Making a Difference by Speaking Out: 
Wigand Says Exactly What’s on His Mind

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PROLOGUE

When starting a career with a particular organization, few of us expect to be confronted with organizational wrongdoing. The typical individual probably thinks that the options available to someone confronted with organizational wrongdoing are clear-cut and the decision that must be made is relatively straightforward. Without being confronted with wrongdoing, an individual might anticipate that some kind of corrective action could be taken easily. One such action may be to confront the wrongdoers and attempt to stop the unacceptable behaviors. Or, perhaps, an individual could simply change employers. Even speaking out and exposing the wrongdoing might seem acceptable. Rarely are the options simple. Therefore, it is beneficial for us to study the ethical dilemmas individuals face and how they responded to them.

An effective way to learn how to deal with organizational wrongdoing is to be privy to the specifics of cases involving individuals who experienced wrongdoing and took corrective action. The following interview was conducted with Dr. Jeffrey S. Wigand, the highest-ranking executive in any tobacco company to speak out about what goes on within the tobacco corporate world. This case is unique in many ways. Tobacco generates sales of approximately U.S. $50 billion annually and has been in use throughout the world for hundreds of years. Virtually all cases of individuals speaking out about wrongdoing are about one organization. Although Jeff Wigand describes some decisions and resulting behaviors of high-ranking Brown and Williamson executives, his account provides insights about an entire industry.

Although the movie, The Insider, CBS’ 60 Minutes, and PBS’ Frontline provided interesting details of Jeff Wigand’s experiences, the information contained in this interview reveals specific details of organizational wrongdoing that led him to speak out. These instances, when explained, can be used by us to answer the difficult question, “Given the circumstances, what action would I have taken?” These instances of wrongdoing also stimulate us to question the mind-set of individuals who engage in such wrongdoing. Unlike numerous other instances in which individuals spoke out about organizational wrongdoing, Jeff Wigand describes his life after speaking out as fulfilling.
Jeff Wigand earned a Ph.D. in endocrinology and biochemistry from the University of Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. He held senior management positions with Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer and from 1989 until 1993 was vice president for research and development at Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company. Subsequent to being terminated from Brown and Williamson, he and his family were threatened with physical harm. Furthermore, he describes how conflicting judicial orders between a Kentucky and a federal judge threatened his First Amendment rights. Despite the possibility of being incarcerated, Jeff Wigand cooperated with news organizations and federal and state officials and testified about the hazards of cigarettes. He was instrumental in assisting the states’ attorneys general in the settlement against the tobacco industry. In addition, he worked with the Food and Drug Administration under the code name Research. He shuns the label of hero and does not consider his actions to be brave.

**EXPECTATIONS OF WORKING FOR BROWN AND WILLIAMSON TOBACCO COMPANY**

**Armenakis:** Jeff, what was your motivation for going to work for Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company?

**Wigand:** There are a number of factors that played into sort of an equation that led me to make that decision. First, I had spent 25 years in the health care industry where science was used to search for the truth and where science was used to make lives healthy or better. I was offered an opportunity to take a product that, when used as intended, kills four million people in the world annually, and use my skills that I had used for 25 years in the pharmaceuticals and the health care industries to improve the product. Second, from a personal point of view, I got the opportunity, to move my family from the New York City area to Kentucky where my children would be close to their grandparents. And, I also had considerable economic incentive to do it. I essentially doubled my salary. And so I had personal gain, I thought I had professional opportunity and I had economic gain. When I put it all together and the six months of interviews with the senior management in BAT (British American Tobacco Company), I chose to leave the health care industry to try to make a safer cigarette.

**Armenakis:** What objectives did you set for yourself?

**Wigand:** Well, there were a number of objectives. One was I clearly understood before getting to the company, and I mean the company being the tobacco industry in particular, that cigarettes were addictive and that cigarettes were tobacco products that contained between 4,000 to 8,000 toxic components. If you could use contemporary scientific techniques, like filtration, affinity chromatography, or any of the things I had used before, I could take out of cigarettes some of those toxic components, like carbon monoxide, acetone (i.e., the major ingredient in nail polish remover), embalming fluid, formaldehyde, and all the things that contribute to addiction. So you could reduce the biological risk for those who choose to smoke or choose to continue to smoke as an adult. The second part of it is that traditionally in the pharmaceutical industry, we were able to change molecules and change some of their biological impact. Nicotine has a cardiovascular effect. Nicotine is highly addictive. It has 5 times the addictive capacity of, say, cocaine. And, by changing the shape of a molecule or changing the functional groups of a molecule, you could change the biochemical properties. And, we did that so many times in pharmaceuticals. Nicotine is no different than other pharmaceuticals, and we should be able to do it with nicotine. My intent was to change nicotine structure and make it less addictive and less cardiovascular and then change some of the components that are in tobacco products.

**Commentary**

Jeff Wigand’s motivation to work for Brown and Williamson and the objectives he set for himself were arguably ambitious. From his experiences with Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer, he apparently inferred Brown and Williamson would provide him with the autonomy and resources to be socially responsible. As described throughout the interview, his personal disappointments with his superiors and his personal loyalties were responsible for his decision to speak out.

**ETHICS OF THE TOBACCO CASE**

**Armenakis:** Why is the so-called tobacco case an ethics’ issue?

**Wigand:** Well, I have to take you through some of the things that I’ve learned and observed in the 4 years and 3 months that I was at the company. I was a senior corporate officer, so I had quite a bit of visibility in terms of daily operations, as well as, strategic operations. Ethics came into play in the behavior of a company and its total disregard for public health and safety [to generate] profits and sales. The company clearly understood that children were its target, not adults, and clearly looked at gateway products. The company had an opportunity to share with the general public and the health care community information that could have helped in terms of public health and safety and in the net save lives. They chose not to do it.

**Armenakis:** You went from being a loyal organization man, if you will, to speaking out. What was the main trigger that caused you to do this?

**Wigand:** Well, it’s hard for me to give a single epiphany, so to speak, of why I chose to do what I did. I think part of it was an evolutionary process. Some of it is probably when I was terminated at the company, some of it was the lawsuits they chased me with, it was the death threats, it was the Congressional testimony (of the tobacco CEOs); and then, it was seeing documents that I had asked to see when I was in the company as head of research and development, that I saw only from an outside source once
they were leaked. Ultimately, I felt that I had to share what I knew with the public with CBS’ 60 Minutes on August 5, 1995.

Armenakis: Can you describe some of these events in a little more detail?

Wigand: From my experiences within the company, it didn’t take me long to see things that concerned me and gave me pause for thought. I wasn’t with the company 3 months (i.e., March 1989) before lawyers were telling me, all the science I had read in the Surgeon Generals’ Reports—1964 to 1988, etc., were all hocus-pocus. I learned about two important issues the industry tried to mislead the public about. One was the causal hypothesis, that is, numerous tobacco studies haven’t been able to show cause and effect (i.e., between smoking and health problems). The other was the whole issue of addiction. They will never admit it’s addictive (even though we know it is addictive) because addiction reduces free choice. If the product is now defined as addictive, no longer is free choice an issue. It is addictive. It’s out of control. It was the first time in my experience I’d ever had lawyers tell me how to think about science.

Part of what I was trying to do is build an organization that was directed toward making a safer cigarette. What do you have to take out of it, how do you measure safety, and how could you ensure that translates to manufacturing? So, I started creating a greater portfolio of technical skills—more Ph.D.s, more fundamental—so that we could put it on an analytical basis, rather than an empirical basis. The company, when I joined it, was very empirically based—smelly, touchy, feely — so when a mistake happened, they couldn’t understand how a mistake happened or a manufacturing error occurred. In September 1989, my first year there, we assembled all the scientists of this $25 billion company from all its principal tobacco-producing companies. And, we gathered for 4½ days in British Columbia, and we sat down and looked at the existing toolbox, the instant toolbox of all the technology that each and every part of the company had and how we could use it and apply it to the product. For example, how could you make a fire safe cigarette. . . . a cigarette that didn’t cause a fire when dropped on bedding material or like the cloth on this chair? How do you change nicotine structure so it wouldn’t be so addictive or create cardiovascular issues? How would you test it? How would you use the contemporary pharmacological molecular modeling techniques on this product? How would you use genetic engineering and gene-splicing technology to influence the nicotine content of the tobacco? What type of biological testing methods would you use? How would you deal with the whole issue of environmental tobacco smoke? And, at the end of the 4½ day meeting, we generated in the order of about 15 to 16 pages of minutes, which clearly was contradictory to my original meeting with the lawyers in March of 1989. [The minutes] said, yeah there is a causal relationship, nicotine is addictive and you can change it. Well, we memorialized it; we had programs that said here, take this tool, use it this way, use this one this way and we discussed it openly. And, it clearly was consistent with the company’s internal mantra, but absolutely contrary to the external mantra. Well, when I circulated these minutes within the company and to my boss, the president and chief operating officer of the company (Mr. Thomas E. Sandefur, Jr.), I would say his reaction was clearly apoplectic. I can’t characterize it any other way . . . . “How could you ever create a document like this? We need to get this document controlled.” And, the way he controlled it was, he ordered the assistant general counsel of the company, who never attended the meeting, to take the minutes (that we generated from 4½ days at the scientists’ meeting), and change them from the 15 to 16 pages to 2½ pages of vanilla, the intent being to destroy the document that clearly reflected what the company knew and could be producible in a court of law and to produce a document that was vanilla and not controversial. I got in trouble because I was a participant and I generated the minutes. But that’s what happened and was what I thought I was hired for and that was to make a safer cigarette and this was part of it. So, they changed the minutes. I had never seen anything like that. It bothered me.

Then, in January of 1990, this got such visibility that the chairman and CEO of BAT Industries ordered all the lawyers and all the scientists in the various companies that participated in this to a New York meeting. We were told at that meeting, specifically how lawyers would control communications, oral and written, including electronic. They would vet documents before they became permanent records. They would sequester or maintain documents, that were particularly controversial, at remote sites so they couldn’t be discovered in a court of law. And, then all the scientists would have to go through caution-in-writing seminars. We couldn’t use the word safer anymore. We couldn’t use the word addictive anymore. We couldn’t use these words anymore because then the lawyers would edit them out. You can actually read about this on the Web sites now and look at the original Vancouver minutes, the edited, and what followed in terms of the mandate from the chairman of the board. Then, on the fire safe cigarette, the industry could get together under the (Rep. Joe) Moakley (D-MA) Bill and work on it. Well, I had a lot of interest in this because fires created by cigarettes account for 1,200 lives lost a year, and they are mostly kids, nonsmokers, and firefighters. So, if you had a cigarette that didn’t create a fire, gee whiz, you don’t have to worry about the toxicity, you just save those lives. Through the Moakley Bill, which allowed for the tobacco companies’ scientists to sit down together and to talk through a joint venture without violating the antitrust laws, I set a course for this company for the better part of 4 years. And, during that period when we (i.e., the tobacco companies’ scientists) were supposed to be working cooperatively to make a fire safe cigarette, my company is saying “it’s impossible; let’s attack this, let’s attack CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission), let’s make sure that we discredit whatever we do.” This was kind of strange for me. You work together and then what you do is you spend your efforts trying to discredit it. Ultimately, this project was taken away from me. It was put into the lawyers’ hands. [They] boxed it up and shipped it overseas as if it never happened and you couldn’t find it; because a safer cigarette meant what? Everything else that they said before was unsafe. So, I’m seeing things that really, really, are getting me bothered.

And then, my kids are coming home and saying “Dad, you are killing people with the job you are doing.” And I’m saying, “Wow, what a trip this is!”

I’m pulling down a six-figure salary; I have a daughter that needs medical care; I have a house with a mortgage and all the things that go with it; and, I also was learning from the year plus with the company, how this company treated defectors. Whether it was on sexual harassment
litigation or anything, I saw how they brought out the power (in using the legal system) that they had from immense profits. Nobody could handle that.

So then I said, “Well, what am I going to do?” Well, I can’t put my family in harm’s way, and I don’t want to get in harm’s way. So, I focused on on teen addiction, on additives and lots of other things. I got into numerous confrontations. When I discovered that somebody was smuggling germ plasm out of the country to Brazil (Department of Justice, 1998); Meier, 1998; Weinstein, 1998) in a cigarette pack to avoid explaining genetically engineered tobacco seeds, I went to the president of the company (i.e., Mr. Sandefur) and I said “What’s going on here? If this is not a problem, why are we taking the seeds out in the cigarette pack and not declaring it through customs? There is a problem here, what’s going on?” It was dismissed.

A significant event occurred in August of 1992. I had been the recipient of a draft copy of a National Toxicology Program technical report (National Institutes of Health, 1993) that basically described one of the additives (i.e., coumarin), the company continued to use, as a lung-specific carcinogen. Well, this is an additive that the company had used for years in its cigarettes until 1984 when it took it out of its cigarette products. This chemical compound, which masked foul odors, was shown to be a carcinogen in laboratory animals. It had been removed from GRAS (generally recognized as safe) by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). And, it needed to be disclosed according to HHS (Health and Human Services) under the Cigarette Additives Act. But in the Cigarette Additives Act there was no provision for what they call noncigarette products, like pipe tobacco, moist snuff, and chewing tobacco. So, when Brown and Williamson and all the other companies removed it from their cigarettes, Brown and Williamson continued to use this chemical compound in its pipe tobacco. And, so when this report came to me, I look at the report and said here is incremental information that is above and beyond the 1984 information that now demands duty of care. Duty of care means that you know something that puts somebody in harm’s way so you have a moral responsibility to take it out. And so, of course, before I can change something independently I had to go to my boss (Thomas Sandefur). So, I went back to the same guy I had been talking with (i.e., my boss) and I said, “This has got to come out. Here is the new evidence that says we are putting more people at more risk. We have to take it out.” And he basically said, “No, we are not taking it out because it will affect sales. Go back to the lab and find a substitute.”

I’m up to you know where, and I’m getting in hot water because I’m continually running into these things and bringing them up. I never had a problem like this when I worked for J&J or Pfizer. I just never had that problem. And so, several months later, Sandefur now becomes the new CEO and new chairman of the board and the first thing he does is—BANG; (he fires me). That was fine. I was happy. I was done. They escorted me out of the office, they took all my files. They wouldn’t let me have anything. They just escorted me out of the office with a guard.

Finally, in the end, my boss, who was the chief operating officer, soon after he became the chief executive officer, would actually go in front of Congress and take an oath, and under oath, clearly say that nicotine wasn’t addictive and that smoking was no more dangerous than eating Twinkies, which was far removed from what his daily mantra was. I felt that that was probably the ultimate ethical violation. In fact, if anything, this Congressional testimony pushed me to do what I did because, if I sat quiet while that image replayed itself in my mind, I would be no different than those people who I saw take that oath and violate that oath of trust.

Arenenakis: Who presented the award to you and in what kind of setting was it presented?

Wigand: R&D had an annual quality meeting that recognized individuals’ participation and contributions to the TQM process. It was held at the R&D complex outdoors and under a tent with food and all the trappings of a celebration. I had formed a TQM management team that worked with R&D employees from the bottom up . . . training, involvement, education, etc.

Arenenakis: Did you discuss the points you described that led to your speaking out with your colleagues in departmental meetings and/or “water cooler” meetings?

Wigand: There were numerous conversations on many of the issues I have raised, post B&W, while I was at the company. If you mean, did I ever discuss with any of my subordinates what I intended to do with the knowledge I had accumulated . . . No. There were many of my subordinates that were aware of my concerns over the way things were done, namely, smuggling tobacco seed out of the country in a cigarette pack, . . . destruction of documents. I am not considered a shrinking flower when it comes to issues like those.

Arenenakis: What can you tell me about the reaction of your colleagues to your concerns after termination?

Wigand: Well, after I was escorted off the property, several of my colleagues came by to visit with me and talk about the termination, etc. They were disappointed and surprised. They were all told not to associate with me. Some of them left for other employment.

Arenenakis: Did you maintain any contact with any of them?

Wigand: No, I did not want to put any of them in harm’s way.

Arenenakis: Was there anything that you look to that maybe guided you to come out and speak out? Prior experience, or . . .

Wigand: Well, again, I don’t have a simple answer for you. I’m sure my religion played a part of it. I’m sure my education played a part of it. I’m sure my work experience, particularly at Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer; I’m sure my own beliefs and my own moral compass and my own integrity. I cannot unbundle in a way that gives you a very straightforward distinct answer. I think it’s a composite that made me do what I believed was right. And, I still believe it was the right thing to do. . . . I only recently started looking for lots of the whys, and I must tell you that I didn’t know of Immanuel Kant (Kant, 1983) when I first was dealing with this issue. [His writings] would have given me the insights of some of the actions and the beliefs and ethical behaviors and the nature of the human being. I knew the things I saw, the things I learned.
and observed in the company, were outside the bounds of everything I knew before. For a lawyer to deliberately and constantly change the minutes of a meeting so that they wouldn’t be discovered in the public domain or through litigation to me was unethical. To smuggle seeds out of the country was not only illegal but unethical, and I knew that. I wasn’t quite sure what to do with the knowledge I had at the time. Foremost in my mind early on was my family. I did not want to put my family in harm’s way (i.e., financially, emotionally, and psychologically), and that kind of carried some weight in the beginning.

I had a responsibility that came with knowledge. And, I think I would probably tell the kids today that there is a responsibility with knowledge. What do you do with what you know? Also, the belief that I think a single person is any individual who can make a difference. When we believe in something, we need to stand up and be counted. And, in fact, we teach this to our kids; stand up and be counted when you believe in something. You have the power to change, . . . that I had embedded in my character I believe. What I didn’t have embedded into my knowledge base was a lot of the philosophical reasons why I did what I did, and I’m learning that. I must be honest with you, I’ve not mastered the understanding yet, but I clearly understand that what I did was right, and I wouldn’t change, and I don’t have compunctions about doing the same thing again, provided the same set of conditions exist. I believe it was my moral imperative.

Armenakis: The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of speech. How does your situation relate to that?

Wigand: Well, my freedom of speech was taken from me by a Kentucky court. A judge in Kentucky said I could not speak about tobacco or tobacco matters. In fact, he enjoined me and threatened to incarcerate me in a Kentucky jail if I violated it. I had some help from a federal judge in Washington that allowed me to talk to federal agencies and state agencies without that penalty, but when I was subpoenaed by the federal government to Mississippi on the fire safe cigarette issue, I was also subpoenaed in the Mississippi litigation. While that deposition was going on with the U.S. government in the morning, Brown and Williamson went to the Mississippi Supreme Court and tried to block the civil deposition, but they also went back ex parte (in the interest on one party, only) to the Kentucky judge that issued the first restraining injunctive order, freedom of speech, and secured a pending contempt citation. And, I was told at lunchtime that if I went forward in the afternoon when I went back to Kentucky, I would be most likely incarcerated for giving testimony under one jurisdiction and violating the other jurisdiction, which was probably, the most scary thing of all. I was told at lunchtime that I had a responsibility that came with knowledge. And, I think I would probably tell the kids today that there is a responsibility with knowledge. What do you do with what you know? Also, the belief that I think a single person is any individual who can make a difference. When we believe in something, we need to stand up and be counted. And, in fact, we teach this to our kids; stand up and be counted when you believe in something. You have the power to change, . . . that I had embedded in my character I believe. What I didn’t have embedded into my knowledge base was a lot of the philosophical reasons why I did what I did, and I’m learning that. I must be honest with you, I’ve not mastered the understanding yet, but I clearly understand that what I did was right, and I wouldn’t change, and I don’t have compunctions about doing the same thing again, provided the same set of conditions exist. I believe it was my moral imperative.

Armenakis: Can you explain why people continue to work for a tobacco company?

Wigand: Why do people continue? I did and part of it was because I didn’t want to disrupt my family. Part of it was the comfort zone. Part of it was I didn’t want any part of the attack or the retribution associated with being a defector. I think that is something that goes with the intimidation factor. When you make $100,000 a year as a salary and you are living in an environment where the average income is $12,000/$13,000, there is a significant quality of life and you really think about, “Well, gee whiz, what is my loyalty to?”. So, I think that’s one factor.

I think also the silos of knowledge within the companies tend to be very much and rigidly segmented and sequestered. I was at a very different type of point. I was at the top of the food chain, and I got the visibility that not many people had. But I also came to the industry with a totally different perspective. I wasn’t inculcated in that culture for decades and decades like many other people.

Many of the people that I worked with are not intrinsically bad people. They are just confused. And, they have the same knowledge I have and I am disappointed that many more did not exercise their morale compass. And, this was not only in the company that I worked for, but others, as well.

Commentary

The subtitle to this interview was taken from a quote by the actor who portrayed Thomas Sandefur in the movie The Insider “[Jeff Wigand] says exactly what’s on his mind.” This subtitle seems appropriate enough. Wigand was candid with his boss, which cost him his job. Indeed, he admits he is not a “shrinking flower.” He observed “how this company treated defectors.” He must have anticipated some of events he experienced. Furthermore, he fully understood the likelihood of his colleagues being the target of intimidation tactics if they violated the company’s orders not to associate with him. And, he understood why they should not, could not, and would not associate with him in any way. Thus, after his termination, he
did not initiate any contact with his colleagues for fear of putting them in harm’s way. As he offered, “They are not intrinsically bad people.” Despite his observation of intimidation tactics and his own familial concerns, he ultimately made the decision to speak out. Viewers of The Insider vicariously experience some of the intimidation tactics.

Jeff Wigand was guided, to confront what he considered organizational wrongdoing, by what he calls his moral compass, that is, his ethical values, which were instilled in him, long before he was employed with Brown and Williamson. It took the accumulation of the conflict between his personal values with these incidents over the 4-plus years of employment with the company for him to speak out. His account gives us a description of the constraining culture of Brown and Williamson and an indication of the company’s lack of social responsiveness.

The tobacco case illustrates some of the differences between what is ethical and what is legal. Prior to the tobacco settlement of 1997, the industry discredited scientific research about the addictiveness and danger of cigarettes to smokers and nonsmokers. It was not and is not an illegal product. However, Wigand believes if cigarettes were invented today, they would be declared illegal. In addition to his description of what was known about cigarettes by tobacco employees, we have anecdotal evidence of the some of the executives’ attitudes regarding the health hazards of cigarettes. A case in point is the testimony of Mr. David Goerlitz. Dave Goerlitz was the so-called Winston Man because he was a model who portrayed one of various heroes in Winston cigarette TV commercials. He recounted a conversation with an R.J. Reynolds executive and his colleagues. In the conversation, Mr. Goerlitz asked the group why they did not smoke. One executive responded, “We don’t smoke the s—, we just sell it. We reserve that for the young, smoke. One executive responded, "We don't smoke..."
Armenakis: Do you have anything like a set of criteria that you can use to measure your success?

Wigand: I got a measure of my success today. One of the kids in the class here, a college student, after listening to how the tobacco industry operates and how they target people, basically said she didn’t want any part of the tobacco industry and handed me her pack of cigarettes. As far as I’m concerned, my trip has been worth it. That I’ve gotten one person’s life that will be changed from that. Her (health) risks that she has had from being manipulated and duped as a child will be improved. She started smoking when she was a kid—not when she was a reasonable adult at 19 or 20 years old, but when she was a child. She really didn’t understand how she was manipulated into it and how it can hurt her and the reasons why the industry targeted her particularly. To me, it’s worth it. I can go home today and say I’ve made a difference. I want to make sure I can say that everyday.

Armenakis: What are some of the things that you do in this mission to influence smoking behavior?

Wigand: Well, I do it on two ends of the spectrum. One is on the adult end and the policy end, which is more strategic where I ask people who are in political office, people who can influence those in political office, those that are opinion leaders or can be part of the policy making, to put into visibility the need to regulate this product, particularly as it relates to our children.

It’s a product that 3,000 children a day, average age 11 to 12 years old start using. It generates the horrific statistics we see later, and so we need policies and programs and laws and regulations that put this product in its context, which is, when used as intended, it kills. It wouldn’t be legal if it was invented today.

The second part of it is going down and working at the level of the kids, which I really probably enjoy most of all. It’s getting in and working with the fourth or fifth graders before they become hooked, before they get manipulated, and give them the knowledge to see how it happens so that they can’t be part of the manipulation or part of the duping.

And so, that to me has tremendous reward and uses my total integrated skills that I have mastered over the years. My science background, my education credentialing, my corporate experience, the movie, and everything else give me credibility that I can do this and do it very effectively. So, I do it throughout the world and with the intent of working both ends of the spectrum, so to speak.

Armenakis: Looking back on the last few years, is there anything you would do differently?

Wigand: Well, everybody looks back and says I could stir the pot of stew a little bit differently. I don’t think I would change my decision at all. I have no regrets, and it clearly was the right thing to do. If I have to go back and tweak and tinker things, I’m not quite sure I could make this chemistry any better. There are many times that Attorney General Mike Moore and I, Dickie Scruggs, and Ron Motley get together and we kind of reflect about where we are today versus where we were a year or 3 or 4 years ago. It must have been a tremendous alignment of the stars or whatever; I’m not quite sure I could do much tinkering with it.

My single largest disappointment is probably the breakup of my family, but I look back at that and I say well, if it was right, it probably would have survived the test and would have been stronger today. I’m better off, she is better off, my children clearly understand that their dad did the right thing and that they have a model to follow. I have no regrets and for that there is not much I can change.

Armenakis: What advice would you give to a young person now, graduating and getting ready to embark on a career?

Wigand: Wow! Lots of things. First of all, I think we have seen recently lots of corporate misbehavior that involves people, that involves the culture. I would urge those that are going into business today, as they see something wrong, they should try to right the system; and I think they need to bring an ethical awareness to the corporations today that we are seeing a significant lack of. I mean, the Enron situation, Ford/Firestone, the tobacco industry, and so forth, they had knowledge, and they chose to ignore that knowledge and didn’t know what to do with the knowledge that they had. They were motivated by different factors.

I would hope people going out understand the ethical behavior that’s required to make money and will not deviate from that. And, I hope by sharing what I know and some of the philosophical aspects of Kant (1983) and Rawls (1999) and the other ethicists we have talked about, that they would learn that they have a moral compass and they need to follow it.

Commentary

Jeff Wigand’s life after speaking out has been changed dramatically. The consequences of his actions have been similar to many of the other individuals who have courageously confronted the truth and revealed the wrongdoing of organizations (cf. Alford, 2001; Miethe, 1999; Sapsford & Beckett, 2002). One important distinction of Jeff Wigand’s life after speaking out (compared to others who have spoken out) is he expresses fulfillment in life. He redefined his career by taking his knowledge and is applying it in a way to further serve people. He founded Smoke-Free Kids, Inc., a not-for-profit foundation, and is successfully crusading for the betterment of people by helping young people make informed decisions about tobacco use.

EPILOGUE

Jeff Wigand admits that he would like to see the tobacco industry regulated. He would like to see the tobacco companies make money ethically, but he feels the product must be regulated. Unlike products that are regulated by the FDA, the only listing of the contents on a pack of cigarettes is 20 Class A Cigarettes. There is nothing on the pack about the 599 chemical additives, the pesticide residues, and the bacteria from the soil and agricultural products. He argues for disclosure.
Jeff Wigand expressed anger and frustration that only 10 of the 50 states have chosen to spend their settlement money appropriately. He believes that is missing the intention that the attorneys general started with. He also feels that the tobacco industry is working to disrupt the states’ use of the settlement funds. To learn more about Jeff Wigand, access his Web site (www.jeffreywigand.com). He continues to “say exactly what is on his mind.”

NOTES

1. This press release stated that DNA Plant Technology Corporation pleaded guilty to conspiring to illegally export tobacco seeds to Brazil and a number of other countries from 1984 to 1991.

2. In this article, Janice Bravo, a researcher for DNA Plant Technology, shipped tobacco seeds to Brazil to Souza Cruz Overseas, a British American Tobacco (BAT) subsidiary. BAT is the parent company of Brown and Williamson.

3. In this article, Brown and Williamson (B&W) is named as an unindicted coconspirator with DNA Plant Technology Corporation (DNAP).

4. This quote by Mr. Goerlitz, referred to as the Winston Man, was repeated from a conversation with a R.J. Reynolds executive and his colleagues. Mr. Goerlitz asked the group why they did not smoke.

REFERENCES


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