

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Rise Above It All

By Douglas E. Welch

Fraud is everywhere, from the city streets to the corporate boardroom. Lately, we seem to be swimming in an ocean of fraud. Worse yet, some of us in the high-tech world are aiding and abetting it, if not committing fraud outright ourselves. Any career is built on developing a level of trust with your clients. Any connection to any business with even the appearance of being fraudulent will eventually bring your career to an end.

Sure, it might have short-term benefits—expensive houses, flashy cars, etc.—but you will find it hard even remembering these items when the whole thing goes bust. Steer clear of participating in anything that smells of a scam, whether perpetrated by an individual or a large company. You owe it to yourself, your career and your family to stick to the straight and narrow.

One type of fraud that affects high-tech careerists directly is unsolicited e-mail, or spam. As a user of the Internet, you are deluged with ads to buy this miracle cream, invest in the latest multi-level marketing scheme, or “make thousands of dollars from your home.” It amazes me that any high-tech careerist would have anything to do with creating and delivering spam.

I make a call to all high-tech careerists: Don’t work on technology that you wouldn’t want directed at yourself. Don’t build software that invades people’s privacy. Don’t create or use annoying “pop-up” advertising. Don’t use your technology in an attempt to defraud others, in any fashion. Just because we *can* do something doesn’t mean we *should*.

At the moment, my biggest concern is high-tech workers who assist, directly or indirectly, in the stealing of hundreds of thousands of dollars through credit card fraud, abuse of PayPal-like payment systems, and other outright, criminal frauds. Some might claim that they aren’t culpable because they were only providing technology services, not actually touching the money that resulted.

This is bunk. If you continue to work for a company that is engaging in fraud, you are involved. If the company

is using technology you developed or equipment you operate, you are involved. If you find yourself in a situation such as this, there is only one thing for you to do: Get out, now! If you don’t, you could find yourself involved in civil litigation, criminal charges, or even be sent to prison.

It should be clear that fraud can happen in any size company, from the smallest startup to the largest corporation. It seems very likely that when the Enron debacle is finally dissected, we will find fraud on both a small and large scale. Worse yet, we will find scores of executives, managers and employees who decided to do nothing.

For whatever reason, these people decided to do nothing—not even get a different job—when confronted with this fraud. They decided it wasn’t any of their business. These people collectively carry a small portion of responsibility for Enron’s failure. Worse yet, they also share responsibility for the loss of thousands of jobs, the decimation of retirement plans and, very possibly, the end of their own careers.

As high-tech careerists, all of you have the skills, desire and ability to live wonderful lives, filled with better-than-average luxuries for you and your families. Frauds will try to tempt you with visions of great wealth or greater power. They will play to the common human weaknesses of greed and fear. They will lie, cheat and steal, from their “customers” and probably even you.

Don’t get involved. Don’t let it happen. You need only look around you to see the results if you do. □

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