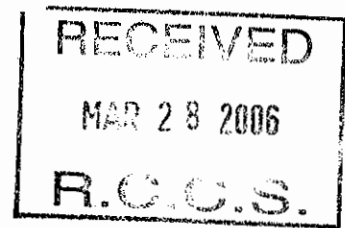


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Whistleblowing: A Tool for the Protection of Society
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Whistleblowing: A Tool for the Protection of Society

It doesn't matter which country, what job, what social class or what time period: people will always find a way to commit fraudulent acts. Frequently, these acts are witnessed by a person who must make a choice. He or she must choose to either pretend to see nothing, or blow the whistle on the offender. It is not a desirable position to be the person who has to stand up for the rights of others. Whistleblowing can result in so many bad situations: a loss of job, a demotion, and persecution from the employer, coworkers and the community. Thankfully, despite all these things, there are people who will still blow the whistle. This is fortunate because these individuals ensure that honesty and righteousness are preserved in society; fraudulent acts are effectively prevented and detected because of their actions.

It seems that in this world there are two types of people: those who do what's easy and those who do what's right. Those who stand aside and let bad things happen take the easy route; those people who witness an injustice and refuse to do nothing take the difficult path.

One can hardly blame a person for wanting to stand idly by if they know of foul play in a corporation; there are many unhappy stories that follow the average whistleblower. In Fraser Valley, prison guard Lori Bailey had to move workplaces after receiving taunts and mistrust in her work environment as a result of reporting information about her coworkers. In 2005 in Santa Fe, a 52 year old man was beaten up to keep him quiet about an irregular financial situation at the nuclear plant where he worked. While these places seem far away, one must realize that Saskatchewan also has its problems when it comes to injustice in the work place. Recently, Linda Merk, the office manager

and bookkeeper of the Ironworkers Union Local 771, accused the president and business manager of the union of financial indiscretions, and lost her job for it. Stories such as these do not tend to encourage one to take the whistleblowers route.

There are other factors that make whistleblowing even harder to do. Since childhood, people have understood that it is not really respected to be a tattler. Children who constantly “spill the beans” on other children have always been made fun of. This behaviour doesn’t end in childhood though. Many people who inform the authorities of coworker’s misdemeanors are afterward at the mercy of those same coworker’s taunts and retaliations, even though the coworkers are in the wrong. All around, it appears that blowing the whistle can be difficult in an economic, professional and social sense.

It’s a wonder that people still blow the whistle with so much to lose, but it is a wonderful thing that they do! The word whistleblower holds a more dignified connotation than “tattle tales” of childhood. A whistleblower has a purpose other than a simple desire to get others in trouble. They stand up for those who cannot speak out themselves, through ignorance or lack of power to do so. Overlooked cases of senior and child abuse have been brought to the attention of the authorities at the expense of people’s jobs and reputations. Scientists have been fired for not approving health measures that could harm the unknowing public. The Sponsorship Scandal that has brought the leaders of this country to their knees is the result of a few brave people speaking out against what is wrong. Fraud can drain money from private citizens and tarnish reputations. It saps money from the government, taking away from the finances which fund social programs which benefit all in society, especially those who are most in

need. It is fortunate for every person in society that some individuals are brave enough to bring to light fraudulent acts.

The knowledge that there are people willing to blow the whistle goes a long way in the prevention of fraud among every member of the workplace hierarchy. It is very fortunate for fraud prevention that the Sponsorship Scandal was uncovered and heavily publicized. This situation serves as a warning to the people high up in their corporation: it shows that high rank will not protect a person if they commit a criminal act, because there are always brave people who are willing to uncover their misdeeds. It also shows that if they are uncovered, consequences will follow despite their rank: the Liberal Party discovered this as they fell from power in the 2006 election. Those who believe that they are too discreet to be noticed by their superiors in a workplace may also refrain from criminal acts as they know that even if their superiors don't notice, their coworkers will, and they have the power to bring any misdeeds forward.

Fraud detection is aided largely by the acts of whistleblowers. In many situations, there are things that witnesses know about fraudulent acts that the law enforcement authorities could not possibly learn. For the officials to find out these facts, money and resources are wasted. In other cases, the situations would not even be brought up had it not been for whistleblowers. These actions conserve justice in society.

Recently, a law was passed which provides a certain amount of protection and security for somebody who reports fraud. This will go a long way in detection of fraud. Now that people know that they protected from falling victim to the unfortunate chastisement which has previously been the fate of whistleblowers, they may have the courage and security to come forward with information.

There are numerous advantages linked with the principle of whistleblowing, but one cannot ignore the fact that there are some drawbacks associated with these actions as well. Rampant whistleblowing can cause mistrust and mild paranoia in a workplace. If overused, it can ruin intra-workplace relationships, as people will become afraid to say anything to anybody as a result of the fear of being tattled on. This problem should not occur, however, if the authorities can determine when people are tattling because they want to see others get in trouble, or they want to further their own careers in a selfish manner. If only valid issues are acted upon by the authorities, then perhaps only people who are blowing the whistle as a result of injustice will report misdeeds, rather than those who are telling for personal gain.

Whistleblowing is an important tool in the retention of order and equality in a society. While it is a difficult thing to do because sometimes repercussions follow, whistleblowing serves to protect private citizens and the public systems from fraud. It can aid in the prevention of fraudulent acts, and helps with the detection of these acts should they occur. For these reasons, society is fortunate that there are people who are willing to risk their own security to ensure that fraud is curbed, and justice is preserved for all.