

Viewpoints

Steal a little or steal a lot

In recent weeks, I have been thinking about a question that Robert Hyde, chief financial officer for the Utah Jazz and president of Fanzz, told me the Jazz organization poses in job interviews. First, the interviewer sets the stage for the question by providing some information.

“Employee theft can be a problem. From time to time, employees take company property home for personal use. Some will take paper and pencils for their kids to use in school. Some will take Utah Jazz hats and T-shirts for their friends. On rare occasions, employees may take company property and resell it.”

Then, the interviewer poses the question: “Are you the kind of person who steals a little or are you the type of person who steals a lot?” A surprisingly common answer given by job candidates is that if they are lucky enough to get a job with the Jazz organization they will only steal a little.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

■
Commentary

Michael Vaughan is Weber State University's provost. He accepts e-mail from readers at MVAUGHAN@Weber.edu

In recent weeks, similar scenarios have been played out on the national scene. Candidates for positions in the Obama administration are being questioned about how much they have stolen.

Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner failed to pay several thousands of dollars in federal taxes. After the unpaid taxes were detected, he coughed up \$43,200 in back taxes and interest. Seemingly, this qualifies

as “stealing a little” because Geithner was confirmed by the Senate Finance Committee.

Apparently, Tom Daschle crossed the line between stealing a little and stealing a lot. Daschle withdrew his nomination to lead the Health and Human Services Department when it was discovered that he failed to pay \$128,000 in taxes. Apparently, \$128,000 amounts to “stealing a lot.”

Geithner and Daschle are two high-profile examples, but they are not the only examples. Nancy Killefer, who was appointed by President Obama to a new position to scrutinize government spending, resigned from the Office of Management and Budget because of questions with her taxes.

These cases aren't unique to the Obama administration. You may recall that President Bush's nominee for secretary of homeland security, Bernard Kerik, withdrew his nomination

*... politicians should
be subjected to the same
scrutiny as any candidate
for a job.*

because he had not paid employment taxes on a domestic worker who was an illegal immigrant.

Another Bush nominee, Linda Chavez, who was an outspoken critic of minimum wage increases, withdrew her nomination to be labor secretary when questionable employment relationships with an illegal immigrant were uncovered. Regrettably, I could continue with a long list of examples for prior presidential administrations, and I could expand the list with countless examples from state and local government.

The humorist Will Rogers was

fond of calling the politicians in Washington, D.C. the “hired help.” I think that Rogers was correct in his view that politicians are simply employees of the citizens of this country. This being the case, politicians should be subjected to the same scrutiny as any candidate for a job.

This brings me back to the question posed in job interviews: “Are you the type of person who will steal a little or the type who will steal a lot?” What does the Jazz organization do when candidates for a job say they will only steal a little? The answer is the organization doesn't hire them.

The only successful candidates are the ones who say they won't steal anything and would be uncomfortable working in an environment where theft is regularly tolerated.

It would be a refreshing change to see the same standard applied to the nation's “hired help” in Washington D.C.