
The Mathis Group's Messenger

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Ethics In The Workplace

Ethical decisions are tricky. If you talk to 10 different people, you will get 10 different definitions of ethics, along with 10 different solutions to an ethical problem. We have all faced an ethical situation, whether it be socially or professionally, where we have felt like we are between a rock and a hard place. How do you deal with such a situation? What do you do if you know someone you work with is behaving unethically?

First, let's look the definition of ethics. According to *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Ethics*, ethics clarifies "the nature of right and wrong, good and bad". It tells us how we should behave. Along with ethics, norms, beliefs, values, moral standards, and laws are taken into account when dealing with a problem. Let's look at each of these in greater detail.

Norms - Norms are when everyone agrees on the way things should be done. It is how you expect all people to act. For example, it's a norm that people should be honest. If you can't trust others, there is no way that any business can be conducted. You will always be second guessing if you can have confidence in what others are telling you.

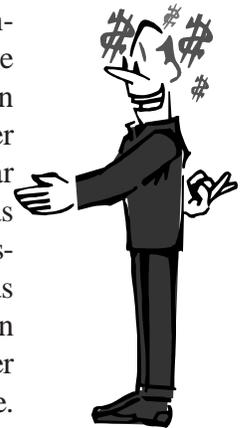
Beliefs - Beliefs are the way you expect others to think. Beliefs don't require any action, only the thought process that supports an individual's norms.

Values - Values are the priorities that you have established for your norms and beliefs. They are the norms and beliefs that an individual feels are the most important.

Moral Standards - Moral standards are whether you feel an act is right or wrong. This is very subjective and can be influenced by emotions.

Laws - According to LaRue T. Hosmer, laws are a set of universal rules that are "widely published, generally accepted, and usually enforced". These are ways that a person is required to act in society or else risk some form of consequence.

Each of these areas influence how you react to a situation. Just because a circumstance does not break any laws, does not necessarily mean that it is ethical. What one person considers to be ethical may not be the same for others. For example, when I was in college I observed the inner workings of a prominent rental car company. The person who I was shadowing received a call from a customer asking about the car that was to be rented. There was an overbooking and the car the customer had reserved was no longer available. Instead of telling the customer what happened, the employee lied to cover his tracks. Did



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Never do anything to compromise your integrity. Anything worth achieving is worth an honorable and honest effort.

*Mike Reid
Professional Golfer*

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he think that was okay to do? Obviously so. Did I feel that he had been ethical toward the customer? Absolutely not. Because of that one situation, I decided that this company was not one in which I wanted to be associated.

There are some instances when you observe someone making an unethical decision that you must call them on. This is a tough decision that many face. On one hand, you know what the fellow employee is doing is wrong. However, you don't want to be considered the tattletale of the organization. What do you do? There are many things that you must consider when making this daunting decision. First, you have to think about the consequences to you and the company if you tell. Will the company benefit? Will there be repercussions to you? You also

have to think about the responsibility that you have to yourself, others, and your organization. To whom do you ultimately answer? Have you made a promise to someone that will be broken if you tell?

No matter if you choose to tell or not, NEVER blow the whistle on someone as payback. Just because you didn't get the promotion you were hoping for or a co-worker took credit for a project you did, doesn't mean that you should "squeal" on someone.

Ethical situations are stressful, to say the least. A lot of thought must go into making the best decision. Make sure that you are making the decision based upon the right motivation--not whether you're mad at the person or you don't want to cause any conflict.

Adapted from *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Ethics* by David Bruce Ingram, Ph.D., and Jennifer A. Parks, Ph.D. and *The Ethics of Management* by LaRue Tone Hosmer.



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