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"We wanted to get rid of any ambiguity," Cox said. "A letter grade speaks to our degree of confidence that a business operates in a trustworthy manner. We're talking about business integrity."

If that's the case, the Better Business Bureau may want to get its own house in order first.

The majority of the bureau's funds come from selling accreditation to companies. Depending on the size of the business, accreditation costs between several hundred and several thousand dollars a year, Cox said.

Accredited businesses are expected to uphold the bureau's standards for good conduct. In return, the companies can use the bureau's logo in their advertising and marketing materials.

Panos Haitayan, co-owner of Cafe Santorini, said his restaurant's A-plus rating reflects its high-quality food and service. "We earned it," he said.

Does he think Cafe Santorini would be rated A-plus even if it were unaccredited?

"I would say so," Haitayan said.

Nope. Cox said the highest grade an unaccredited business can get is an A. Only an accredited company -- in other words, one that pays an annual fee -- can receive an A-plus.

This isn't spelled out anywhere on the bureau's website. The [site](#) of its Los Angeles office says only that "the highest rating assigned to a company is A-plus; the lowest is F. Between those two ratings are nine others in order from higher to lower."

A B-minus, according to the site, "may relate to length of time in business, a past problem that's been corrected, or something else that does not cause problems for consumers."

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