

YOUR CHEATING HEART

It seems like there is a plague of cheating worldwide, a pandemic if you will. Bankers, stockbrokers, politicians, captains of industry, police officers, religious leaders, the working man... all seem to have caught the cheating virus. I heard a professor talking about this on the radio, and he was referencing degrees of cheating. This example is for the many golfing enthusiasts in Milford. The professor's research has shown that a golfer is far less likely to pick up his golf ball and place it in a more desirable spot than he is to nudge it with his toe to a better position. Both are illegal of course, but the act of touching the ball with his hand places the golfer in closer proximity to the illegal act. I'll bet you expect me to deny that I move my ball. Well, I will deny it. An old Law states that the most effective cheating defense is deny, deny, deny. Combine the 'deny' defense with intimations that your golfing partners are also using nefarious strategies, and you're relatively bulletproof because it is very likely that they are guilty of something.

We've seen any number of religious leaders and politicians stoutly deny that they have had romantic assignments outside the confines of marriage. They are shocked and appalled at the very temerity of the accusation. Then, when photographs, e-mails, phone recordings, videotapes and the testimony of lovers proves they lied, they decide to plead for forgiveness. But leading off with the 'deny' defense is an obvious strategy. A pathetic and incompetent strategy, but that's what they go with. The more you have to lose, the greater and more sincere the denials.

The professor ran another experiment where he placed a six pack of soft drinks in the refrigerator of the work place. The half life of the six pack was not longer than a week as fellow workers helped themselves when no one was looking. He then placed a plate with six one dollar bills on it in the same refrigerator. This lasted a very long time, because people were reluctant to steal money. Steal a coke, yes. Steal money, no.

The lesson seems to be that we will cheat and steal, but are more reluctant to do it when there is no other interpretation of our act other than we are cheating or stealing. "Gee, I thought it was a Coke I put in there yesterday." It seems that the higher in the food chain one progresses, the less reluctant one is to steal and cheat, and to do it on a very large scale. It's a sense of entitlement, I suppose. You might think it's more tempting to cheat on a grand scale (think Bernie Madoff), but remember, these guys are millionaires many times over and they keep cheating. It's not like they have to steal to feed the family. No, somehow the Conrad Blacks, Martha Stewarts and

Bernie Madoffs of the world believe they deserve, are entitled, to manipulate events to their benefit. Writing about the baseball player Pete Rose, Thomas Boswell said, "The ego needed to be great and the judgment required to be wise aren't often found in the same package." In my limited experience with captains of industry and public figures, ego trumps judgment whenever they are in conflict.

I was frequently asked to cheat at work. As an example, each month when we submitted our sales forecasts, they were deemed unacceptable because they were too low. We were told to raise them, often substantially, and when they were not met we would be assailed for failing to achieve them. How dumb is that? And when the company asks you to cheat on your sales forecasts, can they be surprised when you pad the expense account and help yourself to the pencils? Many did just that. I must have been one of the very few exceptions. Even now, fifteen years after the fact, I am relying on the "deny" defense. Well. OK, maybe I lifted a pencil. Once.

It seems we will attempt to cheat anyone. The Globe & Mail reports a web site called Information Age Prayer that for \$4.95/month will say prayers for you. "We use state-of-the-art voice synthesizers to voice each prayer at a volume and speed typical of a person praying," they say. OK, I'm not saying there is a God, but if there is, do

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