

ON THE EDGE

# Stealing Is Never O.K.

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In Arthur Miller's classic play "Death of a Salesman," Biff Loman justifies stealing from a lumberyard as a kid because it is only a minor cost to a large business firm. He later justifies stealing test answers from another student because he is a high school football hero. He blames his teacher when he fails senior mathematics. He decides not to make up the class in summer school because he witnessed his beloved father's adulterous affair. Several thefts later, each justifiable in his own mind, he serves prison time.

As Aristotle notes, humans are creatures of habits and bad habits are difficult to break, particularly when blamed on other people.

I was extremely disheartened to read about a few students stealing food from Wingra Café. The primary justifications reported in ON THE EDGE were high tuition and prices. If high costs justify stealing food, Ivy League schools must be overflowing with free lunches. But they are not.

Stealing from Edgewood College is wrong no matter what the reason. Doing so contradicts the school's core values. Theft damages trust among community members.

College is the special time in life when we create ourselves, evolving from teenagers to young adults, making decisions free of parental veto, and solidifying our own sense of right and wrong. We have the freedom to make moral mistakes, such as stealing, cheating, drugs, excessive alcohol consumption, and abuse of the opposite gender, to name the most common. Staff and professors are here in part to help students think through these moral issues.

Our moral accomplishments and mistakes become part of our consciousness and reputation, staying with us our entire life. They explode to the forefront of our consciousness during a life crisis, such as being

fired from a job, death of a loved one, or being rejected by someone we loved. At those crisis points it is common for people to ask themselves: Who Am I? Those with many moral accomplishments more peacefully sail through these crises.

Unexpectedly, I was diagnosed with Hodgkins Disease in 1995. On my 40th birthday, after all efforts to eliminate the cancer had failed miserably. I was told to prepare to die in six months. After the initial shock wore off, a flood of moral failures burst through my mind, interspersed with moral accomplishments. I tracked down my college sweetheart and apologized for having been such a jerk. She forgave me.

The following months were blissful. Life had been a wonderful adventure in making the environment around me a little bit better. I felt very grateful for my moral accomplishments. I had no fear of dying, though I was not in any hurry to do so. I was already smiling when the doctors reported that the cancer had disappeared following additional huge dosages of poisonous chemicals into my blood system.

Other near-death survivors have expressed similar psychological experiences. Those who feared death were inundated with the magnitude of their moral failures. People similar to Biff Loman were in this group. Most were deeply depressed about the harms they had done to others and how little they had lived for the sake of others. They came out of their near-death experiences with heightened moral awareness and reorganized priorities.

So begin building your sailboat now by uniquely embodying Edgewood College's values of truth, compassion, partnership, community and social justice. The benefit in doing so will become clearer in the future. In the meantime, pay for the food provided by hard-working employees and pursue more legitimate avenues for expressing college tuition concerns, such as working with the student government.

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