

Six Components of Ethics Training

Ethics is the hot topic in business today, featured more in articles about ethics scandals than in what to do about ethics in business. Perhaps because we can't teach ethics and we can't legislate ethics. So how do we improve the ethical climate in our business environment?

We guide personal introspection and awareness. We teach reflective thinking and decision making skills. We set corporate values, define ethical behaviors and then walk the talk, being congruent models of how we want others to make decisions and take action. Ethics training requires that we approach the topic experientially, in multiple sessions and with on-going practice.

Steven Covey (author of Principle Centered Leadership and other business classics) has been telling us for years of the importance of identifying our values and finding the true north of our personal or corporate ethical compass. Yet very few people have consciously identified the values that make up their personal or business ethics. This may be a reason they shy away from training in ethics or confronting the topic in any way.

When exploring the question "How does one teach ethics?" several key elements came to mind. They are stated most concisely by Robert A. Giacalone, Surtman Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics at the Belk College of Business Administration and an active trainer in the area of ethics.

Component 1: Provide trainees with ethical judgment philosophies and heuristics*. Effectively training employees to use critical thinking skills to determine consistency of actions with values is essential. *principles or methods by which one makes assessments/judgments of probability simpler

Component 2: Provide trainees with organizational ethical expectations and rules.

Component 3: Provide the industry/profession specific areas of ethical concern.

Most industries and professions have ethical issues and dilemmas that are peculiar to them alone

Component 4: Provide trainees with an understanding of their own ethical tendencies. People have different perspectives on what is right and wrong. Measures of individual difference characteristics related to employee morality provides an understanding of proclivities toward particular ethical judgments.

Component 5: Elaborate on the monkey wrenches in ethical decisions. Often other factors enter the ethics picture that we call biasing factors. These are a result of the manager attributes (socialized gender roles, philosophies of punishment [deterrence, retribution, rehabilitation], or the impact of the unethical behavior on the manager). These may hamper an assessment and reaction to the unethical behavior.

Evaluators may take other things into account (attributes of the offender, including group membership [racial, ethnic, gender], the rarity of the offender's skills, the importance of person to organization, the political connections, the offender's ethical work history, and whether or not the offender is liked).

The attributes of the offense may also be taken into account (magnitude of the offense, the characteristics of the offense, who was hurt by the action and were the victims likable and the specificity of codes related to the action).

Component 6: Get the trainees to practice and return. Trainees need time to absorb the concepts.

After twelve years of providing ethics training to professionals, business leaders and the general public, I concur with Dr. Giacalone's conclusions and encourage you to use them to guide you in formulating values and ethics training for your organization.

There are also excellent ethics assessment tools to assist participants in your training programs (component four). I encourage you to use them as self-discovery is the best way for individuals to uncover their values. Keep in mind that values are formulated very early in life. Your job is to help people identify the values that they already have deeply ingrained in them, see how those values guide their decisions and actions and determine if those values are in alignment with the corporate values, as well as what, if anything, they want to change.

Robert A. Giacalone is the Surtman Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics at the Belk College of Business Administration. Dr. Giacalone is co-editor of three books, *Antisocial Behavior in Organizations* (Sage, 1997), *Impression Management in the Organization* (Erlbaum, 1989) and *Applied Impression Management: How Image Making Affects Managerial Decisions* (Sage, 1991), and co-author of *Impression Management in Organizations: Theory, Measurement, Practice*. He was Series Editor for the Sage Series in Business Ethics from 1992-1997. He can be reached at <http://management.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uncc.edu%2Fragiacal%2Fethframes.html>.

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