

Simple Ethics for the National Park Service

In Jon Jarvis's recent memorandum to all National Park Service employees, he writes that the rules for ethical behavior as a government employee can be complex; and they can seem complicated and confusing.

Perhaps our lives would be easier if we read the rules, and then followed these three basic suggestions:

1-Practice the "Golden Rule" ----**Treat others like you would like to be treated.**

2-Never forget ...that **what you say and what you do matters**---it's important, it makes a difference, and it affects people. What we say and what we do help define who we are, it affects those who hear us and those who see what we are doing, and it makes a difference in how we experience life and in how others experience life. What we say and do cannot be taken back; there are no "do-overs." What we say and do leave impressions, create memories, affect attitudes, and influence behavior.

3-Good ethics often can be summarized by a simple rule-of-thumb: **don't do anything, say anything, or make a decision that you would be embarrassed to see printed and publicized on the front page of the *New York Times*.** This is especially important when we are employed in a position of public trust, when as managers and supervisors we make decisions that affect other lives and organizational structures, when we spend time and money which isn't ours, and when we work for public companies and governmental agencies.

Simply stated, basic ethical behavior doesn't have to be complicated. The Department of the Interior has given us pages of rules and regulations to read and follow, and we've been offered the help of a number of authorized ethics officers. But basic ethics haven't changed: be fair in how you treat people, be deliberate in what you say and do, and don't do anything or make a decision which would embarrass you if it was made public.

Furthermore, ethical behavior is particularly important for those who work within the National Park Service.....because it isn't just any government agency or bureaucracy; it's different. It's loved because it's "America's Best Idea." People don't just visit parks; they have special experiences in them, they have "the best days of their lives" in them, they go to them for very special occasions like honeymoons, anniversaries, family reunions, and "once-in-a-lifetime" family vacations. Simply stated, the National Park Service has been entrusted with the hopes and dreams of both visitors and employees, and the memories and impressions of millions of people every year.

Consequently, everyone working for the National Park Service has a greater responsibilityto be fair, to be ethical, and to be open and transparent in everything we do. It's a responsibility that can be complex but also very simple, and a responsibility that has to be practiced every day, all the time, and in virtually every situation.

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