



Caring for Company Assets Part 2 - Connecting Character

Respect and Property Rights

The character connection for use of company assets centers on the topic of respect for personal property. The bottom line is that you need to have a basic level of respect for personal property no matter who the owner is or how you feel about him or her. The ability to put aside your feelings and show respect, is a sign of a healthy, strong character.

The connection of property rights extends beyond the right of a farmer to till his land or a builder to construct a building. Your property rights extend to everything you own. Since you bought it, another person does not have the right to break it, steal it, or use it without your permission. The exact same principle applies to the property that you come into contact with each day at work. You should respect the property rights of your company and company, your coworkers and their personal property, your business partners, customers, and others with whom you come into regular contact.

Principles and Myths of Property Rights

Let's look at some problems and myths of property rights. Oftentimes, we approach respect for private property with a skewed point of view. We tend to get caught up in perceptions, ideologies, biases, and issues that have little to do with the facts of ownership and the principles of respecting that ownership.

Here are some basic property rights principles...

Principle #1: Nothing in life is free.

Principle #2: Someone owns everything

Principle #3: Someone pays for everything.

The problem comes when we forget these principles, we dehumanize the whole concept of private property, and only think about ourselves. Do you ever find yourself saying, "The government paid for it, so it doesn't matter?" But don't forget that your hard-earned tax dollars paid for it and it does matter.

Have you ever said, "It's such a small expense. The company can afford it." Think about the reality that the company bought it; it belongs to the company and not you. Besides, the relative size of the theft or misuse doesn't make it any more right or moral? Be careful because this kind of rationalization can lead to dangerous slippery slope.



Don't believe these Myths of Property Rights that say...

"Possession is 9/10 of the law."

"Someone else who can afford it will pay for it."

"We all use it so it's public property."

"I contributed something so I can do what I want."

"Nobody else cares so the owner doesn't either."

Don't be deceived for emotionally driven to turn the principle of property rights upside down.

Connecting Character and Caring for Company Assets

How we respect someone else's property shows how well we respect them. Would you carelessly break something that a friend loaned you? No, because you respect that person. Although the relationship between you and your company is different from a personal friendship, the principle is the same. If you break or steal something that belongs to your company, it shows a profound lack of respect. This lack of respect is a reflection of your character and ethics.

Here is how your character is reflected in your treatment of company property. First, you show a fundamental respect for your company, which means that you respect its customers, partners, and all the people in your company. Second, you understand the Golden Rule as it relates to private property. You treat the property of others the same way you want your property to be treated. Third, you demonstrate your honesty and integrity. You don't steal, abuse, or use someone else's property for your personal gain. It's not about how you "feel," it's about who you are! And fourth, you are not simply doing what you want to do or what you feel like doing, – but you are operating with mind and character engaged which is making you a stronger person.

Understand that the character benefits will transfer into your personal life as well. People will trust you. You will have more consistency in your ethical and social behavior. Your character and perspective will deepen. And you will become more principled and balanced person.