

Some Teens See Lies, Cheating OK to Get Ahead

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Study: Lies, cheating OK to some teens

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Today's teenagers say they are confident in their ability to make ethical business decisions. And if it takes lying and cheating to get to the top ... oh, well.

Nearly half of students polled in a Junior Achievement survey said they think it's OK to lie to their parents, and more than a third of them think they need to break the rules at school to succeed.

"I think a lot of times, teens see examples of people in the media taking shortcuts to get ahead in life," said Stephanie Bell, a spokeswoman for Junior Achievement Worldwide, a volunteer organization dedicated to preparing young people for productive careers. "Teens look up to people who are cutting corners and think it's OK, when it really isn't."

It can be difficult for teenagers to find positive role models when they see a steady stream of scandal paraded before them on television and in newspapers, said Edward J. Grenier, president of Junior Achievement's National Capital Area chapter.

In the past week alone, star athletes Alex Rodriguez and Michael Phelps got ensnared in drug scandals, Merrill Lynch was accused of quietly paying out \$3.6 billion in bonuses while the Wall Street investment house was bleeding cash, and the chief executives of America's biggest banks were called before Congress to explain keeping their lavish lifestyles while begging for bailouts from the Treasury.

Despite constant exposure to adults behaving badly, the Junior Achievement survey suggests that teenagers think they will be capable of making ethical business decisions in the future.

The survey of 750 students ages 12 to 17 was conducted by Deloitte, a global accounting and consulting firm.

Eighty percent of students surveyed think they will be able to make ethical decisions when they enter the work force. On the other hand, 38 percent think that in order to succeed, rules must be broken. Forty percent think it is acceptable to lie to their parents, and 61 percent of them say they have done so in the past year.

In what the survey sponsors called a troubling sign, only 54 percent said they look to their parents as role models. The other students said they have no role model at all, or look to their friends.

"There is a troubling incongruent between the degree to which teens feel ethically prepared to enter the work force, and the unethical behaviors in which they engage," said David W. Miller, director of the Princeton University Faith and Work Initiative.

"The survey results do prompt concerns about teens' future workplace behavior and forecast serious challenges to businessmen around how they will need to prepare and train these future leaders."

The study attributed its findings to an absence of adult role models, ethical confusion and a lack of personal accountability.

To help remedy the problem, Junior Achievement and Deloitte have created a "JA Business Ethics" course that teaches students how to make ethical decisions. The \$2 million initiative is intended to help students adopt a code of ethics and apply it to their lives.

"You need to be ethical both in life and business, because you will be held accountable in both," said Mr. Grenier, president of the local JA chapter. "Being ethical is a good thing. Most people in business have gotten where they were by being ethical."

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