CORPORATE ETHICS TRAINING PROGRAMS

Bahaudin G. Mujtaba, Nova Southeastern University

INTRODUCTION

Ethics establishes the required rules and standards that govern the moral behavior of individuals or groups. It also distinguishes between right and wrong conducts. It involves honest consideration to underlying motive, to possible potential harm, and to congruency with established values and rules. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that theoretically, logically, and rationally determines right from wrong, good from bad, moral from immoral, and just from unjust actions, conducts, and behavior. Applied ethics refers to moral conclusions based on rules, standards, codes of ethics, and models that help guide our decisions.

Creating an Ethics Program

Companies need a framework, which their associates can use to make decisions that are aligned with their company's mission and values. A mission or vision statement basically describes the purpose for the existence of the company and accomplishing it is usually a never-ending process. This statement also determines things that the company values and stands for in the society in which it operates. Values are our core beliefs or desires that guide or motivate our attitudes and actions such as honesty, integrity, and fairness. Some people value honesty and some value dishonesty, which can be considered as one of their values. Values can and may change over time as evidenced by the data and the priorities we put on things today compared to forty or fifty years ago. Also people from different cultures, backgrounds and societies may have different values which guide their decisions. This is why it is important that each company has clear values that are communicated to its associates. Majority of the population would associate the word "honesty" and "integrity" with moral behavior. One needs to remember that honesty applies to all situations and not just coworkers and company superiors. Honesty means openness to superiors, coworkers, customers, basically all human beings we come in contact with, and most importantly to oneself. Gandhi said we should be honest in all departments of life and not just here and there because partial honesty does not work. So, the words honesty and integrity can nominally be described by all of the following adjectives: honest, inspiring, integrity, promise-keeping, loyalty, fair-minded, cooperative, caring for others, respect for others, determined, responsible citizenship, pursuit of excellence, accountability, and universal social responsibility like Gandhi and Mother Teresa.

Guidelines For Facilitators

The information on ethical issues should **be** designed to help participants become aware of their personal and professional behavior in both society in general and in their work setting. Most of the cases and exercises should be designed to stimulate participant's thinking and sharing of different viewpoints. As a trainer and/or facilitator, one should acknowledge participants various viewpoints and decide how much time to allow for each discussion. Some cases and exercises may take more or less time depending on the participant's background and interests.

It is important to realize that there may not always be one right answer to each dilemma, however, as trainers and facilitators it is our responsibility to provide an environment for all participants to share their ideas and feelings. It is important to encourage sharing of ideas and feelings, but it is even more important to assure participant's that their ideas and emotions would be totally confidential and would not get out of the four walls of the conference room. It is also

useful to understand everyone's point of view from their perspective. Facilitators should be more supportive than judgmental in order to encourage participation. Trainers should also make it a point to remind the audience that they should not be afraid to say, "they are not sure where they stand on certain issues". Participants might be at the workshop for different reasons. Some might be there for self-development purpose, while others might be there because their organization requires them to attend. Those sent by their organizations may feel as though they were sent because someone thought their ethical values are harmful to the organization and this is why they are here. So, it is important to mention that we are all here to become aware of our personal ethics, values, and to see how they can help us personally as well as professionally to make educated decisions in our society.

As a facilitator or trainer, one should bring current cases or clippings from daily newspapers and journals because they are the best tools for practical learning and application of ethics. Certain companies and individuals have been on the news and radio that are examples of conducts that can destroy the image of the person and/or even the company. In some cases the importance of money and profits became greater than trying to do the right thing. This has been shown by the Sears Automotive case, where the mechanics were charging people for unneeded work to increase their volume for meeting or exceeding quotas. So, leaders and executives should look at their reward systems from all aspects, including the motivation and incentives it provides for accomplishing the results. Another example of this would be the Bausch and Lomb's managers and executives who inflated their sales volume of Ray-Ban sunglasses to meet set performance standards or targeted goals. They were sending a large supply of these glasses to customers who did not need them. Some of those customers were sent two years of supplies despite the fact that they did not ask for them.

Training workshops should be designed to explain ethical theories and their application to the current environment of business and it should be industry specific. The participants should become knowledgeable about ethical issues and should have a model to follow in order to resolve ethical issues. It is becoming increasingly important to promote ethical awareness and moral behavior in our changing world of business because even a single decision can have a major impact as shown by the Chernobyl disaster where thousand of people were affected worldwide.

Summary

To determine if a decision is ethical or not, one can use the following questions as a guideline. If any of the answers are "No", then the decision may need further consideration. Is it honest? Is it aligned with company policies and codes? Is it legal? Is it aligned with my own personal values? Does it harm anyone? Are the benefits greater than cost? Who is affected by it and can it be justified? Does it violate human rights? Is everyone being treated equally? In a perfect world, would there be better alternatives? Would I disclose this decision without hesitation to the media, my family and friends, and to my coworkers and superiors? Will I feel good about myself?

Companies can also emphasize Kant's *Categorical Imperative* also called the "supreme principle of morals" at the individual level to filter out immoral decisions. Kant's *Categorical imperative* is the universal moral rule in which we command ourselves to abide and follow. It states that *"act only on the maxim that you can at the same time will* that it *should become a universal law."* According to Immanuel Kant, an action is moral if: a) it can be suggested to being made consistently universal. b) it derives and respects the autonomy of human beings; and c) it respects rational beings as ends in themselves.