

Ethics – Excerpted Readings – Handout #1

Novelist Robert B. Parker once wrote, "Most people don't have much trouble seeing what's right or wrong. Doing it is sometimes complicated, but knowing the right thing is usually not so hard."

Suggesting, of course, that in order to be ethical people, we need to have both a conscience and a backbone. Knowing right from wrong is fairly simple. Behaving ethically is a bit more complicated.

Coupe, K. (2006). Ethics 101: Conscience & backbone. *Chain Store Age*, 82(6), 36-37. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.purdue.edu/docview/222070964?accountid=13360>

Excerpt from Ann, I. M. (1999). Talking about ethics. *Association Management*, 51(3), 45-53. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/229235212?accountid=13360> :

Murphy: Ethics deals with general principles, or guidelines, of behavior. It also has to do with character development.

Navran: I refer to ethics as those behaviors that reflect our values. So, if we act in ways that are consistent with what we say we believe in- our principles and our values-that is ethical behavior. Acting in ways that contradict what we say we believe in is unethical behavior.

Dubinsky: I look at business ethics as the application of moral rights and wrongs in an organizational setting. It describes what we ought to be doing, but it also allows for intense disagreement, because these concepts don't give you absolute right or wrong answers. Business ethics gives us the framework within which to talk about those differences.

Chonko: I have always viewed ethics as guidelines that were interfered with by human judgment. Sometimes human judgment steps outside the value of those guidelines.

When Codes Work

Noonan: One of the tools is a code of ethics, but do codes work?

Petry: Today, nearly 100 percent of large organizations have a code of ethics, but if that's all they have, it won't work. A code of ethics works when employees have some say in drafting or revising it; it is a living document and actually governs the way work is done; the principles embodied in it also show up on performance appraisals and in the compensation system; people are disciplined, hired, fired, and promoted based on that code; and an ethics officer or someone in the organization has the job of communicating ethical principles to employees and communicating employee concerns to management.

Navran: There is a phenomenon with codes of ethics that I call the three P's: print, post, and pray, which is where some organizations fall down. They print it, they post it to all, and then they pray for change. This not only doesn't work, it backfires because it creates cynicism.

I think there are two critical issues that don't get talked about enough. One is employees' perceptions of senior executives' agendas. Why are we doing this? What is the motive? Is it to protect the

executives? Is it to create a facade? Is it a whitewash? Or is it something that is sincerely believed?

The second issue concerns critical events. What happens when the organization has to either put up or shut up about what it says it believes in? What happens in the situation where the organization succeeds because of bad business in the short term? Does the organization bite the bullet short-term for the longterm good to be consistent with what it says it believes in, or does it cave?

Hoffman: You have to have a code that states the values of the organization. You also have to provide some rules indicating how employees should behave so that if they behave outside of that framework, they understand they ought to go elsewhere and the organization will see that they do.

Dubinsky: In each organization, you figure out how you're going to use the code-for instance, how it fits in with employee performance evaluations and the organization's business ethics training.

The Link Between Workplace Pressure and Unethical Behavior

In a study examining the extent of pressure experienced by American workers in the workplace, a 1997 nationwide survey jointly sponsored by the American Society of Chartered Life Underwriters and Chartered Financial Consultants and the Ethics Officer Association provides a definitive link between workplace pressure and illegal or unethical behavior by employees.

Workplace pressure has increased significantly from five years ago and from one year ago. Today, 57% of the respondents feel more pressure than five years ago, and 40% feel pressure has increased since last year.

The majority of workers (60%) feel a substantial amount of pressure on the job, and more than one out of four (27%) feel a "great deal" of pressure.

Most workers (56%) feel some pressure to act unethically or illegally on the job.

Half of the respondents (48%) reported that, due to pressure, they had engaged in one or more unethical or illegal actions during the last year. The top five actions are:

16% Cut corners on quality control

14% Covered up incidents

11% Abused or lied about sick days

9% Lied to or deceived customers

7% Put inappropriate pressure on others

When asked if they believed that "ethical dilemmas are an unavoidable consequence of business and cannot be reduced," only 15% agreed. Consistent with previous responses that pinpointed poor communication and leadership as sources of pressure, workers cite "better communication/open dialogue" (73%) and "serious commitment by management to address issue" (71%) as the best solutions to the problem.

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