

The Moral Spiral: Think before you act!

As part of my speaking/training ethics programs, I always explain the moral spiral concept and the news this week has given me a perfect opportunity to share it.

The moral spiral is the understanding that no decision is made in isolation or without affecting at least one other human being. One decision leads to another, leads to another, etc. hence the spiral effect. The example of Penn State is a perfect example of the moral spiral with not only legal ramifications but immoral ones as well.

The decision not to act on charges of sexual abuse of children years ago, has cost Penn state:

- \$60 million
- Banned from post season games for 4 years
- Scholarship issues/reputation
- Removal of over 100 wins from Joe Paterno's coaching record

The list goes on and on and on as does the moral spiral! Who thought of these "prices to pay" back then, when the powers that be thought they could just sweep this abuse under the rug. Now look at the prices to pay and some aren't even fully known yet, and people who had nothing to do with this debacle will also pay a price and Penn State, as an institution will pay for years to come!

This is the moral spiral.

Logic tells us that it is better to deal with something when it is first discovered and pay the price that is needed for being forth coming. Isn't it better to treat a disease when you first find it than wait until it develops into something that is so costly financially, psychologically, and emotionally?

Is it that people in positions of power, whether it is a university or a corporation, actually think that they can get away with unethical and/or illegal behavior? If so, how brazen of them to think so, primarily because they are only thinking of themselves, their positions and their own CYA, and not the "victims", which rarely can be indentified or measured.

What's the moral of the story? Think beyond the immediate, most accessible answer and beyond yourself to think about who or what else could be affected by your decision. Think the decision through reflectively, keeping mind that no matter what your decision is there is always a price to pay, the moral spiral will still exist and people will still be affected.

Your focus and choice is to assess what you can afford to pay the present moment and not believe that there will never be a price to pay in the future!