natural impulses that never go stale or find themselves out of style.

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Some will scoff that this view is an oversimplification in a complex, competitive world. It's simple, all right, but that's the point! It's little more than what we learned as kids, what we accepted as correct behavior before today's pressures tempted some to jettison those values in favor of getting ahead or enhancing bottom lines.

Although the values of our youth, at least to some degree, usually are faith-based, they also are encompassed in natural law. Nearly everyone on the planet, for instance, shares a belief in basic human goodness.

Human beings inherently prize honesty over deceit, even in the remotest corners of the globe. In the extreme northeast of India lies the semi-primitive state of Arunachal Pradesh. Few of us even know it exists. Indeed, this area is nearly forgotten by New Delhi. More than 100 tribes have their own cultures, languages, and animistic religions. Yet, they share several characteristics, including making honesty an absolute value.

How ironic, not to mention shameful, that the most educated and industrialized nations seem to have the most troublesome time with universal values of integrity.

Michael Josephson, who heads the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina del Rey, California, says one only has to view popular shows such as *The Apprentice* and *Survivor* to get the notion that life's winners are those who deceive others without getting caught. Nobody seems offended by that. It's not so much that temptations are any greater today, Josephson notes, it's that our defenses have weakened.

Be that as it may, I maintain we all know when we bend or break the rules, when we are approaching a boundary, when we do something untoward. Whatever the expedient rationale or the instant gratification that "justified" it, we don't feel quite right about it because we were taught better.

It is this traditional set of behavioral values that will lead us not into temptation but to long-term success. Forget about who finishes first and who finishes last. Decent, honorable people finish races—and their lives—in grand style and with respect.

The twentieth-century explorer Ernest Shackleton, whose legendary, heroic exploits in Antarctica inspired half a dozen books, looked at life as a game to be played fairly and with honor:

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Life to me is the greatest of all games. The danger lies in treating it as a trivial game, a game to be taken lightly, and a game in which the rules don't matter much. The rules matter a great deal. The game has to be played fairly or it is no game at all. And even to win the game is not the chief end. The chief end is to win it honorably and splendidly.



The principles we learned as children were simple and fair. They remain simple and fair. With moral compasses programmed in the sandboxes of long ago, we can navigate career courses with values that guarantee successful lives, a path that is good for one's mental and moral well-being, not to mention long-term material success.