

Damage and Restitution

Consider the following case of damage and restitution. Dr. D. is a professional who has done quite well in his career. He has won awards, is respected by many and has a strong clique of friends. However, in his later years, he begins to realize that he has made some significant errors. At times, he has been *anti-collegial* in that he has demonized and bullied colleagues that he didn't like or was told not to like. He would treat them poorly, be abusive, and try to exclude them. By doing this, he did many of them and their reputations serious harm. He was not only a leader in these actions but also actually threatened those who wouldn't join him. It's as though he was locked into a continual hazing event, but it was far from harmless, as hazing can often be. He laughed off the problems that occurred. Even though a professional, he has never seen a problem with his behavior and was supported by his like-minded friends. However, over time, friends and colleagues became angry with him. When his wife left him and some colleagues disassociated from him, he began to understand the pattern he has been in for many years. Going as far back as his college days he showed a certain meanness, selfishness and callousness. He wonders if he has some sociopathic tendencies. But, even though Dr. D is beginning to realize what he has done, he is afraid to discuss it and admit to it. At times, he is obsessed with his error. Also, he is afraid of retribution from those he hurt so he doesn't want to face it. What can Dr. D do to restore a positive balance in his "ethical bank account?"

Comment: We can damage others in many ways by our behavior, and this is an example of one of those cases.

While Dr. D cannot take back the damage he has done over the years, it seems he can do at least two things. One is to make restitution as best he can, and two, he can examine his failures and adopt better behaviors and attitudes in the future. Restitution may be significant because he has done serious harm to some, and Dr. D may be afraid to face it. But restitution can be more than money. It can be an apology and service, for example. Because of the potential anger of those he has hurt, he may have to be *creative* about this and how to restore a positive balance to his ethical bank account.

What does he need to change and focus on within him? What mistakes did he make? Certainly avoiding personal responsibility for hurtful actions is one. Showing a lack of compassion and empathy is another. In collegial ethics, does simply *disliking* someone ever justify destructive behavior? If he was *told* to act this way by others, does this show a lack of responsibility and *courage*? What kind of program can he adopt to develop more responsibility, courage, compassion and empathy? Perhaps he can get counseling, seek mentoring, read about people who have the qualities he needs, and persist in trying to develop collegial habits.