

Call for all business and political leaders to be unashamedly ethical

Elections are over, members of Parliament have been sworn in. Some people with tainted pasts have not made themselves available to serve in that capacity, and we wait with baited breath for things to change. Will the NPA get around to charging those whose names have been bandied about seemingly for years in exposes and commissions of enquiries?

Is waiting all we can do? What is there to stop the next generation from following in the footsteps of their elders? What are we teaching in our schools, in our colleges and in our universities? Some of our professional bodies demand that their members are well versed in the niceties of ethics and good governance, but lately even these well qualified and highly educated individuals have fallen short of our expectations.

A study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) entitled "The dishonesty of honest people" is instructive. First, a group of people was asked to take a test in which they were financially rewarded for each correct answer. The room was set up to make cheating relatively easy – an answer book was left near at hand or something of that nature. Then the economists conducting the study simply sat back and watched to see how many people would cheat.

Some 229 students were tested in three ways. First, they were simply asked to take the test. This helped the researchers to establish how many people would cheat under "normal circumstances". Next, they were asked to recall 10 books they had read while at high school, following which they then took another test. The effect of memory recall had no impact on the number of people cheating.

Lastly, they asked the participants to recall as many of the 10 Commandments as they could, following which they then took another test. What they learned was staggering. The simple act of reminding the participants of a set of moral behaviours virtually eliminated cheating altogether!

The conclusion of the researchers is hugely relevant: they state that people are prone to allow themselves a level of dishonesty without thinking themselves to be dishonest. People deceive themselves, in other words. And the most remarkable finding was that the reminder of the 10 Commandments virtually eliminated that self-deception. *"The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* (Ps 119:130 NKJV)

Remarkable as it was, it would seem God had been preparing for just that phenomenon. Graham Power, of the Global Day of Prayer fame, received as part of his vision from God in 2001 a clear instruction for a commitment campaign which was launched under the banner Unashamedly Ethical. This was to be a campaign built upon three simple foundations:

Firstly, a global community to make a public commitment to "ethics, values and clean living" by signing the relevant Unashamedly Ethical commitment form. Once the commitment is taken, signatories then publicly display their membership by using the logo on all company materials and signage, and by displaying their Unashamedly Ethical member's certificate.

Secondly, a closed economy is effectively created by the establishment of an online directory of all the signatories. If one would like to deal with businesses whose leaders have signed the Organizational Commitment form, one can search for these on the website.

Thirdly, strong accountability is provided by an ombudsman who holds all the signatories accountable and who will review written complaints against any signatory.

The 10 commitments (not to be confused with the 10 Commandments!) on the Unashamedly Ethical commitment forms are an amazing reminder to all signatories of the moral standards which God lays out for us in the Bible, and they are written in such a way as not to exclude anyone on the basis of religion.

If that study at MIT was a true reflection of the reactions of those who are reminded of what it is to be honest, then the commitment made by individuals, businesses, NGOs, political parties, local and national government agencies and legislative bodies, should be sufficient to speak to our consciences.

In his many speaking engagements, all over the world Graham Power has invited all who have made a commitment to stand together in this filthy river of corruption that swirls around us. If enough of us stand together in the river, might we not stop its' flow altogether?

In the years since I committed myself, my business and the body corporate I was the chairman of, presentations have been made locally to numerous entities. They include the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber, the Regional Association of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, the local committees of the Black Management Forum and South Africa Social Security Agency, as well as a breakfast presentation hosted by the then Mayor in February 2017.

The mayor, and the members of his mayoral committee who attended, made personal commitments to being Unashamedly Ethical. The mayor signed a commitment on behalf of the whole municipality. I know that many individuals and businesses have also signed the appropriate commitments, but perhaps not enough to stop the flow of the river of corruption – YET!

M D Smith
Workplace Minister.