

The Collapse of Trust

Has “situational ethics” become the norm?



BY BRAD YARBROUGH

There's a universal yearning within each of us to find and achieve purpose. From childhood, we begin the search to find our place in the world. During that journey, people tend to desire dependability. And they demonstrate appreciation for the support, security and safety provided within a healthy society. But what happens when this fundamental confidence begins to collapse?

One of the most vital components of a healthy community is trust. It is a prerequisite for obvious reasons. We need a reliability factor that gives confidence to the community. It must exist among the people, processes and products, whether delivered individually or through entities, whether public or private. The more we can rely on these, the better the chances for individuals and their communities to succeed. The converse is also true.

The good news is that, according to a growing body of research, humans are hardwired to trust others. Yet recent surveys reveal a decline in the overall trust level in society, especially toward institutional entities. With this in mind, I found a statement made on the news program Meet the Press, particularly poignant. Commentator Chuck Todd was interviewing political strategists when one stated, “We live in an era where trust has collapsed in every single institution in the country with the exception of the military. And, it's not without cause. An era of systemic fraud in business, in politics, in the culture, sports, in religion. All of it accumulating to this moment in time...”

With such troubling cynicism and mistrust about the state of our society, I can't help but wonder how we got here. Frankly, I believe it's because we are witnessing a culture that no longer

places importance on ethical conduct. Today, “situational ethics” has become the justification for misbehavior.

Each of us must journey through life and its countless options. Yet far too many individuals and entities are navigating without an ethics sextant to determine direction and destination. Even if wanting to make ethical decisions, many are confused by the rearrangement of the fixed ethical points that were once reliable for determining right positions. It's no wonder there is a trust deficit in today's culture. For communities and organizations to remain healthy, it is absolutely vital to determine whether we are dangerously drifting off course.

Taking a Stand

As a society, we must all insist on ethical behavior from individuals and entities. If we accept anything less, we become participants in destroying the trust needed for a thriving community. It is critical to have fixed ethical points in society's galaxy of people, processes, products, and yes, politics so that individuals and organizations can measure right and wrong attitudes and actions.

Clearly, our profession has never wavered in its focus on ethics and trustworthiness. IRWA has a longstanding history of emphasizing and fostering a culture defined by an ethical code of conduct. In an era characterized by distrust, I applaud IRWA's commitment to making ethical conduct a priority. I encourage every member to do the same. In doing so, we assure that our professional community will thrive. And we will stand as an example for conducting business in the right way. ★



Brad is the Owner and CEO of Pilgrim Land Services, a right of way services company in Oklahoma City. With over 35 years experience in oil and gas, he has clients nationwide and an extensive network of landmen and agents.