



MITCHELL PHOENIX

A Principle is Only a Principle until it Costs You Something

The Lockerbie bomber has been 'set free for oil' scream recent headlines. It seems that the British Government uses the Groucho Marx School of thinking... "Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others."

A principle is a powerful guide and especially useful for defining the culture and values of an organization. It provides boundaries and challenges us to uphold what is determined as 'right'. Our principles are tested when we stand to lose something. The test always relates to the short term. How can we profit now? rather than what is the potential long term loss?

A negotiation tactic is to give something away that costs you little yet has value to the other party. In the oil for prisoners negotiation it is easy to see the short term win. What are the longer-term implications of sacrificing a principle? In this case, diminished reputation, loss of confidence in leadership, a further target, to name but a few.

Ultimately, we are defined by the principles we uphold. As Abraham Lincoln once said "Important principles may and must be inflexible."