

Most people think of corruption belonging exclusively to the Third World. Actually corruption is everywhere. Sometimes it is rampant like a plague and sometimes it is subtle and very hard to detect. Let me tell you about corruption that I have experienced.

First, let's look at the United States. When I started doing advocacy work in Indiana I made a pledge to myself to not get stuck in any funny corruption stuff. I would help businesses make new found millions of dollars and would not accept a fee or kick back. Free trips, cash, sex and everything else you can think of confronted me and I repulsed them all except for one time. I opened some doors for a personal friend of mine. In fact, this new opportunity became history for Black owned business in Indiana. Subsequent to the victory he asked me for a ride to some destination and I obliged. As he was leaving the car he stated that he put an envelope on my back seat and I should "read" what was in it when I have time. When I opened the envelope I found ten one hundred dollar bills.

The above tarnished our friendship but somehow I got over the fact that I put those hundred dollar bills in my pocket. I lost no sleep but resolved to jump off that "slippery slope" and never tolerate such action again – no matter how much I or my family may need the money.

Quid pro quo is a matter of business. Procurement agents who get along and do favors for major vendors find themselves with high paying corporate positions the instant they retire. You will find buyers for state and city governments laughing it up at football and basketball games. Research the seats they were sitting in and establish the owner of them. If you really want to bust them, take a picture via your cell phone and then send it to the local prosecutor's office. Also, only a fool who was getting monetary favors would report it on their income tax. That is another way to investigate their unusually high living standard than they report to the IRS.

The majority of contractual activity within the Federal Highway Administration system has some form, major or minor, of corrupt activity. The US Department of Defense had the Administrator of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business (a Black male) selling Mentor/Protégé contracts to Black owned firms. The culprit finally got busted via an investigation of the Chair of the House Small Business Committee (late 1990's). This activity was somehow reported to the Committee and they implored the FBI to investigate. In the end, this guy and his assistant got a 28 year rap in a maximum federal prison – his neighbor was the infamous John Gotti.

The former Congressman Bill Jefferson got a thirteen year prison rap for doing something funny with \$90,000 and Nigerians. At the same time corporate giant Halliburton was busted over a half billion dollars of funny stuff with Nigerians. They got no jail time but paid a very high fine. It's kind of funny in this nation that when a Black commits corruption his punishment is infinitely more severe than a white counterpart.

Now, let's leave the U.S. and go international. Levels of corruption are active in our nation but overseas they are on steroids. In fact, in many nations it is considered straight up business. Recently, we have had a West African consultant tell us that the way to deal with bribes and pay offs is to enter it into your budget. That money is a "cost of sales". Other companies will have a "bag man" within their firm who will meet (supposedly unknown to the owner) with his counterpart on the customer or procurement side. The money is exchanged and the business is won (or bought). The process is established for repeat business.

When doing business in South America and Africa, Europeans/Asians completely understand this game and play along with it. Please don't think that Europe and Asia are exempt of these games themselves. We, Americans should not deal with it and ride out this era of corruption until, one day, straight up business will be the norm and not the exception.

The fact is that the cost of these practices will eventually be reflected in the price of the product or services being provided. Yes, the end user – consumer – will pay for them. How do we police this? Corporations and government buying offices should monitor the lifestyles and net worth of their employees and officials. The Defense guy I mentioned above gave himself away by buying a fancy car, taking lavish vacations, wearing expensive jewelry and, as they found out in the investigation, he had a bank account in the nation of Lichtenstein. Imagine, a brother from DC having a bank account in this enclave of central Europe. It is time for corruption to end.

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