

## Whistleblowing is for the brave

Whistleblowing is a brave act of conscience that exposes whistleblowers to numerous risks that can carry heavy personal costs.

Velasquez (1998) referred to an old study of Farnsworth executed in 1988, of which the findings are still relevant, because of few changes in the global context. This study found that the average whistleblower in America is a 47-year old family man who has been a conscientious employee for 7 years and who has a strong belief in universal moral principles.

The study found the following: that 100 percent of the whistleblowers surveyed who worked for private businesses were fired by their employers, 20 percent could still not find work at the time of the survey, 25 percent suffered increased financial burdens on their family, 17 percent lost their homes, 54 percent were harassed by peers at work, 15 percent viewed their subsequent divorce as a result of their whistleblowing, 80 percent suffered physical deterioration, 86 percent reported emotional stress including feelings of depression, powerlessness, isolation, anxiety, and 10 percent reported having attempted suicide.

Most of the whistleblowers surveyed however had few regrets and said



JOHAN COETZEE

that they would do it again. Some of the typical comments whistleblowers made to the surveying team were the following: "This has turned out to be the most frightening thing I have ever done. But it has also been the most satisfying. I think I did the right thing. Lost income can be replaced. Lost self-esteem is more difficult to retrieve" and "Finding honesty within myself was more powerful than I expected".

Whistleblowing is not a popularity contest, it is for the brave and honest that are willing to face the situation of uncertainty and risk to make a difference for the betterment of society. Whistleblowers are unsung heroes and heroines. We need more whistleblowers in the Land of the Brave.

### • References

Velasquez, M.G. 2002. *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases*.

[jcoetzee@polytechnic.edu.na](mailto:jcoetzee@polytechnic.edu.na)