

Spotlight on AAMA Code of Ethics

Larry A. Mullins, CFAAMA, Former Chairman of the Board, AAMA

Standard Number Eight: “Members shall never use their position, office or membership for selfish personal or financial gain.”

If only some members of senior management of a major energy company or the managing partners who oversaw their audit, had pledged to follow this ethical guideline. They might have been able to avoid one of the most significant financial disasters of all time for an organization, and most regrettably, for the thousands of people who trusted them enough to invest in their company.

They also might have been able to avoid damaging hundreds of professional reputations, including some who were not even involved, and possibly have prevented at least one suicide that is known and associated with the event. Was it worth it for the individuals to risk the future of so many people for personal gain, be it in the form of high salaries, earnings or share value? Not hardly, but what happened is the age old tale of power and greed and money influencing people’s decisions to act in ways not consistent with ethical values and standards. What would cause individuals to act in such a manner and is this type of conduct only related to those in the financial fields?

While recent events may have us thinking it only occurs in publicly traded companies, we need to appreciate that the “sins” of selfish personal or financial gain can occur in all fields, profit or nonprofit, public or private. This has unfortunately been demonstrated by the breakdown of values by some trusted leaders in some church organizations, the discovery of spies in our most trusted federal agencies and when violations of public trust occur within our own profession.

So, if the consequences are so great, why do these types of things happen? Is it hubris that some individuals think they no longer have to abide by the rules? Is it from being overwhelmed with contradictory regulation and policy where one is not sure what to do? Is it just plain greed, the manipulation of power and people or just plain stupidity? Or is it a breakdown in values and standards that most people would agree are proper.

It’s hard to say if it is any one of the above, a combination of all of them, or even other reasons not mentioned, but it is probably safe to say that if we follow our AAMA Code of Ethics and the values that most of our parents taught us and we teach our children, we would be better off as a society and individuals.

Those of us in leadership positions in health care have an opportunity to influence society in a very positive way or to create harm if we are not careful. We have an additional duty to not use our positions, office or membership for unreasonable benefit. That’s not to say we don’t deserve fair market considerations for very complex professional responsibilities, but we should make sure that our actions are such that we would be comfortable reading about them in the paper the next day or, if we felt uncomfortable reading them, have the integrity to acknowledge our actions and correct them.

If we behave as true servant leaders we will put the interest of people who trust in us, internally and externally, ahead of our own self-interest, we will feel better about who we are, what we are doing and the world will be a better place for it.

As a member of AAMA, it is your responsibility to uphold the AAMA Code of Ethics, not only supporting and serving your professional association, but serving your institution and your community as well.