The Slippery Slope
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Corrupt leaders and officials syphon money from the economy, often into their own pockets, which takes capital away from productive use in the business sector. Corruption promotes the advancement of enterprises that are not the most competitive or fiscally fit, skewing the economy away from maximum efficiency and undermining the ability of more capable businesses to succeed.

Ethics laws and rules don’t prevent corruption or unethical behavior. Many major ethical scandals have rocked the U.S. government and business leadership, despite ethics rules. Watergate, Enron, Arthur Anderson, Monica Lewinsky, Bernie Madoff, Tyco, Martha Stewart, Dennis Hastert . . . the list goes on. But ethics rules make such misbehavior less likely, expose it when it happens, and remove the person responsible or otherwise remediate the situation to eliminate the corruption or unethical behavior.

When ethical standards are relaxed or dismissed at the top, it doesn’t just make it less likely that we will catch and eliminate corrupt leaders. It has an insidious effect on behavior throughout the society, allowing corruption to spread.

We have seen this in societies that have a relaxed attitude toward ethics. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych presided over one of the most corrupt societies in history, where he set the tone by stealing or misdirecting what is estimated as $100 billion during his tenure. The rest of Ukrainian society followed suite, where daily life was structured around the bribes required to get anything done, including, for example, receiving basic medical treatment or children’s entrance to school. Corruption at the top in Mexico has given rise to the famous “mordida”—the “bite”—where officials right down to building inspectors and police demand bribes before providing every service that Mexican citizens should have available to them without having to pay a bribe.

I will never forget driving with a friend in his car in Moscow, when we were stopped by a policeman for a non-working tail light which was actually functioning just fine. A bribe was demanded, and then we could go on our way. This is what an unethical society looks like for average people on a daily basis.

Corruption is the enemy of all good things in society. It makes life for ordinary citizens irrational and unpredictable. It harms the economy. Let’s not start down that slippery slope.