

# Trust Me on This One

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For the past few years I have noticed that more and more firms have started using words like integrity, trust and ethics to describe how they do business. We serve as “trusted business advisors” to our clients. We have “integrity” and operate with the highest “ethical” standards. When I see these words used to describe professional services my first thought is why do they feel a need to say this to the public. Has there been a problem with trust and integrity in the past at this firm? It certainly tells me that they have some questions about it and feel the need to communicate with others.

I can’t imagine going to my doctor and having her tell me that she practices with integrity and high ethical standards that can be trusted. We have never had this type of conversation but she had better practice in that manner or she won’t be practicing for long! The same is true for the accounting profession. We don’t need to be “telling” our clients about trust and integrity, we need to be “practicing” with integrity and letting our clients judge our trustworthiness which immediately makes me think of core values.

Many of the firms I have visited over the years have wonderful core value statements that are not practiced. “We have the highest level of integrity” but yet they talk badly about clients and coworkers. Promises are made to clients but not kept. “I’ll have it to you tomorrow” and then deliver next week, “I’ll call you right back” and then fail to call, “The fee will be XXX” and then send a bill for more than the client was expecting. “We value our clients” and then discuss how to fire them or call them the “clients from hell” as described recently in one publication. The conversations and actions in many accounting firms simply don’t support their flowery core value statements. Their employees see this and so do their clients.

Over the years I have found we think as we speak. If you want to be that firm that practices with integrity and high ethical standards that is trusted by its clients clean up your language and also do what you say you will do. Rather simple concepts that will be noticed by everyone in contact with your firm. Your values and your actions will be congruent. Employees will have a higher level of respect for the core values and practice accordingly and clients will share with others that the firm practices with the highest level of integrity and can be trusted as business advisors. Trust me on this one.

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