

Local CPA, ex-cons attempt to spread word that crime doesn't pay

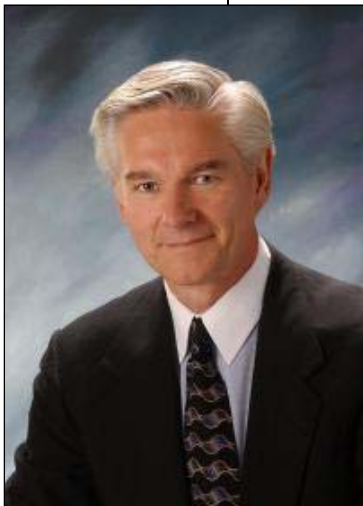
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In the past few years, the American public has seen some the nation's largest companies collapse like a house of cards because of financial impropriety, leaving many employees out of work and millions of shareholders reeling. Still, fraud in the business world is nothing new and the greed that spawns it remains a threat regardless of how many laws and regulations are enacted.

To combat this threat, a local certified public accountant has started a speakers' agency that combines the financial expertise of CPAs and attorneys with the personal experience of ex-convict executives to educate accountants, corporations and business schools about the inner-workings of fraud and how to prevent it.

"I have a story to tell that's very accessible to people," Walter Pavlo, former senior manager of collections for MCI, said after a speech at the Haas School of Business at the University of California.

"Everyone has probably encountered a time in their lives when they teetered on the edge of doing something wrong."



Gary Zeune, CPA, Founder
The Pros & The Cons

Pavlo, who spent more than a year behind bars for wire fraud and money laundering, is on staff at Pros & Cons, an organization which, according to founder Gary Zeune is the only speakers' agency in the country that specializes in supplying former white-collar criminals for speaking engagements.

Zeune, a long-time Central Ohio CPA and lecturer, started Pros & Cons in 1994 when he asked Barry Minkow, the founder of carpet-cleaning enterprise ZZZZ Best, to join him on his speaker's circuit. At the time, Minkow was serving a seven-and-a-half-year prison term for embezzling \$26 million from ZZZZ Best, and Zeune believed Minkow's first-hand account of high-profile fraud might inject some life into the sometimes dry material covered at fraud seminars and continuing professional education courses.

Minkow was granted parole to take

the job and used the money he received from the bookings to pay back the people from whom he had stolen.



Barry Minkow, Founder and CEO of ZZZZ Best Carpet Cleaning, speaking to the youth group at his church.

As word got out about the informative and interesting seminars presided over by Zeune and Minkow, they became more and more in demand.

"I was the steak, Barry (Minkow) was the sizzle," said Zeune, who was soon fielding requests from state CPA societies and governmental agencies.

Once Minkow decided to leave Pros & Cons to become a minister, Zeune enlisted the help of Minkow's former partner in crime, Mark Morze, who served more than four years in jail for his role in the ZZZZ Best

enterprise, which bilked banks and investors for some \$100 million in the 1980s.

"Gee whiz, he stole \$100 million. How bad (of a speaker) can he be?" said Zeune of Morze, whose speeches advocate deterrence through relaying his personal experiences of incarceration.



Walt Pavlo

"The prison as Club Fed is a big myth," Morze said. "There are fights, rapes and protection payments. If you're not deterred by financial consequences, then you should be deterred by criminal consequences."

In addition to Morze and Pavlo, Zeune, from his office in Powell, now manages a stable of former executives with criminal records and by-the-book professionals available for seminars on a variety of topics involving the perpetration, warning signs and consequences of corporate fraud. Their services have experienced a 30-percent increase in demand over the past year.

Zeune said he partly attributes this rise in requests to the high-profile trials of Martha Stewart and former Tyco chief Dennis Kozlowski.

According to the organizations that hire the Pros & Cons, the speakers' presentations are leaving their mark.

"It's a powerful message," said Kellie McElhany, the Haas School professor who arranged the Pavlo appearance. "You actually get to see the consequences of poor ethical decision-making."

Similarly, Tony Eufinger, spokesman for the Ohio Society of CPAs, said society members have had favorable reactions to the lectures Pros & Cons give.

"Overall, they receive positive

evaluations from our members," he said. "(Zeune) provides perspectives that our members feel are poignant and timely."

Putting some white-collar-turned-orange-collar executives on the podium alongside the legal experts has not only given the seminars a needed shot in the arm, but it

also has given the fallen executives a chance to get back on their feet.

Pavlo, who did time for designing an accounting scheme that resulted in \$6 million in stolen customer money in six months, has become one of Pros & Cons more popular lecturers since his release last year.

He earned more than \$30,000 last year. This year, he says, receiving up to \$5,000 per appearance, he could earn between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

Since joining the Pros & Cons staff in 1994, Morze said he has consistently brought in between \$60,000 and \$80,000 every year.

And the road back from financial ruin that Zeune's company provides may be the only road that some of these former executives have open to them.

"There's not too many people who want to hire 50-something-year-old ex-convicts," said Nicholas Wallace, another of Pros & Cons' speakers.

Wallace was incarcerated for nearly seven years for his role in a \$350 million fraud at a Florida brokerage house in the 1980s. Upon entering his cell in 1987, he had \$1.8 million, but after paying legal fees and settling a divorce, Wallace left prison with \$800 to his name and \$3 million in legal bills.

Still, Zeune said that not all perpetrators of corporate fraud are able to find employment with Pros & Cons.

"You have to have a compelling story and take responsibility for what you did, which is something a lot of criminals won't do," he said.

Once the former execs can own up to their mistakes and assume accountability, they open themselves up to another benefit to complement their paychecks - redemption.

"Guys in Gary (Zeune)'s group are dealing better than other white-collar criminals," Morze said. "Guys who are in denial pay the price forever."

If you have questions or comments for **The Daily Reporter** regarding this story please contact editor@sourcenews.com.



Nick Wallace



Mark Morze

All photos inserted
by Gary Zeune.