

**Honesty and Trust in America Survey**

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## I. Methodology and Sample Characteristics

### Methodology

Zogby International conducted interviews of 8175 adults online. Panelists who have agreed to participate in Zogby polls online were invited to participate in the survey. The online poll ran from 4/18/06 through 4/24/06. The margin of error is +/- 1.1 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. Slight weights were added to region, age, race and gender to more accurately reflect the population.

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent*
Sample size	<b>8175</b>	100
East	1869	23
South	2112	26
Central/Great Lakes	2518	31
West	1625	20
Did not answer region	51	1
18-29	1629	20
30-49	3258	40
50-64	1874	23
65+	1385	17
18-24	589	7
25-34	1657	20
35-54	3389	42
55-69	1859	23
70+	652	8
Did not answer age	29	--
Less than high school	46	1
High school graduate	432	5
Some college	2329	29
College graduate+	5337	65
Did not answer education	31	--
White	6070	74
Hispanic	809	10
African American	890	11
Asian/Pacific	162	2
Other/mixed	162	2
Did not answer race	82	1
Less than \$15,000	301	4
\$15,000-\$24,999	425	5
\$25,000-\$34,999	722	9

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent*
\$35,000-\$49,999	1122	14
\$50,000-\$74,999	1688	21
\$75,000 or more	3085	38
Did not answer income	833	10
Male	3923	48
Female	4217	52

\* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent and might not total 100.

## II. Introduction – by Jim Lichtman

“Honesty,” Plato wrote, “is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty.” A few centuries and a few billion ethics scandals later, it would seem that that unfortunate piece of wisdom is still alive and living very well.

In the last few years we have seen an unsettling number of ethics scandals involving corporate CEO’s, politicians, athletes and other celebrities. And every time we hear of another scandal our level of trust and confidence in individuals and institutions declines.

Are these events the result of a few rogue individuals and organizations bending or breaking the rules to suit their own needs, or is there a nationwide epidemic of greed and corruption driven by a win-at-any-cost attitude?

How much trust and confidence *do* Americans have in the critical institutions that constitute a great part of the infrastructure of the country – corporate, government, and media?

Are Americans, *themselves* honest and trustworthy or are they willing to bend the rules for personal gain?

Is America becoming a culture of corruption?

### III. Executive Summary

In examining the state of honesty in America today respondents were asked straightforward questions regarding their feelings on honesty, their personal level of honesty and their take on how much honesty they encounter in their everyday lives. They were also asked questions about trust, the trust they have in government, corporations, and in the sources they use for the information upon which they build their opinions.

No one agrees that the state of honesty in America today is the best possible and about 1 in 6 thinks it is in the worst shape possible. In general, less than half of Americans believe the state of honesty will improve in the next several years. Hope springs eternal for some however, as thirteen percent expect it to improve, and more than a quarter expect it to remain the same.

Americans have 4 times more trust that corporations are doing the right thing by *shareholders* than by either their consumers or their employees. Americans are much more confident that corporations are working to enrich their shareholders.

When Americans are building these opinions, to whom do they turn as a reliable source? They turn to the television news, but not one of the original “big three” networks. National news on cable television has the most trust at 65% high, while a quarter or less trust the other named news sources. The Internet has the lowest “high” rating, while the lowest of the low goes to broadcast television news, with half of Americans not confident in their reporting.

Who do we trust? Friends and co-workers are invested with high trustworthiness by three-quarters of respondents. And most respondents report that they feel their friends and family trust them as well. Work issues tend to appear as general productivity and pay equity complaints or under the general guise of “backstabbing.” There are certainly concerns with the ethics of employers and/or upper level management. As one respondent put it, for employers the “ends justify the means.” Other respondents had no problems or consider themselves fortunate to be working among people who share their values, for example: “I’ve worked with the same group of doctors in a small practice for 10 years and never had a problem with any of this;” or an even more interesting “I have great respect and admiration for my co-workers. I have *NEVER* seen my employees lie, cheat or steal. We operate our business on Quaker values and assume each individual is important and worthy of respect.”

Which groups or individuals do you trust? By slim margins, teachers and parents are seen as trustworthy, as are health care providers and parents. The clergy holds some ground here as well. Speaking in generalities really didn’t resonate with respondents as witnessed by this verbatim response “Ethical behavior is not conferred upon an individual by virtue of membership in some group.”

When asked about what two or three changes would make a more honest America, answers were wide-ranging and diverse. Raising children right, giving parents

the tools to raise honest kids, cracking down on lying politicians, and firing Congress were just a few of the suggested solutions.

Respondents typically view honesty as a problem “away from home” they see themselves, and to a great extent their friends and family, as essentially honest and moral. Once you move beyond the borders of home and family to the workplace, to corporate America, to Washington DC and the world at large, the sense of security in knowing that the world is an honest place to do business diminishes significantly.

## IV. Narrative Analysis

### *1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, what is the state of honesty in America today?*

1 The worst possible	18%
2	41
3	35
4	5
5 The best possible	--
Not sure	1

No one believes that the state of honesty in America today is the best possible, and about 1 in 6 thinks it is in the worst shape possible. Forty-one percent chose 2, next to the worst possible, and 35% were in the middle, choosing 3, halfway between best and worst.

Hispanics (23%) and African Americans (26%) are more likely than are whites (16%) to call the state of honesty the worst possible. Younger respondents appear to be less jaded, as 11% of 18-24 year olds call the state of honesty the worst possible, while twice as many respondents over the age of 70 call it the worst possible. Although youthful respondents do not call the state of honesty good, just slightly less bad, with them more likely to choose a 2 on the scale than are the older respondents.

Across most demographics, in most income brackets, age groups and areas of the country, the state of honesty is most often rated a 2 or 3 on a 5 point scale.

### *2. Is the state of honesty in America today better or worse than it was when you were a child?*

Better	4%
Worse	74
The same	18
Not sure	5

Three quarters find the state of honesty in America worse than it was when they were young. Just 4% find it better and another 1 in 6 believe it has not changed since they were young.

There is a regional difference here, 73% of Easterners finding the state of honesty worse than when they were children and 78% of Westerners finding it to be worse. Correspondingly 14% of Westerners call the state of honesty the same, and 18% of Easterners believe that it is.

Eighteen to twenty-four year olds are twice as likely (6%) as 55-69 year olds (3%) to find the world a more honest place now. Men (20%) are slightly more likely than

women (15%) to agree that the state of honesty is better now than it was when they were young.

In every demographic, no more than 7% said the state of honesty in America today is better than it was when they were a child.

**3. In general, do you anticipate the state of honesty in America will improve or decline in the next five years?**

Improve	13%
Decline	45
Remain the same	28
Not sure	14

In general, 45%-less than half- of Americans believe that the state of honesty will improve in the next five years. This is interesting as three-quarters of them feel it is worse now than it was when they were young. Thirteen percent expect it to improve, and more than a quarter expect it to remain the same.

Asians (53%) are more likely than whites (45%), Hispanics (46%), or African Americans (46%) to believe that the state of honesty in America will decline in the next five years.

In every demographic pluralities expect the state of honesty to decline.

**4. In general, do you have more or less trust in your government now than you did 5 years ago?**

More	8%
Less	75
The same	17
Not sure	1

Respondents have less trust in the government than they did 5 years ago, by a wide margin. Three quarters have less trust, while 8% have more trust and 17% have the same amount of trust as they did 5 years ago.

Residents of the Great Lakes are nearly twice as likely to have more trust now, than are residents of the east or west (10% and 6% respectively). Older residents too are somewhat more likely to have more trust now than 5 years ago, but the numbers are still below 10%. Whites and Hispanics are twice as trusting as Asians. Seventy-four percent of whites have less trust and 83% of African Americans have less trust in the government than they did 5 years ago.

Respondents, who say they have less trust now, decrease as their income rises. Eighty-one percent of those earning \$15,000 or less have less trust in the government now, while 73% of those earning \$75,000 or more have less trust in the government now.

Seventy-one percent of men have less trust than 5 years ago, and 77% of women do.

**5 – 7. In general, do you have more or less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by consumers... by employees... by shareholders?**

**Table 1. Trust in Corporations**

	More	Less	The same	Not sure
By consumers	5	74	21	1
By employees	5	77	17	2
By shareholders	19	42	31	8

Americans have 4 times more trust that corporations are doing the right thing by shareholders than by either their consumers or their employees. Three quarters of them have less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by consumers and 77% of them have less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by their employees.

Women (79%) have significantly less trust than men do (69%) that corporations are doing the right thing by consumers. They also have less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by employees (81% women, 73% men) and shareholders (45% women, 39% men).

About 1 in 5 believes that corporations are doing the right thing by shareholders, though a still robust 42% has less trust that corporations are working to enrich even their own shareholders.

Seventy percent or more in every demographic group has less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by consumers. Seventy-three percent or more in every demographic group has less trust that corporations are doing the right thing by employees.

Americans are somewhat more confident that corporations are working to enrich their shareholders. While those reporting more confidence that corporations are doing the right thing by shareholders hovers around the 20% mark in most demographic subgroups, those reporting the same confidence hovers in the 20%-30% range as opposed to the high teens or low 20's as in the previous 2 questions.

**8. What 2 or 3 specific changes would have to take place in order to improve your trust in corporations today?**

Do something about CEOs salary/compensation	16%
More transparency	6
Improve employer/employee relationship	5
Eliminate greed	5
Enforce existing regulations & laws	5
Reduce outsourcing	5
Stop corporate influence	5
More financial accountability	4
Respect consumers	4
Pay employees better	4
None/not sure	4
Implement new regulations & laws	3
Eliminate corporate welfare	3
Protect the environment	3
More civic & community involvement	2
Protect retirement pensions/401Ks	2
Improvement of health benefits	2
Restructure Board of Directors	2
Accountability: non-financial, unspecified	2
Long-term strategic planning,	2
Ease regulations	1
Increased shareholder control	1
Government change	1
Get rid of corporate personhood	1
Less monopolies	1
Nothing they do would restore my confidence	1
Stop hiring illegal immigrants	1
Lower oil & gas prices, impose windfall profit tax	1
Promote unions	1
Fire executives	1
Reduce union influence	0.5
Fair & balanced reporting	0.5
Stop lay-offs,	0.4
Impeach Bush, Cheney, etc.	0.3
Lower profits, rationale unspecified	0.2
Increased employee dedication	0.2

9 – 12. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no confidence at all, and 5 being very confident please rate how much confidence you have in the following.

**Table 2. Confidence in Media** (ranked by % high)

<b>How much confidence do you have that the reporting is accurate and fair?</b>	<b>High (4+5)</b>	<b>Medium (3)</b>	<b>Low (1+2)</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
When you read an article in newspapers	25	35	40	1
When you read an article on the Internet	19	48	31	2
When you watch national news on broadcast television (ABC, CBS, NBC)	25	26	49	1
When you watch national news on cable television (CNN, FOX News, MSNBC)	20	33	46	2

The Internet has the lowest “high” rating, while the lowest of the low goes to broadcast television news, with half of Americans not confident in their reporting.

As age increases, confidence in newspaper reporting decreases. Confidence in the accuracy of Internet reporting also decreases age increases but the range is much smaller, ranging from 3% 18-29 year olds with no confidence, to 8% of those 65 and over with no confidence. The Newspapers have a high of 21% no confidence among those 65 and over, with 8% of 18-29 year olds expressing no confidence at all in newspapers. No confidence at all in the national news ranges from 14% among 18-29 year olds to 33% among individuals aged 65 and over.

Women (22% no confidence) express somewhat more confidence than do men (27% no confidence) in broadcast television news, and in the accuracy of newspaper reporting (women 13% no confidence, vs. men 18% no confidence)

**13 – 18. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all trustworthy and 5 being very trustworthy, how much do you trust each of these to act properly?**

**Table 3. Trustworthiness of Select Groups** (ranked by % high)

	High (4+5)	Medium (3)	Low (1+2)	Not sure
Friends and Co-Workers	75	21	4	1
Corporate Leaders	7	23	69	1
The Media	11	31	58	--
The President	24	7	69	--
The Courts	29	38	33	1
Congress	3	20	76	

Friends and co-workers are invested with high trustworthiness by three-quarters of respondents.

Low levels of trust were given to Corporate Leaders and the President (69% each), with the lowest numbers given to Congress at 76%.

The courts are held as moderately trustworthy by 38%, they score low trustworthiness with 33% and high trustworthiness by 29%.

Across nearly every demographic, individuals award their friends and co-workers a 4 on a 1-5 scale of trustworthiness.

Corporate leaders score not at all trustworthy or a 2 on the scale about a third of the time each. African Americans and Hispanics particularly distrust corporate leaders rating them as not at all trustworthy 42% and 38% respectively.

The media fares better, with nearly a third choosing the more moderate 3 as their score for the trustworthiness of the media, and about another third choosing a 2.

**19. What 2 or 3 specific changes would have to take place in order to improve your trust in government today?**

Personnel changes/Impeachment proceedings	17%
Curtail/eliminate lobbying, minimize cronyism	10
Campaign finance reform	8
More transparency	7
Reduce greed, show honesty/integrity etc..	6
More focus on holding people accountable	6

Term limits	5
Less partisanship	5
Checks and balances/more equal distribution of power	3
Fiscal/economic responsibility	3
Restructure the government: set up/policies/laws	3
More/Less media involvement	2
Curtail Pork Barrel spending/don't hide spending	2
More protection of citizens' rights	2
Increase/enforce criminal laws for gov't officials	2
More focus on key issues e.g. healthcare, social security etc..	2
Overhaul/simplify tax system	2
Improved Congressional investigation/oversight	2
Increase/decrease/restructure compensation for politicians	2
Less voting fraud/increase in voters	1
Not sure, can't think of anything	1
Overhaul/enforcement of immigration laws	1
Smaller government	1
Increased involvement of third parties	1
Follow the Constitution more closely	1
Reduce/increase US involvement in foreign issues	1
Abolish Electoral College/election reform	1
Reign in Supreme Court/eliminate legislation from the bench	1
Abolish gerrymandering/redistricting	1
Separation of church & state	1
Nothing can be done at this point	0.5
Increase in National Security	0.4
Environmental protection	0.3
Less dependence on foreign oil	0.2

**One each:** A lot; Elimination of “spin”; Trying to please everyone; Questions aren't valid; Move D.C. to Yuma, Arizona; Revolution; A miracle; Less frivolous lawsuits; Fewer millionaires in Congress; End atmosphere of complacency; Ask Jesus what to do

**20. Do you consider yourself honest and trustworthy?**

**21. Do your friends and co-workers consider you honest and trustworthy?**

**Table 4. Respondents' Trustworthiness**

	Yes	No	Not sure
Consider yourself	97	1	2
Friends/co-workers consider you	95	--	5

Significant majorities in every subgroup consider themselves trustworthy. While 75% consider their own friends trustworthy, nearly all (95%) believe that their friends and co-workers consider them trustworthy.

**22. In your work experience, which ethical issue occurs most frequently?**

Lying	25%
Stealing/cheating	8
Lack of respect	43
*Other	11
Not sure	14

**\*Other:** People being counterproductive (138); Backstabbing (129); Lack of equality (46); Pay differences (39); Overall lack of ethics (35); Prejudice (35); All of the above (35); Lack of responsibility (30); Lack of respect (29); Lack of trust (28); Stealing/cheating (19); Lack of integrity (18); Lack of accountability (15); Conflict of interest (10); Fraud (9); Apathy (6); People thinking about themselves (6); Confidentiality issues (6); No commitment to goals (6); Poor communication (6); Ignorant about workplace issues (4); Worker fatigue (3); Legal/union problems (3); Issues with illegal immigrants (2); None (105)

In their work experience 43% agree that lack of respect occurs most frequently. A quarter agree that lying occurs most often and 8% believe that stealing and cheating are the most frequent problem.

**23. You work for a company that provides paid vacations that grow in length the longer you stay with the company. You have worked there several years and have helped the company grow and prosper. You decide to take a vacation with your family and realize that you have been credited with five more days than you are entitled to. You know your spouse and family would be overjoyed with the extra time. What do you do?**

Take the extra time; you deserve it	5%
Take the extra time, but vow to work extra hours when you come back	4
Report the error and plan a vacation based on the time you have actually earned	86
Not sure	6

An overwhelming majority indicates that they would honestly report the error in their vacation time and plan a vacation based on the time they actually earned. A scant 5% would just take the time, and 4% would take the time and work extra hours to replace it.

As age increases the likelihood of reporting the error increases, 70% of 18-29 year olds would report the error, 87% of 30-49 year olds would report it, and 92% of those over 50 would report it.

Fewer than 10% of respondents in any category would just take the extra time, with the exception of those aged 18-24 where 16% would just take the time.

**24. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own beliefs – A or B?**

**Table 5. Importance of Honesty and Trust in Personal Life**

	%
Statement A: I believe that honesty and trust are important in my personal life	99
Statement B: I believe that being seen as honest and trustworthy is not really that important in my personal life	1
Not sure	1

Everyone agrees that honesty and trust are important in their personal life.

**25. You are updating your resume for a job you are anxious to get. You are out of work, have a mortgage payment and kids in school. You believe you're ideal for the job. It's exactly the same as your last job where you excelled. However, your potential employer requires a college degree for anyone interviewed and you never graduated. Do you imply that you're a graduate to get the interview, or do you honestly describe your education level?**

Make it appear I'm a graduate	4%
Honestly describe my education	92
Not sure	4

Nearly all respondents agree that the best course is to honestly describe their education. Fewer than 10% in every demographic subgroup are willing to make it appear as though they have graduated to secure the job.

**26. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own beliefs – A or B?**

**Table 6. Importance of Honesty and Trust in the Workplace**

	%
Statement A: I believe that honesty and trust are important in the workplace	98
Statement B: I believe that being seen as honest and trustworthy are not really that important in the workplace	1
Not sure	1

Nearly all agree that honesty and trust are important in the workplace.

**27. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own beliefs – A or B?**

**Table 7. Honesty and Integrity vs. Goals**

	%
Statement A: I believe that honesty and integrity are important as long as they don't compromise my goals	10
Statement B: I believe that my goals are less important than acting with honesty and integrity	85
Not sure	4

Eighty-five percent agree that their personal goals are less important than acting with honesty and integrity.

Again there is an age component in responses—19% of 18-29 year olds agree that honest and integrity are important as long as they don't compromise their goals, and just 7% of those over 50 agree. For the older the respondent, honesty and integrity are more important than their goals, while for the younger respondents, there is still some consideration of goals before honesty.

**28. Would you turn in a co-worker for lying, cheating or stealing?**

Yes	53%
No	10
Not sure	38

More than half would turn in a co-worker for lying, cheating or stealing. Nearly two in five however, are unsure about whether they would, perhaps indicating that this is situational. Still, pluralities in every demographic, and majorities in most would turn in a co-worker for such transgressions.

**29. A pedophile has moved into your community. You are aware of this because you work in the mental health system. Your knowledge of this is confidential but if someone checked the online database they would find the information online. Do you...?**

**Table 8. Confidentiality vs. Safety**

	%
Say nothing; the job demands your confidentiality	29
Casually mention to some neighbors that the website listing sex offenders is a good place to visit periodically, and hope someone else figures it out	35
Say something, the children's safety is paramount	25
Not sure	11

This proved a thornier issue for respondents with 35% agreeing that they would casually mention the website, 29% strictly adhering to the ethical guidelines for employees of the mental health system. A quarter agrees that they would simply say something, valuing the children's safety above their own vow of confidentiality.

Curiously, here 18-29 year olds are least likely to breach confidentiality, while older respondents are more inclined to breach their code of ethics to protect the neighborhood children.

**30. What would you do if you caught a friend or co-worker in a lie?**

Confront them	54%
Depends on the circumstances	27
Report them to a supervisor/authorities	4
Do nothing, but lose respect/trust in them	4
Ignore the incident, do nothing	4
Don't know, not sure, no idea	3
Investigate before taking any action	1
Mention it to friends, co-workers, others	1

**31. You babysit your neighbor's young son each week in your home across the street in return for much needed grocery money. Their teenage daughter comes home in the afternoon long before her parents. You've noticed that a teenage boy has been hanging around their house after school every day. You obviously do not know exactly what is going on, but the parents seem unaware. One day, the mother expresses to you her concerns for her daughter and asks you if you have noticed anything unusual. Do you...?**

Mention it to them and possibly risk your day care job and the money you need	79%
Let it be, you don't really know the circumstances anyway	5
*Other	10

**\*Other:** Confront girl (168); Advise mother to speak with daughter (55); Ask for clarification (45); Depends (43); Speak to daughter (28); Give specific advice to parent (22); Get actively involved (9); Confront boy (5); Confront girl & boy (5); Watch the situation (4)

Eight in ten would risk their day car job to mention to their neighbor about their daughter’s afternoon visitor. Just 5% would let it be, and 10% chose “other” with another solution.

Older respondents once again are more likely to mention the issue, possibly risking their jobs, while younger respondents are somewhat more likely to just let it be.

**32. You are the owner of company with a good sales team, but due to increased competition they’ve been struggling lately. However, a new sales person has achieved a dramatic surge in sales by using some questionable sales methods. Although, her methods go against what you strive to achieve as good business practice, you employ 50 people and her contracts help keep them employed. What do you do?**

Encourage her methods because they work	2%
Ignore her methods hoping she will move on, but in the meantime benefit from her practices	5
Ask her to change her methods or she will have to leave the company	66
*Other	12
Not sure	16

**\*Other:** Coach employee to change, then monitor (218); Modify methods (135); Address the methods (116); Find out more (94); Find compromise (60); Depends (57); Discuss with staff (44); Fire/Demote her (26); Consult with employees (18); Are her methods unethical? (17); Review policies (9); Hire a consultant (4)

Two thirds agree that the course of action is to ask the sales person to change her questionable methods or leave the company. Just 5% agree that they would ignore her methods, and a mere 2% would encourage her.

**33. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own beliefs – A or B?**

**Table 9. Company’s Reputation for Honesty/Integrity**

	%
Statement A: My company has a good reputation for acting in an honest and ethical manner.	66
Statement B: My company’s reputation could use improvement in the areas of honesty and trust.	23
Not sure/Not Applicable	12

Two thirds agree that their company has a good reputation for acting in an honest and ethical manner. About a quarter agree that their company could use some improvement in the areas of honesty and trust.

Thirty percent of African Americans chose statement B, 21% of whites and Asians did, and 25% of Hispanics did. Otherwise there were few demographic differences.

**34. Which of the following two statements comes closest to your own beliefs – A or B?**

**Table 10. Pressure at Work to be Dishonest**

	%
Statement A: I have never been pressured at work to violate the honesty and trust of our customers or those with whom I work	64
Statement B: From time to time, I have been pressured at work to be less than honest	31
Not sure	5

Sixty-four percent have never been pressured at work to violate the honesty and trust of their customers or those with whom they work. Thirty-one percent agree that from time to time they have been pressured at work to be less than honest.

*(Asked only of those who say they have been pressured at work.)*

**35. On a scale from 1 – 5, 5 representing the most pressure, how much pressure have you felt to violate honesty and trust?**

**Table 11. Pressure to Lie**

	High (4+5)	Medium (3)	Low (1+2)	Not sure
Pressure to violate honesty and trust	31	32	37	--

A third chose right in the middle, halfway between most and least pressure to violate honesty and trust. Almost another third chose high pressure to violate honesty and trust and 37% feel a low pressure to violate honesty and trust.

**36. You are selling your home and you know that it has a serious defect that would likely not be detected for several years. This defect could potentially decrease your profit substantially. Do you encourage the buyer to hire a home inspector and pretend you do not suspect any defects, believing in the motto “Buyer Beware,” or do you disclose the defect?**

Encourage the buyer to hire a home inspector	30%
Disclose the defect	58
Not sure	12

More than half agree that the right thing to do would be to disclose the defect, and 30% would encourage the buyer to hire a home inspector. More than 10% are not sure how they would handle it.

Westerners (27%) are less likely than Easterners to encourage the buyer to hire an inspector, and 11% more likely to agree that they would disclose the defect.

Just about half of 18-29 year olds agree that they would disclose the defect, and 10% more 30-49 year olds would. Sixty-four percent of 50-64 year olds would disclose and 61% of those over 65 would as well.

**37. Do you play by the rules, even when others do not?**

Always	31%
Usually	64
Sometimes	5
Never	--
Not sure	1

Sixty-four percent usually play by the rules even when others do not, with 31% agreeing that they always play by the rules. Five percent say they sometimes play by the rules even when others do not.

Again there are some regional differences, East coast residents agree that they always play by the rules 25% of the time, and West coast residents agree that they always play by the rules 31% of the time.

Age plays a part here as well, with 17% of 18-29 year olds always playing by the rules and twice as many 50-64 year olds playing by the rules. Thirty-seven percent of those 65 and older play by the rules and 31% of 30-49 year olds do, so as age increases the decision to stick with the rules appears to become more popular.

**38. A co-worker, who has become a friend, goes on maternity leave from your company. State law mandates that the company “hold” her job for one year until she returns. Although she had previously said she had every intention to return to work, two months into your friend’s leave, she tells you that she has decided not to return to work, but will not tell the company’s owner in order to continue to collect benefits for the full year. Later, the boss confides to you that he’ll be glad when your friend returns to work, as she is a strong asset to the company. What do you do?**

Tell him the truth. He deserves to know what you know	17%
Say nothing. It’s up to my friend to tell the boss	64
Not sure	19

Sixty-four percent agree that they would do nothing and let their friend tell the boss herself. Seventeen percent say they would tell the boss the real story, and 19% are just not sure what they would do.

**39. Should all employees be held the same ethical standard?**

Yes	95%
No	2
Not sure	4

Nearly all respondents agree that all employees should be held to the same ethical standard.

**40. Today, which of the following individuals or groups do you believe demonstrate the best example of honesty and trust?**

Teachers or educators	22%
The clergy	13
Elected officials/politicians	--
Businesswomen and men	2
Sports figures/entertainers	--
Parents	16
Community activists	12
*Other	7
None	16
Not sure	13

**\*Other:** Depends on individual (152); Health Care (95); Military Personnel (73); Public Service (59); Religious (30); Young children (21); Elected officials (17); Activists (15); Media (14); The clergy (13); Parents (13); Volunteers (8); Business professionals (6); Non Profits (5); Sports figures/entertainers (4); Friends/family (4); Democrats (3); Libertarians (3); Conservatives (2); Teachers (2); Liberals (2)

Teachers and educators are seen as the best examples of trust and honesty by a small margin of 22%. Parents are slightly more trusted than clergy (16% and 13% respectively), and community activists are trusted by slightly more than 10%, just 2% believe that business women and men exhibit the best examples of honesty and trust.

**41. You work for a Fortune 500 company and discover that they are not complying with an industry regulation. You take this to your boss who takes the matter up with her superior. She is told that it will be dealt with, but you discover that it never is. Your boss tells you that, at the risk of her own job, she can't take it any higher. She says you can, but implies that you may face serious consequences as a result. Do you...?**

Go over her head and risk her wrath as well as that of the company	25%
Decide that you've told your boss and now it's the company's problem and not yours	24
Turn the company in and risk being fired	21
*Other	12
Not sure	20

**\*Other:** Depends on severity (357); Anonymously report to authorities/media (161); Change jobs (135); Openly report to authorities/media (113); Document and take action (73); Make effort to resolve (42); Consult an attorney (24); Research regulations (11)

A quarter agrees that they will go over their boss's head and risk the consequences. Another quarter decide that it is now the company's problem. Twenty-one percent risk firing as a consequence and agree that they will turn the company in. Twenty percent are not sure and 12% have other ideas.

Men are twice as likely to tell the boss the truth than are women. African Americans are more likely to say nothing than are Whites or Hispanics, though majorities in all racial demographics are more likely to say nothing. Interestingly there are no significant differences for the various subgroups of income range.

**42. Have you ever used, distributed or copied computer software beyond its intended use?**

Yes	33%
No	67
Not sure	--

Two thirds say they have never used, distributed or copied computer software beyond its intended use. Another third admit that they have, no one was not sure.

The likelihood of using computer software in this fashion is much higher among younger respondents than among older ones. More than half of all 18-29 year olds agree that they have used or copied software beyond its intended use. Twenty-seven percent of

50-64 year-olds agree that they have, and just 18% of those 65 and over. Men are twice as likely as women to have used software beyond its intended use.

**43. Under what circumstance are you most likely to lie?**

**Table 12. When Most Likely to Lie**

	%
Spouse or friend asks you about their appearance or gift they have given to you	81
Co-worker asks about you their job performance	5
Boss or manager asks you about a job that you were supposed to complete	4
Spouse or friend asks you about a job that you were supposed to complete	2
*Other	9
Not sure	--

**\*Other:** Don't lie (240); Avoid hurt (128); Try not to (66); Avoid parties (14); Questions about personal life (12); Admitting infidelity (11); Aiding government (11); If someone is ill (10); Sex questions (9); To protect a child (9); Confidentiality (8); To avoid phone calls (7); Lie by omission (7); How I am feeling (6); Money 5; Humor (5); Age or weight (5); Santa Claus (5), Easter Bunny (5); If the truth will hurt (5); To justify poor judgment (4); Helps progress (4); To avoid work (3); Surveys (3); If it makes people feel better (3); When I'll be home (3); To avoid an argument (3); Disagree w/situation (2); For the boss (2); To keep a job (2); National Security (2); So people won't worry (2); Not to offend the host (2); All 2; To a child (2); If I don't like the person (2)

It is most likely that respondents will lie when a spouse or friend asks them about their appearance or gift they have been given. All other responses were less than 10%.

**44. In business, it is common practice to reward individuals who meet or exceed sales or other goals. Do you believe that individuals within a company who come forward about an illegal or unethical act should be similarly rewarded for uncovering wrongdoing?**

Yes	65%
No	18
Not sure	18

Sixty-five percent agree that individuals within a company who come forward about an illegal or unethical act should be rewarded similarly to those who meet or exceed sales goals.

Between 60% and 70% in every demographic subgroup agrees that individuals who come forward should be rewarded.

**45. What 2 or 3 specific changes would have to take place in order to improve honesty and trust in America today?**

Reward honesty	8%
Hold people accountable	8
People should set a good example for children	7
New government leadership	7
A fair and balanced media	6
Parents should teach values/ethics	5
Return to religious principles	5
Demonstration respect for self and others	4
More transparency	4
Schools should reinforce values/ethics	4
Consistent and tougher law enforcement	4
Change the culture	3
Put less value on wealth/materialism	3
Reward whistleblowers	2
Practice the Golden Rule	2
Eliminate lobbying	2
Improve education	2
Improve salaries/benefits for workers	2
Separation of church and state	1
They can't do anything to restore my trust	1
Have stronger work ethic	1
Campaign finance reform	1
Increase respect for authority/the law	1
Protect civil rights	1
Fix the tax system	1
Judicial reform	1
Increase community involvement	1
Improve government oversight	1
Media/entertainment should reinforce values/ethics	1
Reform voting system	1
Smaller government	0.5
Term limits	0.5
Workplace should reinforce values/ethics	0.4
Reduce greed	0.3
Not sure/no response	9

**Other:** Improve foreign policy (12); Reform/enforce immigration laws (10); Improve homeland security (7); Environmental stewardship (6); Reduce dependence on foreign oil (3)

#### IV. Conclusions and Recommendations – by Jim Lichtman

The key objective behind this survey was to find out if the ethics scandals of recent years are a condition limited to one segment of society or a symptom that America, as a whole, is becoming less ethical?

The good news is that for the most part Americans would seem to demonstrate honesty and integrity in their lives. When tested with eight, real-life narratives, more often than not, the majority chose to do the right thing. When faced with a choice between honoring the confidentiality of a pedophile and the safety of their children in their neighborhood (Q-29), 60% would choose to violate the rules in order to protect their children; an understandable concern.

However, 30% would *not* disclose a serious defect in their home if it meant compromising their sale price (Q-36); 33% acknowledged that they *have* used computer software beyond its intended use (Q-42); and 64% would *not* disclose information that would be helpful to an employer regarding another employee (Q-38).

Good ethical conduct is not always easy. In fact, most of us lie at one time or another, sometimes for “convenience,” as when a spouse or friend asks about their appearance or a gift they have given (Q-43), 81%. Less than 10% say would lie about more important issues.

When it comes to honesty and trust in the workplace (Q-26), 98% believe that it is important. And more than half, (53%) would turn in a co-worker for lying, cheating or stealing (Q-28). However, 31% say that they have been pressured at work to be less than honest (Q-34). And when that group was asked what level of pressure they had faced, the numbers are almost equally divided between high, medium and low levels of pressure (Q-35). Clearly, there needs to be greater emphasis on developing ways to reduce or eliminate workplace pressure to act unethically.

When it comes to accountability and incentive, an overwhelming 95% of those questioned believe that *all* employees should be held to the same ethical standards (Q-39). And 65% believe that “virtue” should not be the *only* reward for doing the right thing. Americans believe that anyone within a company who comes forward with information regarding an illegal or unethical act should be rewarded in a similar manner to those individuals who meet a sales or other goal (Q-44).

While levels of honesty and trust are high when it comes to friends and co-workers, more work needs to be done in the areas of workplace pressure and overall respect (Q-22). 43% called “lack of respect” the most common ethical issue, followed by “lying” (25%).

When it comes to handing out grades for Honesty and Trust regarding the various institutions in America, the news is not so good.

The results would seem to indicate that the three horseman of the ethical apocalypse are: Money, Power and Arrogance.

English Historian John Acton famously said that, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Former Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, perhaps infamously, added, “I like power and I like to use it.”

When asked to grade the level of Trustworthiness of Select Groups (Q-13-18), Congress was given the lowest numbers at 76%, with Corporate Leaders and the President tied at 69%.

When asked “What 2 or 3 specific changes would have to take place in order to *improve* your trust in government today?”(Q-19), the American public is more than a little fed-up with the lack of true leadership in Washington. Of the more than (00,000) write-in responses, the top three called for, “personnel changes (or impeachment); curtail or eliminate lobbying and cronyism, and campaign finance reform.”

Americans also want to see their elected officials live up to their responsibilities with greater transparency, less greed and partisanship, and a lot more honesty and integrity. (One individual suggested moving D.C. to Yuma, Arizona. Another said it would take a miracle!)

When the same question was asked concerning corporations (Q-8), the top two responses asked that “something be done about CEOs salary and compensation,” and “more transparency.” The following tied for third: “improve employer/employee relationships; eliminate greed, enforce existing regulations & laws; reduce outsourcing; and stop corporate influence.” (1% noted that “*Nothing* they do would restore my confidence.)

So, what’s to be done? How can we get Washington to change? How can we reduce or eliminate the current culture of corporate and political corruption and promote a culture of character? These are not easy questions and there are no easy answers.

The results of the survey clearly indicate that there is a gap in trust and confidence between the American public and corporate and political leadership.

### **Commitment –**

First, we not only need to make a commitment to live by ethical values in our lives, but we need to elect individuals to public service who are similarly committed to and demonstrate those values in their own lives.

### **Accountability –**

Second, if we are invested in a corporation and/or work for one, we need to advocate for strong ethical policies and consistent consequences for anyone not following those policies.

In March, 2005, the Board of Directors at aerospace giant Boeing fired President Harry Stonecipher after an investigation revealed that he was having an affair with a female employee. In a statement to the press, the Board said that it had little tolerance for missteps.

In March of this year, U.S. Airways CEO Doug Parker *declined* a bonus of \$770,000. In a written statement, Parker said that he chose to decline the money because of the sacrifices other employees had made to keep the company moving forward, and that his leadership “...comes with some expectation of shared sacrifice.”

If Boeing’s Board can take this kind of action, other Boards can do the same. If CEO Doug Parker can show the same sacrifice as his employees, other CEOs can make similar sacrifices.

### **Consciousness –**

Finally, we need to raise the consciousness of ethics in the decisions that we make on a daily basis. Are we treating others with respect, honesty and fairness? Are we helping to create an atmosphere of trust?

One of America’s greatest educators, Booker T. Washington, said that “Character is power.”

Let’s promote *that* kind of power.

Let’s elevate statesmanship over partisanship.

Let’s encourage respect over arrogance.

If we’re ever going to bring about positive change in our culture, we need ethics – now more than ever.