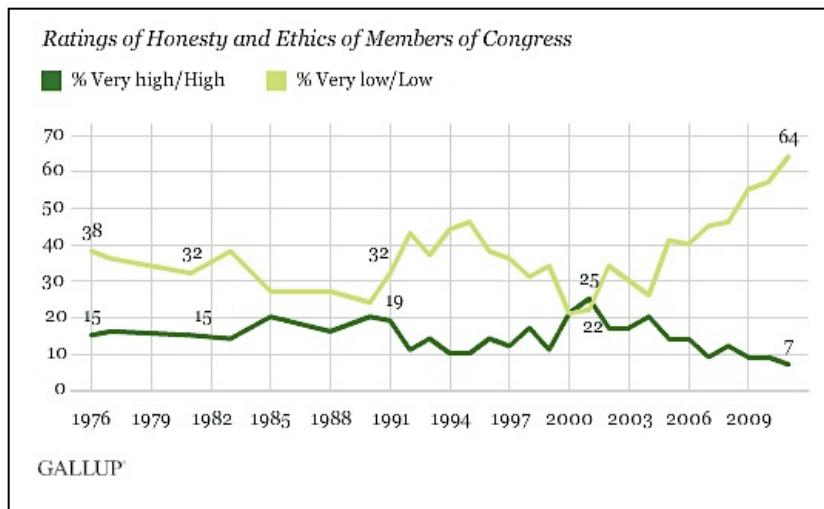


Execution and Honesty

January 2012 Newsletter

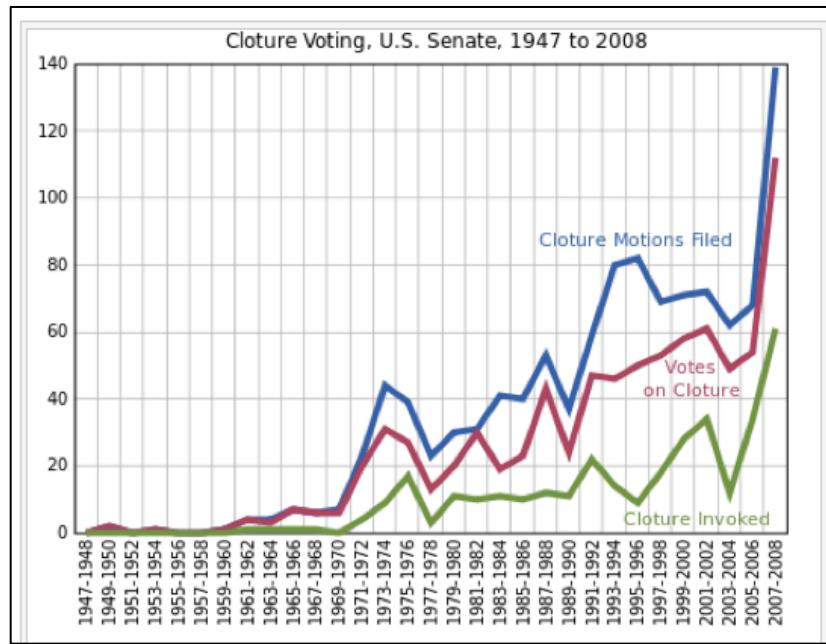
It's old news that Congressional approval rating is at historic lows. In October, it stood at 9%, [lower than that of Paris Hilton, Communism, and Hugo Chavez](#).

What's more surprising is this: 64% of Americans rate the honesty and ethical standards of members of Congress as "low" or "very low," tying the record rating Gallup has measured for any profession historically. That's right: Congress in same ignominious, barrel-bottom-scraping neighborhood as lobbyists, telemarketers, and car salesmen. Pretty grim company, I'd say.



This got me wondering: I mean, are Congressional ethics and honesty really worse than in the past? I doubt it. Politicians are pretty much the same as they ever were. On average, there are probably the same number of crooks, buffoons, and latter-day Ciceros prowling the marble halls of the Capitol today as in 1890 or 1990. But the difference is that now they don't do anything but bicker, engage in hyperbolic blame games, and fail miserably to execute the jobs they were elected to do.

The chart below essentially shows the number of times in each session of congress that a filibuster, or the threat of one, has been used to block pending legislation. Notice the spike in filibusters beginning in 2003... and then look at the rapid increase in the "% Very low/Low" honesty and ethics ratings above. They're nearly mirrors of each other.



Regardless of your political views or your alignment with Presidents Bush and Obama, the ramifications of this kind of obstructionism are clear: it not only lowers approval ratings, it destroys perceptions of honesty and ethicality. Leaders are expected to execute and implement. When they don't, people perceive them as both incompetent and unethical.

Congressmen get lumped in with used car salesmen and lobbyists because, at a fundamental level, they're not respecting their constituents. Similarly, if you're not doing your job of leading and implementing strategy across your organization—or even within your team—you're not respecting your employees' decision to support and follow you. You're demonstrating a rampant disregard for their judgment and loyalty.

That perception may not be justified, but that's the way it is. Humans are irrational, emotional creatures who will link performance to honesty.

As a result, it's even more important than you might have imagined to consider what you're not executing on. What deadlines have you missed? What promises have gone unfulfilled? What projects are lacking solid implementation? Are there any signs that your lack of execution is affecting people's perceptions of your honesty and ethics? What's that doing to your corporate culture?

Special Note: My new book, *A Factory of One*, is now available at Amazon. If you're not ready to buy, you can download the first chapter and read more about the book on the website, www.afactoryofone.com.