

The following quotes are those of Elder Boyd K Packer from his talk on January 18, 1980 entitled 'Keeping Confidences':

“ Talents and abilities and training may set us far above people in general. However , if there is a flaw in our character and we cannot be trusted—if we do not keep confidences ---all of these other qualifications may not be sufficient to make us of real service.”

“ In the course of your services you may come to know many things that are confidential ,and not infrequently sacred. You are obliged to not talk about them, not to reveal them.”

“ you are not free to discusswith your husband or wife, or your room-mates, your family or others . If you do you are breaking a trust and reducing the amount of faith that exists.”

“ Someone may break confidences and defend himself by saying, “I didn't say anything really, all I said was such and such.” He is like the Farmhand who is accused of letting the cattle stray, and defends himself by saying, “I didn't tear down the fence, all I did was open the gate just a little.”

‘I heard Brother Romney say, on one occasion, when we were meeting with a group of mission presidents in Geneva, Switzerland, and it was a very spiritual meeting; he told us some things and then he said, “ I do not tell all I know, I have never told my wife all I know. I found out long ago that if I told everything I knew , the Lord would cease to trust me.

The ability to keep confidences is basic to good character”

Keeping Confidences

Page 22 Church Handbook of Instructions

“ During and after their term of service in a calling leaders must keep confidences.....A breach of confidence can damage trust, testimonies, and faith.A leader must not discuss confidential matters with others, including his counselors and wife, unless he receives consent”

Page 37 Church Handbook of Instructions

“ Leaders should keep information about proposed callings and releases confidential. Only those who need to know, such as an auxiliary president who oversees the person, are informed before the person is presented for a sustaining vote. A person who is being considered for a calling is not notified until the calling is issued.”

Page 131 Church Handbook of Instructions

“ Church records are confidential. These include membership records, financial records, minutes of meetings, official forms.....records of disciplinary councils...

All information needs to be protected from unauthorized access...”

Page 17 Church Handbook of Instructions

“The Bishop should keep confidential the needs of members and the help that is provided. He should be careful not to embarrass members who need assistance. If he asks the Relief Society President to help, he shares only the information they need to fulfill their duties. He also instructs them to maintain confidentiality.....”

ELDER BOYD K. PACKER

Church Employees

Lecture Series

January 18, 1980

KEEPING CONFIDENCES

The theme of this series of meetings, I am told, is service. Now, to understand why I would say what I am going to say, under the title of service, I think you should know this: I firmly believe that to render the greatest service to this Church, we must show quite as much concern for what we are, as for what we do.

What we are, the very quality of our actual selves, may be of greater service than some things we are required to do. To be competent, even to be highly skilled, and able to perform some difficult procedures may be of great service. But if we are less than we should be, we may actually be a disservice.

I would like to talk about one trait of character that contributes very much indeed, to what we are. It is often overlooked, but it is so essential that a slight weakness in it can outweigh all of our other attributes and overbalance them. It has to do with keeping confidences and with being trustworthy.

Talents and abilities and training may set us far above people in general. However, if there is a flaw in our character and we cannot be trusted -- if we do not keep confidences -- all of these other qualifications may not be sufficient to make us of real service.

Some who are not blessed with much ability, perhaps are even handicapped, are of great service to this kingdom because of what they are -- trustworthy!

If we cannot keep a confidence, despite our other attributes, we may be more of a disservice than a service to the Church and Kingdom of God. We are all fellow servants in the Church and Kingdom of God.

Everything we do, every act performed, every procedure completed, every sentence that is typed, every computation that is made, every form that is completed, every statistic that is tabulated or message sent, all of it, contributes to the on-rolling of the work of the Lord. Whether it has to do with the efficiency of the heating system in a Church building, accounting for a contribution, preparing of a payroll, or the accurate translation of a work for a course of study, all of it can contribute, in harmonious cooperation, to the central purpose of the Church; provided, that each one of us is, and all of us are, what we profess to be -- Latter-day Saints!

We can be assured that everything we do, however temporal it may appear, will one day have a spiritual effect that may strengthen the work of the Lord and move it forward in a way that would please Him.

The Lord said,

"For by the power of my Spirit created I. . . all things both spiritual and temporal --

"First, spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work --

"Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal. . ."

(D&C 29:31,32,34)

Now, with that introduction, with the subject of being trustworthy established in our minds, I want to speak to you very directly about the matter of keeping confidences concerning the work that you do and your employment.

Unfortunately, there are things that we may do, either inadvertently, or with intent, that can slow the pace of the work of the Lord.

I could give a sermon about the obligation of a bishop or a stake president to keep confidences. They come to know many things that are very personal and important to individual members of the Church in the course of their interviews and their duties.

Bishops, stake presidents, and other ecclesiastical officers are obliged, by spiritual commitment, not to reveal those things, but to keep them as sacred and confidential.

There is a similar, and I think quite equal, responsibility that rests upon the employees of the Church. In the course of your service you may come to know many things that are confidential, and not infrequently, very sacred. You are obliged not to talk about them, not to reveal them.

You are not free to discuss the documents, programs, etc., on which you may be working, with your husband or wife, or your roommates, your family, or others. If you do, you are breaking a trust and reducing the amount of faith that exists.

You can increase the faith of the Brethren. Did you know that? There are some in whom the Brethren can have perfect confidence and trust, and complete faith. The Brethren know that they would not do anything or say anything that would, in any way, injure or limit the ongoing of the work of the Lord.

I am thinking, as an example, of Joseph Anderson, who for nearly fifty years was secretary to the First Presidency. He sat with them daily and heard all their counseling and made minutes of it all. Fifty years with never a breach of confidence. President David O. McKay said of Joseph Anderson once, "That man can be quiet in more languages than any man I've ever known."

Someone may break confidence and then defend himself by saying, "I didn't say anything really, all I said was such and such." He is like a farmhand who is accused of letting the cattle stray, and defends himself by saying, "I didn't tear down the fence, All I did was open the gate just a little."

A fence may be built, at great expense of time and money, for miles around a piece of property. Yet everything can get loose through one small opening if some careless soul does not close the gate, or opens it maliciously. Surely no one of us, by virtue of what we are, and by virtue of the cause we serve, would permit ourselves to be that careless farmhand.

The other day, in doing some reading in Brigham Young's discourses, I came across this sentence, spoken at the laying of the cornerstone for the Salt Lake Temple. President Young had explained that he already knew what the temple would be like when it was finished. I quote one sentence: "I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions, but suffice it to say, five years ago last July I was here, and saw in the spirit the temple not ten feet from where we have laid the chief cornerstone."

The part of that sentence I want to emphasize is his statement, "I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions." In that he is quite typical of the prophets and apostles in our day.

I have come to know that when spiritual experiences are given to us, they are given to us to hold sacred and personal. We would do well not to relate them, unless prompted at some time to express them to an individual or in a meeting.

While we have the accounts of many spiritual experiences given to Brethren in generations past (and generally made known after they were gone), there are noticeably few of them concerning the present Brethren. Have you ever wondered why?

Someone raised this question on one occasion: The Brethren do not talk very often about their own personal spiritual experiences; don't they have any of them?

There is a scripture worth quoting here, from Alma, Chapter 12, Verse 9. I'm just going to read the first of it, but you read the next verses too.

" . . . It is given unto many, "

(That's an interesting word, "many." It doesn't say it's given to the prophet or this one or that one. "It is given unto many.")

"to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him."

There are many things that the Brethren know, individually and collectively, that they just do not talk about, and there are many scriptures which sustain them in this silence. Let me read a few.

From Job:

"Hast thou heard the secret of God? and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself?" (Job 15:9)

From Proverbs:

"A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."
(Proverbs 11:13)

That's worth repeating!

From Matthew:

"Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." (Matt. 16:20)

From Mark:

"And as they came down from the mountain,"
(the Mount of Transfiguration) "he charged
them that they should tell no man what things
they had seen, till the Son of man were risen
from the dead." (Mark 9:9)

From Luke, in connection with healing the lepers:

"And he charged them to tell no man; but go,
and shew thyself to the priest, . . ." (Luke 5:14)

And also from Luke, after raising the daughter of Jairus
from the dead:

"And her parents were astonished; but he
charged them that they should tell no man what
was done." (Luke 8:56)

Before becoming one of the General Authorities, I was an
employee of the Church for 12 years. So, I have been involved,
in one capacity or another, for over thirty years. Many years
ago, long before I was called to be one of the General Authorities,
I came in contact with some of them through my employment. On
occasions I would hear them make comment or tell experiences. I
made this rule for myself; I've been grateful many times that I
had the inspiration to do this.

If I should be in a small group, in a closed meeting, and
one of the Brethren made an expression or told of an experience,
I would never repeat it. I took that as an expression of con-
fidence, as being a gesture of trust, and I was obliged not to
betray. If, however, on some occasion I heard those same things
spoken by that General Authority in a public meeting, I felt,
thereafter, free to make comment on them.

For instance, many years ago President Kimball told me of
a personal, spiritual experience. I carried that for years and
never felt free to tell others or to use it in a lesson or a talk.
Then, shortly after becoming a General Authority, we were invited
to his home at conference time. There was a large gathering, with
people from several parts of the world. President Kimball related
that same experience. Thereafter, if prompted, I felt free to
mention it in a lesson or a talk, for I had heard him speak of it
publicly.

I came to know later, that the Lord and His servants value
very greatly the strength of character evidenced by the keeping
of confidences. I came to know that the Lord will test us. He
will find out just how trustworthy we will be.

We, here at Church Headquarters, or those employed in the area offices, temples, or other Church institutions, may be assigned at times to do some very temporal things. There is, nevertheless, a spiritual measurement laid across it all. We are bound, therefore, as a condition of our employment, to be trustworthy.

I heard Brother Romney say, on one occasion, when we were meeting with a group of mission presidents in Geneva, Switzerland, and it was a very spiritual meeting; he told us some things and then he said, "I do not tell all I know, I have never told my wife all I know. I found out long ago that if I told everything I knew, the Lord would cease to trust me."

The ability to keep confidences is basic to good character.

Now, the fact that I would approach this subject is some evidence that there is a major and grave concern on the part of the Brethren over this matter. Do you have a sensitivity to know what may be talked about and what may not? If at any time you wonder whether or not you could comment on something that you are helping with, or that's going on, check with your file leader, and then go on the counsel that you are given.

More than once when I was to give a talk to the Regional Representatives, or at Brigham Young University, or somewhere else, I have had a paragraph reviewed by the President of the Church because I had included in it some hint, and sometimes that's all it was, some hint, of something that was being discussed, but that had not been publicly announced. I did not feel free to even mention anything close to it without specific clearance.

If in doubt, I should think you would say nothing about things that are under consideration at Church Headquarters.

I once served on a stake high council and I was teaching seminary at the same time. Brother Leon Strong was also a seminary teacher and sat next to me on the high council. On one occasion the stake president presented, in our meeting, the name of a man to be called to a position of leadership. Because of some knowledge we had of this man, Brother Strong and I had talked about him. What an able man he was; how sad that he couldn't be in a leadership position because of his wife. She had one personality trait -- she could never keep a confidence. She might even be described as malicious. The stake president was not fully aware of this.

When the stake president presented his name, the two of us cast negative votes and explained why. The stake president considered the matter at length and finally said he felt he should proceed anyway. He asked if we would sustain him in issuing this call.

Immediately the issue changed. In my mind, then, it was a vote to sustain the stake president, who had the right to inspiration in the call, not necessarily a vote for the man. He called for a vote; Brother Strong and I joined the other ten members of the stake high council -- affirmatively. But neither of us felt fully settled about the matter.

When our stake conference was held, a month or two later, Elder Harold B. Lee, of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, presided. After the sessions we assembled for the ordinations. There were quite a few of them. In those days we would set apart the bishoprics, and so on. Elder Lee ordained some others, and then that brother was called forth to be ordained by this member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. Brother Strong nudged me and whispered, "Now we'll see whether this Church is run by revelation."

Elder Lee put his hands on the man's head and began the ordination, and then he hesitated. There was a long hesitation and then he proceeded with words to this effect: "The blessings that you've heard pronounced upon the others" (and he mentioned occupation and so on) "here apply to you as well, but for you there is a special blessing." And then that man received the longest and most pointed blessing of them all. It had to do, entirely, with keeping counsel, particularly from his wife. In reality, it was not so much a blessing for him as for his wife.

I had not met any of the General Authorities before. I think that was the first time, but when the meeting was over I went to Elder Lee and said, "Did you know this brother before you ordained him?"

"No," he said, "I think I have never seen him until I came into this room."

I said, "He received a very special blessing."

And Elder Lee said, "Yes, I felt that."

Later, the president of the stake explained he had hoped to talk to Elder Lee about that man, but in the press of business he just hadn't had time.

That brother scrupulously kept confidences thereafter. His wife changed her ways. He went on to serve in higher positions in the Church.

And so, Brother Strong was right. That day we did see whether this Church was run by revelation.

Many people are interested in what you do. Members of the Church are interested in what's going on at Church Headquarters. Workers in other departments are always interested in what

Some non-members are very interested as well, with a very wholesome, commendable interest. But, not infrequently, apostates and excommunicants have a very perverse interest in what's going on at Church Headquarters, and some of them maintain contacts in order to get information. And, I am sorry indeed to say, some even seek employment here in order to gain their unworthy ends.

That brings us to another matter I want to mention. It is very delicate and I do not want what I say to be misread. Let me relate an experience.

When I was president of the New England Mission it was my responsibility to preside at an elder's court where a young elder was excommunicated from the Church. He had become involved with an older woman.

I had been very concerned about the woman because she took too helpful an interest in the missionaries. I had talked to the stake president. He, in turn, had talked to the bishop. They both shared my concern.

The woman was called in and warned and instructed that she was not to attend missionary meetings, assist with baptisms, nor invite elders to her home. Her home was off limits to the elders.

At the court a fact came out that hurt me very deeply. The elder on trial had a junior companion who knew what was going on, of the visits this elder had been making to this woman's home. He knew very well that her home had been declared off limits to the missionaries. When asked why he did not report it weeks before, his explanation was simply, "I didn't want to be a tattletale."

I was in agony. One word from him, at any time over a period of many weeks, and that excommunication would not have been necessary.

I told all of the missionaries thereafter, that there was no room in the Church for juvenile loyalties of the type that elder exhibited.

I should have taken some very heavy disciplinary action against that elder who had become an accessory to a transgression that cost his senior companion, and also the woman, their membership in the Church. I regret to this day that I did not do it.

When we are in confrontation with the adversary there is no room for elementary-school-type loyalties. Our allegiance is to the Lord and to His church, to the Brethren, and to the Kingdom of God.

Now we do not want any employee of the Church to be suspicious of another, or to try to gain status by belittling or criticizing the actions or motives of others. That can be a type of transgression. But if one sees something out of order, there is a place to quietly report it, in the proper channel. Then,

once the report is made, your responsibility ends. In some cases, in spite of appearance, the facts may not justify any action. But you have done your duty; you can let the matter rest.

If you know of something untoward or unworthy, immoral, unethical, dishonest, or illegal, that goes on, you have a responsibility to the Church and Kingdom of God to see that the matter at least is investigated. Then be satisfied with what is done by higher authority, with whatever action may or may not be taken.

Thereafter, and actually, as a general rule, it is wise to take care of one's self; to make sure there is nothing unworthy about the service that each one of us renders.

You might wonder why the Brethren don't explain everything that is going on. Then you would know whether or not something is sensitive.

I heard President Hugh B. Brown relate an incident that came to his attention when he was a cavalry officer in World War I.

One night the allied infantrymen were ordered to prepare for a major action at daylight. They were to sleep in their clothing, with full equipment ready, for a signal to come at first light.

A major in the Canadian cavalry was ordered, at the given signal, to take his cavalry unit up the hill before the trenches. He was to be the first to move out. They were to move their horses rapidly up the face of the hill. Then, just before they reached the top, they were to turn left and gallop along the hill just below the summit for an exact period of time. Then the major was to order a right turn to move over the hill and engage the enemy.

The young major followed the instructions to the point where the left turn was to be ordered. He thought, "Just two more leaps and I can see the other side of the hill." He spurred his mount, and to his surprise, saw the enemy foot soldiers quietly coming up the other side of the hill. They were attempting a surprise attack.

He sensed at once an opportunity. The foot soldiers would be no match for his cavalry. He contravened the order of the general, ordered his cavalry over the brow of the hill, and they engaged the enemy. The battle was going all their way.

A few minutes later their own artillery, from several miles behind the allied lines, began raking that slope. The allied general knew where the enemy would be at that time. The unit of cavalry should have been a half mile to the left, moving over the hill to encircle the remnants of the enemy. But most of them were wiped out by their own artillery.

The young smart-aleck major broke faith and contravened the orders. Had everyone followed orders, a crucial battle might have been won.

Some may ask, well, why didn't the general tell everyone down the line, so they would all know what was going on? This disaster could have been avoided if he had. Well, you know why he did not. Often there is no time. Quick action is often crucial. But there is another reason also, maybe a more important one. Security! When you are at war (and we are), security is crucial.

In the battle betwixt good and evil we are not neutral. We carry the banner of the Almighty and are subject to all of the devices of the adversary that could embarrass or discredit or destroy the work that the Lord has laid upon us.

Each of us must be trustworthy. We must keep confidences. If an incident, and there have been some, could be traced to you, or to someone you are responsible to supervise, that breach of confidence could be of most serious concern. A condition of our service, all of us, is to be trustworthy.

It is well to have a ready answer so that you will not be caught off guard and reveal a confidence. For instance, often some matter is being discussed in the Councils of the Church that may interest people, but is not ready for announcement. I have to be on guard continually, lest I make some remark that would breach the confidence.

But more particularly, I must be prepared in case someone asks me if the matter is being considered by the Brethren. At once we are obliged to be honest. What do you do? I may know full well that that matter is being discussed. What am I to say, without being dishonest and without breaking a confidence?

Have a ready answer. Let me give you a sample or two. If someone asks, I'll say, "We do not discuss matters under consideration until they are announced by the First Presidency," or, "That would be a matter you'd have to present to the First Presidency for an answer," or, "I am sorry, but I am not free to comment on that." And I've always found if somebody presses you beyond that, you've a right to be suspicious.

A ready answer will be a great protection for you. You can then speak the truth and yet not breach a confidence by talking of things that are confidential. That means if someone from another department, or outside, or the man on the street, or your family, or anyone else asks you, have a ready answer, and let it go at that.

In recent months there have been several things happen that suggest the need for tightening up on this matter of keeping confidences.

Make sure that you -- and those you supervise -- are trustworthy. The war with the adversary goes on. We are in sensitive positions -- all of us.

I heard President Lee say once, "Just as the waters were purest at the mountain source, the purest word of God, and the least apt to be polluted, is that which comes from the lips of the living prophets who are set up to guide Israel in our own day and time."

If the work of the Lord is to be disturbed, it can be disturbed with most effect here at Church Headquarters.

The adversary is not foolish enough to poison the spring with large doses of poisonous stain. That would be quickly noticed. He would rather, I think, intermittently pour in small amounts of poison that would weaken rather than disable; that would retard rather than stop the work. Such pollutants may be missed by all but the most alert.

Now, I want you to understand, and if you miss this you've missed what I have to say--I am not, and the Brethren are not, impugning the integrity of any soul.

Just in the work-a-day way the world works, sometimes we loosen up on things we should be tight on. It is just a matter of being more shipshape by virtue of where we are heading. We have some tight places to move through now and in this generation ahead of us. If we are to prevail and to survive, it will be because we are united and we are careful.

In almost every case with which I am familiar, the employees are dedicated, efficient, competent, and beyond that, faithful.

And how could we impugn you when 18 men of the General Authorities, now living, came from among the ranks of Church employees?

From the Council of the Twelve Apostles: Elders Petersen, Hinckley, Monson, and Packer were employed by the Church at the time of their call.

From the Seventies Presidency: Elders Fyans, Tuttle, Hanks, and Dunn.

From the Seventies: Elders Anderson, Asay, Cook, Didier, Kikuchi, Larsen, Paramore, Pinegar, Vandenberg, and Wells.

That says something. That speaks for the quality of our employees.

So we are asking, Brethren and Sisters, that you be alert; suggesting that the battle is now joined, the world is at unrest politically, but that is a symptom of the world being at unease, at unrest spiritually; and we are all fellow servants in this great Church and Kingdom of God. I quote again from Proverbs:

"A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that
is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."
(Proverbs 11:13)

I want to bear witness that the Church is precisely what we claim it is. We have presiding over us, a prophet of God. May the Lord bless you in your employment, in your homes, with your families, in your desires, your yearnings, in your associations, and what you do. If you are trustworthy and faithful the blessings of the Lord will be poured out upon you because you are crucial to His service. Of this I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.