THE BUSINESS OF CHEATING

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ABSTRACT

The days of the library card catalog and physically opening a book to research a topic are long gone. Innovation and ease of access to information opens the door to knowledge and exploration beyond one's belief and imagination. That ease of access also brings with it the temptation of plagiarism, fraud, and academic and professional dishonesty. It is through brainstorming and collaboration that ideas are developed to reshape the foundations of accountability and personal integrity. "I would prefer even to fail with honor than to win by cheating" Sophocles (n.d). This paper addresses events, behaviors, reactions, and damage caused by cheating in the classroom and the workplace. The cause for concern is that experiential learning, originality and creativity are at risk.

INTRODUCTION

"In one of the nation's largest cheating scandals of its kind, 11 defendants were convicted Wednesday of racketeering for their roles in a scheme to inflate students' scores on standardized exams." (Brumback, 2015). When thoroughly examined, there are so many wrongful behaviors involved in this case, it is difficult to know where to begin and the excuses for the behavior would fill a book. Perhaps the most unsettling element is the arrogance and refusal to accept responsibility for the behavior. It was discovered that the cheating dated back to 2005 and that the actions were orchestrated and designed to fulfill multiple desired outcomes. From passing schools to bonuses for those in power, the actions became the catalyst for being successful by deception. As time marched on, the behavior became the accepted culture.

From the classroom to the board room cheating and corruption are on the rise in all cultures (Juyal, Thawani, & Thaledi, 2015; Heneghan, 2012). With the increased ease of access to information, perhaps the perception of cheating is skewed and does not resonate with the concept of doing something wrong. By reinforcing the precepts of academic honesty early during the learning process, we strengthen the foundation for personal accountability, ethical integrity and credible behaviors throughout the learning journey and through the career of the student. By taking a comprehensive look at specific examples of the similarities between classroom and career based plagiarism, the proposed reasoning behind the behavior, and the seemingly indifferent reaction to the act of cheating we are able to develop a protocol for the urgency in strong ethical character.

This important concern applies to all that teach and lead given that we all have a duty to identify and reconcile plagiarism and cheating. Each action is laced with clues that help to identify the intentional plagiarized submission from the submission by those that lack the understanding for proper formatting and author recognition. Instructors must understand that the plagiarized assignment is more than a problem when grading a paper. Understanding the damage of plagiarism is an important step to changing the behaviors of the offender.

THE CONCEPT OF CHEATING

Cheating comes in many forms. Russell (1997) said "Most people would sooner die than think; in fact, they do so". (Russell, B. quotes). Dishonesty is so much more than just copying words from a source and not providing proper credit for the work. Academic dishonesty may be in the form of plagiarism, collusion, the falsification of records, selling of papers for profit, or buying of papers or coursework. Business world dishonesty behaviors include falsification of records, falsification of finances, plagiarism, embezzlement, piracy, and copyright or patent violations. What is evident is that the concept of cheating is similar in both the classroom and the board room or organization. The stealing of ideas is a behavior that requires a specific design and energy to carry out the process. The utilization of keywords and a search engine provides content for every imaginable topic. The availability of too much knowledge prohibits the rigors of critical thinking.

DEFINING THE CULTURE

Common between both worlds, we got away with it once and then twice and then it becomes part of the culture. As with the ATL school system, the behavior becomes easier and easier. However, there comes a point that the discovery of the actions will create such disappointment/shock, the behavior cannot stop. The consequences are too large therefore the behavior must continue. The actions and behaviors define the culture of cheating in both the academic and professional setting. Some individuals are looking for the easy way out or are lazy with poor time management skills and the result is to cheat or buy content. Some do not understand the moral implications of the action and that coupled with a lack of knowledge or confidence takes them to a behavior that is perhaps out of the norm. For others, the outcome is so important they are willing to take the risk of not being caught by any means available. Is there a changing culture of acceptable behaviors that could be playing a role in the process of academic dishonesty?

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

One must wonder about the impact of copy and paste on the integrity of scholarly writing and originality. The action of copy and paste has diluted the originality of the source to the point of not being able to actually identify the resource. It is unclear if the student understands that quoting a source and not having ever seen the original document is in and of itself cheating. Many times we find an article or resource and neglect to write down the website and are unable to find the information at a later date. Students do this and assume that the information is in space or the cloud and therefore it is free to use as their own. Little do they realize that one or two lines is considered plagiarism, even if it is "just a little bit".

Komarraju, Weston, and Dollinger (2007) looked at the imagined futures of academically dishonest students and found that cheating has the potential to be a precursor to wrongful

behaviors during their future careers. Three areas of wrongful academic behavior were identified as possible predicators to a furtherance of norm-violating behaviors. Something as simple as sharing answers with a fellow student and not getting caught, has the potential to set the stage for future behaviors in the business world.

The catalyst for behaviors is sometimes the lack of outrage over the act and shifting the blame to the overseer rather than the student. A prime example was seen in at a high school in mid-Georgia over a summer writing assignment. 83 students were suspended for cheating on an assignment at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. The group submitted the same paper and were appalled when the school determined that they plagiarized the assignment through the act of collusion. Just as appalling was the response of parents, many were outraged as this was, in their words "just a summer writing assignment". The parents were accepting of a zero for the assignment; however, they felt suspension was overly aggressive. School Officials explained that what the students did was in violation of the school honor code and unacceptable behavior. In addition to the suspension, many lost standing in school clubs of academic distinction. (Farner, 2016).

Brent & Atkinson (2011) extensively researched the concept of student cheating and excuses for cheating. They discovered a gap in the research in that there was information lacking in the discussion of when might cheating be acceptable. While the majority of the student responders stated that cheating is never acceptable, there were also parameters when the same responders felt that cheating was more acceptable than at other times. The results alluded to homework and online submissions being more likely to be plagiarized than quizzes and testing.

ORGANIZATIONAL DISHONESTY

Make no mistake, cheating is not limited to the world of the student. The business world is plagued with the same wrongful behaviors hampering productivity and credibility. Writers, politicians, scholars, CFO's and CEO's alike have purposefully made decisions to cheat, defraud, and misrepresent themselves through wrongful behaviors. The reputation of the organization relies on the integrity of those within the walls. When the credibility of the individual is questionable, the honor of the organization is tarnished and at risk.

Wrongful behaviors in the organization are driven by many of the same concepts seen in academia. However, there are additional considerations for workplace cheating as presented by Gill, Prowse, & Vlassopoulos (2012). The authors' find that there is a direct connection to the wrongful behaviors of cheating and the perceived fairness of the employer's compensation structure. While this may drive the behaviors, it does not negate the energy required on part of the employer to investigate and discipline the actions. Nor do the actions of the employer condone the wrongful behaviors of the employee.

The cost of organizational cheating is both financial and morale based. Because of our litigious society, unless egregious, the investigating party must dot the i's and cross all t's. Paperwork and documentation often prevent the event from being considered wrongful. Consider the time and energy involved in the following actions: Identify the wrongful behavior, document the behavior, verbal warning, counsel the employee, provide an improvement plan, continue to document behavior, written warnings 1, 2, and 3, termination, defend litigation and unemployment. It is no wonder that 'just a little bit' of cheating is sometimes overlooked. Time is money. Not only is the lead and investigation time costly, but the follow-up to the event equals in time and money.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

There are two sides of every problem and the problem of cheating is no exception. There is the cheated and there is the cheater. The cheater is the catalyst of costly outcomes and some of the behaviors include plagiarism, student loan mills, paper mills, stolen time fraud, financial fraud, falsified applications, and falsified resumes. The costly outcomes for the institute or organization are learning opportunities that are lost, business opportunities that are lost, the cost of litigation, the cost of production, the cost of personnel, and the cost of reputation. This process occurs within every organization: the discovery, the mitigation, the outcomes, the litigation, time, energy and money that could be utilized in so many other important areas. This wrongful behavior occurs in credible organizations, it is wrong to assume that it is the organization that is a fault, they are not always the bad guy.

While the internet is often the blame for cheating, it must be remembered that one must copy and paste from the internet to actually create the event. One web search has the potential to provide an entire package of course work for the student. The money flow does not stop with the cheater and the cheated, it also moves to the entrepreneur that develops the tools to identify the plagiarized document. Miller (2013) believes that there are two implications for instructors – one, they must assume that students will cheat; and two, instructors have the ability to encourage strong ethical behaviors and moral character.

GROWING ETHICALLY STRONG BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

Does the behavior and actions of the instructor or leader influence the behavior of the student or employee? As teachers and leaders it is important to define our fundamental dedication to establishing the value of personal and professional integrity and reputation. It is important to understand the scope and reality of the problem. Technology provides tools that identify a cheating problem; however, the user must be able to understand the constructs of the technology in determining whether the behavior was intentional or an actual lack of understanding.

What is the appropriate level attention for addressing plagiarism issues? There are times that we become so focused on the issue of formatting or citing that we forget to explain the reason why the behavior is wrong. The problem is more than formatting. "Educational institutions need to move beyond deterrence, detection, and punishment, and take a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach to address plagiarism." (Bretag, 2013). When forming ethical behaviors and moral character, the teacher or leader must be willing to take the extra step in defining why specific behaviors are wrong and violate the trust system both within academia and the organization. That same instructor or leader must be willing to lead by example and provide the template for proper presentation and submission.

In the business world, all organizations have formats and templates that are used during the course of business. Each business has its own language and requirements to meet competitive standards within the business world. When preparing a proposal, the content must be properly formatted with specific data and resources. When official correspondence is developed, it must be properly formatted and contain

confirmable information. When reports are developed they must contain specific information with verifiable content and data. The content must be available and researchable. This explanation alone provides the non-habitual plagiarizer with a reason why formality and acknowledgement are important to their success.

WHAT IS AN INSTRUCTOR TO DO?

As silly as it sounds, the first and foremost action an instructor must take to help curb plagiarism is practice what you preach. Always be the example and follow the rules. "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means." ("Einstein, A. Quotes," n.d.). There are many instructors that create wonderful guidance and/or discussion posts yet fail to properly cite or reference their work thus sending a strong message that this critical behavior may not be as important as led to believe. If the college has the expectation of proper formatting in a specific style, then the instructor must model that behavior and fully adhere to the expectation.

For years, instructors have been behind in the technologies available to identify and curb student cheating. Prior to the availability of online technologies, instructors were on their own in their attempt to identify plagiarized work. However, according to Clark (2008), there are increasingly more universities implementing strong plagiarism checking tools to identify academic dishonesty. The key to the success of the initiative is to utilize the available software, have an understanding of college policy and protocols related to plagiarized work, and have a clear understanding of what the report actually says about the paper. There are times that the submitted work is obviously plagiarized and there are other times that the student lacks the fundamental knowledge of the proper formatting of citations and references. The ability to differentiate between the two behaviors will empower the instructor to address the issue in the appropriate manner.

Nanni & Sanger (2015), contend that many students do not have the skills to summarize or paraphrase with proper citations and therefore fall into a pattern and behavior of unintentional plagiarism. Developing a productive approach to confronting the plagiarizer and understanding when to teach the moment for future accountability is an important first step to forming moral character. By looking at the ethical ramifications of plagiarism not only in the world of academia but in the business world as well, we are able to build a stronger foundation for reinforcing ethical behaviors. While many understand that plagiarism is wrong, many do not understand the reason why the behavior is wrong or what to do to correct the behavior.

If the university does not have written policy related to academic dishonesty, now is the time to encourage the implementation of such policy with the inclusion of plagiarism software tools to facilitate the identification of plagiarism. Without formal language addressing the behavior, the student is left to establish their own limits and expectations for academic honesty. The lack of policy or process coupled with the lack of modeled behavior by the instructor, offers little hope for understanding that the matter is one to be taken seriously and has the potential to impact their future both academically and in their future career.

CONCLUSION

In this day and age of copy and paste and share everything without thought to ownership, it is difficult to maintain a level of formal responsibility. Many of our students and employees believe in the premise that because they found the content online, it must be factual and available for use without recourse. There is a lack of understanding that copying is cheating and cheating is an action that has the potential of extreme consequences. There is more to cheating than using someone's work as their own. The implications of cheating and the impact on the moral character of the individual moves with them from the institution to the workplace.

Ease of access must not be used as the excuse for the actions of the individual. Without a proper understanding of the wrongful behavior the perpetrator may falsely assume that the behavior is acceptable and develop their own culture of bad behaviors. Once the culture is ingrained, it is very difficult to reverse the process. We all have the need to understand the reason why something should or should not happen. Sustainable performance change must be understood, important to the person changing, and defined as urgent to the individual. As leaders and teachers we cannot allow "just a little bit" of cheating go unaddressed for the sake of the future of the individual, our universities, and our organizations. Modeling the expectation and explaining the reason why will help to develop ethically responsible behaviors and create sustainable change within the learning community.

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