

Harder Right the safer route but tougher way

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Bad guys are not necessarily bad people. Or put another way, as retired FBI agent Oliver Halle of east Cobb succinctly puts it in the first words of his new book, there are times when, "Good people get into trouble."

Those good people sometimes wind up on the wrong side of the law, even though they know better, warns Halle.

His book weighs in at a slender 114 pages and is titled, "Taking the Harder Right." The title comes from the Cadet Prayer at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, which says, "Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole truth can be won."

Halle is not a West Point grad. Rather, he commanded a Swift Boat during the Vietnam War, followed by law school and 28 years with the FBI. Most of those years were spent investigating first the Mafia and then white-collar corruption involving public officials. He instigated the investigation into then-Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell and played a key role as well in the investigation that helped bring down then-Fulton County Board of Commissioners Chairman Mitch Skandalakis. The latter case typifies what Halle means when he writes that "Good people get in trouble."

Josh Kenyon was an up-and-coming lawyer on the chairman's staff who soon was promoted to be his chief of staff (and who Halle allows to tell his story "first-person" in the book). Kenyon said his intuition quickly let him know that he was working for an organization that did not put a premium on ethics, but that he kept suppressing such thoughts.

He soon was befriended by vendors hoping to do business with the county, including one with whom Kenyon was uneasy at first but with whom he eventually developed what seemed to him to be a real friendship. The man began covertly giving him envelopes containing thousands of dollars, saying he was just trying to "help out" Kenyon, whose wife had just given birth to twins and was not working. After initially fearing he was being bribed, Kenyon began rationalizing the "gifts" - and even declared them on his taxes.

"My position was not one that could award or even vote on the awarding of county contracts," Kenyon writes. "Thus I rationalized accepting the money without ever asking myself why 'George' would so easily part with \$5,000. I later realized that what he was buying in his mind was access to my office and the perception that came along with that. He would be perceived by county staff as being connected and in favor with the chairman because we hung around so much and he could visit my office without an appointment."

But the vendor ultimately was targeted by the FBI - and Halle, with whom Kenyon was already well acquainted - and the investigation inevitably snared Kenyon as well. To find out how, you'll have to read the book. Suffice it to say that Kenyon lost his job, his wife, his family, his law license and spent time behind bars.

Concludes Halle, "Taking the harder right can be exceedingly hard with very painful

consequences. However, taking the easier wrong all too often is a temporary solution with permanent consequences. Taking the easier wrong can be like eating a candy bar to assuage your immediate hunger, only to leave you even hungrier later."

There's plenty more on the topic in Halle's book, which can be obtained at Amazon.com and which is an easy read based on real-world stories, not a dry text.

And should anyone reading this be among the ethically challenged, don't despair. Writes Halle, "All of us do things that we are ashamed of, embarrassed by or worse. The essential lesson though, is that we all have a code that we live by. We know right from wrong and want to do the right thing, but for some of the reasons this book has talked about we stray from that moral compass. That is the time to take hold, recognize what has happened and go back to your code. It is not too late. You can go back. That is not to say there may not be consequences, but this is where taking the harder right comes into play. - It is not too late to discontinue your destructive behavior." And not too late to read "Taking the Harder Right."

Joe Kirby is Editorial Page editor of the Marietta Daily Journal