



HOW TO BECOME A RELIABLE BUSINESS PARTNER IN AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT?

ADVICES FROM MARLÈNE JANS

Corruption is one of the biggest enemies of progress in our time. It creates a system of patronage, where the resources are shared out by small elite while the majority are trapped in poverty.

Corruption does not only frustrate competition and innovation, but it also adds to cost of doing business and living around the world. It does not only undermine the global economy, but it also promotes terrorism worldwide, and therefore it threatens national security of countries.

Corruption is everywhere. You need to fight against it. But you also need to realize that nobody is perfect. So, do not despair because of failures and mistakes. Corruption can have different faces; you don't see it until you recognize it.

Integrity is about doing right things right even when no one is watching. Integrity is a license to operate for all of us whether we work in a commercial or non-profit organization.

We all want to create really great products and services. Therefore, we also need to know who our partners are, whether they are guided by ethical principles, what their expectations are, and how their activities affect us, our reputation or our supply chain.

Good behaviour of employees and partners can be encouraged or hindered by so called 'influencers' or 'culture drivers'. We can recognize the phases of prevention, detection and response.



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In the prevention phase employees or business partners should have a clear view on what's expected from them. For senior management this implies that they need to communicate very clearly what is expected, and how they define good behaviour. The next step is to set a good example and have the right tone at the top. Saying the right words, but behaving differently will undermine the message and the position of the management. So, practice what you preach. Also show commitment to your staff and partners, and support and protect them in doing the right thing.

Define your core values, define your code of conduct and include a clear long-term commitment to business integrity. Live up to your own core values and your code of conduct. When you are defining your expectations to your employees, you are also defining your expectations to yourself. Good examples encourage really good behaviour. And talk about it, talk about your dilemmas and your considerations before taking a decision.

In addition to your employees, your business partners are also curious about your business behaviour. They want to see your core values, your code of conduct, and they want to see it working in practice. You might make clear what kind of a company you want to be and who you would like to deal with. Communication and presenting the right example are important here as well.

To identify the existing problems, you need to be transparent; sunlight is the best disinfectant. Transparency might make your behaviour visible, it will also help your employees and partners to recognise what's really going on, what can be the impact of such behaviour, and how they can change or improve theirs. In order to openly discuss ethical dilemmas, it is necessary to create a safe and secure environment, as well as to avoid developing a 'tunnel vision' or a culture of silence. Try to unite those people around you who have different opinions, so that you are constantly being challenged: Are you doing things right? Could you do better? Take decisions and make choices, talk about them, explain them. Encourage speaking up about possible issues. That also requires that you are able to accept any criticism or different views.



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In order to encourage integrity, you also need to react, to link a consequence to undesired or impeding behaviour. If you do not do so, then you'll give a message that you are tolerating unethical behaviour and this will undermine your position at the end.

Reward your employees when they show positive behaviour, make a positive contribution to promoting your company's ethical standards, as well as when they speak up and disclose issues or ongoing problems. So, hold everyone accountable, so they can see the clear result of their behaviour. But also hold yourself accountable in this respect, and communicate about it.

You can and should also hold your business partners accountable if they are involved in some fraudulent activities or if they show dangerous and harmful behaviour. It's important to act in line with your policies and to do your third-party due diligence. Then finally, enforcement of behaviour implies the attachment of negative consequences or even punish, when the persons involved have shown impeding or negative behaviour on purpose, and they have not changed their attitude after their behaviour has been discussed and they have been called to account for their behaviour. Similarly, reward positive and encouraging ethical behaviour of employees and partners. These rewards are crucial, and persons involved can feel safe and feel seen. In other words: use the "carrot and stick" approach.

Finally, training is key to promote a culture of integrity Integrity can be regarded as a muscle: a muscle needs training and exercise, all the time.

Remember that all this protects your business reputation; integrity is your license to operate.