

WOULD YOU DO IT IF IT WERE ON TV?



Matt, an eighth grade teacher, was in a huge hurry. With guests arriving at his home shortly, he had a small list of things to buy. With 14 items in his basket, he decided to chance it and use the “10 items or less” express line.

Matt’s heart pounded when he saw Phil, one of his students, come toward him. Matt talks a lot about honesty and ethics and, as he feared, Phil was all too happy to catch him doing something wrong. Sure enough, with a big “gotcha” smile Phil loudly proclaimed, “You have too many items. That’s cheating.”

On the scale of moral transgressions, misusing the express line is a misdemeanor. But the inconsistency between Matt’s words and actions can, nevertheless, seriously undermine his message about the importance of ethics and his personal credibility. Whether he’s officially “on duty” or not, a teacher is expected to set a good example. It’s the same for all people in authority, including parents and bosses. And when they fail to do so, there are consequences.

Yes, it’s unfair to judge a person’s character by such small offenses, but many will. Though we judge ourselves by our best intentions and most noble acts, others are likely to judge us by our last worst act.

Here’s a simple strategy: act as if there’s a tiny TV camera on your shoulder broadcasting all your words and actions. If what you’re thinking of doing isn’t consistent with the image you want to convey, don’t do it.

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