



10 Principles for a Happy Life and Career

Principle 4: Integrity

By Michael A. Crawford, CPA

Editor's Note: Mike Crawford has, by even his own accounts, had a successful and happy career as a CPA in Oklahoma. He says there are 10 basic principles that have guided him through a joyful life and a fulfilling career. In this and future issues of CPAFOCUS, Crawford shares that idea and those principles.

In looking for people to hire, I look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence and energy. If they don't have the first, the other two will kill you." —Warren Buffett

The word integrity has multiple and broad meanings, but here, it's being used to promote honesty and truth. As a CPA, maintaining public trust and confidence is at the core of our mission. The ultimate mission of all professions should be to serve the public's interest in some form; e.g., the legal profession through the pursuit of justice, the medical profession through the preservation of health and the accounting profession through the pursuit and preservation of the truth in numbers. Therefore, it can't be surprising that integrity is a cornerstone of the accounting profession. The importance of integrity is front and center within the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct. It states integrity is measured in terms of what is right and just in the service of the public's interest; that the public trust cannot be subordinated for personal gain or advantage; and that while integrity can accommodate inadvertent error and honest difference of opinion, it cannot accommodate deceit or subordination of principle. This principle of integrity is not only important to the accounting profession, but also as a cornerstone of our lives.

Maybe that is what initially lured me into the accounting profession and, ultimately, into writing and public speaking on topics of ethics and moral behavior - the realization of the importance of honesty and truth in all aspects of life.

We all probably remember a time in our lives when we were caught in a significant lie or dishonest action and came face-to-face with the

unpleasant consequences of those actions. If we learn from them, such mistakes become important teaching moments in our lives.

My first teaching moment came when I was 14 and mowing our family's yard. The lawnmower ran out of gas and we didn't have any at home. My mom reluctantly gave me permission to drive our old '65 Impala six blocks to the local gas station in our small town to get a can of gas and come straight home. I carefully drove straight to the station, bought the gas and proceeded to return straight home. Unfortunately, a block from home, I took a turn too sharply and scraped the side of the car that was stopped waiting for me to turn. I panicked! I fled the scene and drove through an alley to try and hide from the lady in the car that I had just scraped. She was probably still at the stop sign and had likely called the police. As soon as I got home, I parked the car, filled up the mower and began mowing the lawn again, at a more feverish and nervous pace. However, my guilt was building up to the point where I could no longer stand the pressure, so I stopped mowing, went inside and told my mom what happened. She immediately called my dad at work and he called the chief of police.

I can still remember the pain and fear of wondering what the consequences of my inappropriate actions would be. Thanks to my understanding parents and the fact the police chief was our neighbor and family friend, I was spared what could have been much worse consequences. I only had to do some community work and personally pay for the damages to the lady's car. However, that powerful feeling of doing the wrong thing and the accompanying fear of the consequences was so strong, it made a lasting impression on me about the importance of honesty and truthfulness in every aspect of our lives. Although I regret my actions that day, I am thankful to learn from my mistake at such an early age and for the opportunity to build a future career based on the preservation of truth. ☺

Mike Crawford, CPA, is the retired Chairman of Crawford & Associates, P.C., an Oklahoma City-based CPA firm dedicated to state and local government accounting and consulting. Crawford is a past president of the Oklahoma Society of CPAs, an inductee into the Oklahoma Accounting Hall of Fame, the 2011 recipient of the OSCPA Public Service Award and is past vice chairman of the Governmental Accounting Standards Advisory Council. Over the past 30 years, he has authored a number of professional guides, practice aids and articles on topics of governmental accounting, auditing and ethics.