Lessons in empowerment: Honesty is essential for trust

Colin G. Scanes, Editor-in-Chief

In a previous editorial (Scanes, 2010a), I discussed the importance of strategic planning and strategic doing in moving an organization to the next level and the alternative approaches of not strategic planning or doing so in a nonparticipatory manner or with no commitment to make the necessary changes (i.e., making the vision operational). This editorial discusses the issue of honesty. In my opinion, honesty is essential to engender trust, and trust is critical to so much of what we do. Abraham Lincoln said that, “If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” This can be adapted in several ways. In the arena of research, we can say with confidence that if you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow research scientists, you can never regain their respect and esteem. When a researcher is found to have committed scientific fraud or research misconduct (both forms of dishonesty), they are never trusted again. The usual examples of this are the following:

- Plagiarism: This involves two forms of blatant dishonesty: stealing another’s work and lying (committing fraud) by claiming the work is your own
- Fabrication of results: lying (committing fraud)
- Falsification and selection of data: lying (committing fraud)

Self-plagiarism is a less serious infraction but again is dishonest as there is an inherent lie.

I would argue that speaking and writing the truth is important in all aspects of society, whether that is a department, center, college or university, government laboratory, company or other organization. Winston Churchill said, “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.” The question is asked of some people, how do you know when they are lying? The rejoinder is, “when their lips are moving.”

The importance of truth is that without it there is no trust. Steven Covey (Covey, 2008) points out that with trust, an organization can transform itself. There is so much need for our society to move to the next level rather than maintain the status quo (Scanes, 2010b).

There are additional aspects of honesty and truth. An organization needs to be transparent so that members of the organization have a clear understanding of the vision, mission, goals, and strategic plan with regular updates on progress toward the goals. In addition, all members of the organization should have opportunities to provide meaningful input to the development of these goals. To have a vision without a plan suggests a lack of seriousness or candor or lack of commitment to make the necessary changes. An implemented plan is making operational the vision.

REFERENCES