



SEPTEMBER 2014

Messenger

VOL. 12 NO. 6

Do's and Don'ts of Business Ethics

The way people view an ethical dilemma has changed in recent years. Society has moved from a generation that generally held to the same moral standard to one that is relative to the individual. Over and over, I've heard this rising generation say, "Well, that standard or belief is fine for you, but it doesn't work for me." Because of this, some feel that there is a decline in values with people doing whatever they can for instant gratification, a quick-fix to a problem, moving up the corporate ladder, or to just keep up with the Joneses. Can a business operate in that type of mentality? Or does a standard need to be enforced?

Most businesses have a few ethical "Do's" that they generally follow: Treat others with respect, Have integrity, Treat others fairly.

Treat others with respect

We've all heard The Golden Rule: "Treat others the way you would like to be treated". While this was ingrained in us as children, some people have forgotten this simple statement. You should remember to only ask someone to do something that you would be willing to do yourself.

Have integrity

Being a person of your word goes a long way with building respect from others. Being honest and doing what you say you are going to do shows people they can trust you. Do your job the way you would if your manager was watching, even when you are alone.

Treat others fairly

Just because someone is different from you, doesn't mean that you should treat them differently. Strive to keep favoritism from your mind in order to treat every co-worker, customer, and vendor the same.

Businesses also have some "Don'ts": Don't steal, Don't lie, Don't gossip, Don't harm others. However, there are some gray areas within each of those where the employee must make a decision on where he or she will stand. In the following areas, think about how you personally feel about each question.

Don't steal

- Is it wrong to take money from a co-worker's purse?
- Is it wrong to take a Coke from the six-pack in the worker's lounge?
- Is it wrong to take pens home for personal use?
- Is it wrong to keep the \$20 you found in the parking lot?

Don't lie

- Is it wrong to alter your time card?
- Is it wrong to not disclose all information regarding a patient's care to his or her relatives?

When in doubt, tell the truth.

Mark Twain

*Character is doing what's right when
nobody's looking.*

J.C. Watts, Jr.

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- Is it wrong to tell your boss you completed all your duties when you really skipped some or only did half the job?

Don't gossip

- Should you tell a co-worker what you overheard in the hallway?
- Should you tell a co-worker something told to you in confidence?
- Should you tell others how much a fellow employee earns?

Don't harm others

- You are vying for a promotion with a co-worker. Should you withhold information from him about the upcoming interview?
- The person at the desk next to you borrowed something without asking and broke it. Should you try to find something of theirs to break?
- Your CEO isn't the easiest person to get along with. When employees meet in the break room, should they spend time complaining about everything they don't like about the boss?

People will answer these questions differently. While the majority of people would agree that it's stealing to take money from another person, they don't necessarily feel the same way about taking a pen home with them at the end of the day.

Since we all have a different source of our ethics (whether it be from our family, culture, religion, or society), we must work together to find a balance in how to transfer individual opinions into a code of ethics by which our organization will be run.

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