

THE NEED FOR MORAL LITERACY

The Josephson Institute's 2006 survey revealed that 28 percent of high school students admitted stealing from a store and 60 percent cheated on an exam within the past year. Yet these numbers understate the true problem—27 percent confessed they lied on at least one question on the survey itself!

Consider the rampant corporate fraud that devastated the financial markets and sent scores of top executives to jail. Unless we do something about this growing culture of cheating, things could get worse. Another 2006 study of more than 5,000 grad students found that 56 percent of those seeking advanced business degrees are active cheaters who asserted that success is more important than integrity.

How can we ignore the likely havoc caused by an employee pool polluted by so many dishonest future workers, customers and vendors?

Long ago, the business community actively supported literacy programs because it needed employees who could read and write. Well, it's time for business to recognize a parallel need to promote moral literacy because it needs employees who know and do what's right.

When making hiring decisions, philanthropist Warren Buffet said he looks for three qualities: integrity, intelligence and energy. Then he added, "If you don't have the first one, the other two will kill you."

Rotary Clubs, local Chambers of Commerce and other business associations ought to demand and support character-education programs in schools, and major corporations ought to make honesty an explicit and essential aspect of recruitment, performance reviews and promotion decisions.

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