

*Chapter 1 Question:
Is Ethics a Fad?*

Before reading this chapter, I didn't necessarily view ethics as a fad, but maybe as a current "buzz-word." With the current banking scandals and economic crisis, ethics in business has come up in the media often, yet it seems as if the general public is not focusing on business ethics as much now in business as it was about five years ago. Let me clarify. I don't believe that ethics is being ignored or that most people don't think of it as important. What I think is happening is that people are not using the term "ethics" as much as they used to. Rather than use a term that seems ambiguous to many people, when you hear discussion about business scandals they use terms like honesty, trust and integrity (or dishonesty, lack of trust, and no integrity). So, although before reading the book, I didn't necessarily think the study, discussion and practice of business ethics was a fad, I did somewhat think the term "ethics" was.

In my eyes, ethics is something that has been focused on over the last ten years, when, in reality, it has been studied for 20-30 years or more. When I really thought about it, I guess the first time I really remember discussing ethics was in classes during my undergraduate studies about 15-16 years ago. I don't remember one specific class on ethics, but a few classes covered the topic as part of their structure. Honestly, that is when ethics was interesting – when it was new. Well, at least that is what I thought before reading Chapter 1. In my early classes on ethics, there were many case studies and discussions about what is the ethical thing to do. Even in a recent class, this was the format. So, I felt that once a person has reviewed a number of case studies on ethics or experienced ethical dilemmas in their workplace and formed their opinion that they have a basic understanding and are ready to apply it. I initially came into this class with the opinion that I had sufficient training in ethics. I was unsure that I would learn anything new. However, after reading only Chapter 1, I realized that ethics is something that must be

continually taught. Despite doing my best to be ethical both on a personal level and a business level, there are times when my choices are challenging. The book cites examples about ethical dilemmas that business people face. For example, choosing to use a chemical that is not FDA approved, but should be soon. My immediate “ethical” answer is: Don’t use the chemical. Yet, when you consider the business impact of the decision (loss of jobs, loss of customers, impact on the community) the answer is not straightforward. Is it ethical to follow the law to a “T” yet know that you will hurt your employees and your customers? Ethical dilemmas will like this will always be present. The law will always be present. And so will the opinionated people in society who try to shape the way we think and act. With all of the ways to use technology to get information out to the public quickly and frequently, the discussion of ethics and “doing the right thing” will continue.

Larger companies jumped on the ethics bandwagon early on – maybe 10 years ago or so - and began developing ethics policies. They began instilling a sense of business ethics in their employees. Of course, employees already had their personal ethical beliefs that, when combined with company policies, shape the business decisions employees make. Smaller companies are just now discussing ethics and how they affect their business. Although these companies may not adopt a formal policy, they are now talking with their employees about ethics.

After reading the first chapter, I wholeheartedly feel that ethics is not a fad. The decisions that business people face will always impact a variety of stakeholders. Each stakeholder will have their arguments as to why they are the most important. Yet, if each group is vital to the success of the organization, then a manager thinking ethically will make decisions that have the most positive impact on all groups. If ethics were a fad and were to disappear, more scandals would arise, yet society would not be offended. This would be the downfall of

society. People may become more defensive, trying to protect themselves. Laws may be broken. Business would suffer as companies are no longer trustworthy.

Ethics is a set of checks-and-balances for our society. It is continually being fine tuned with additional research, teaching and experiences. An ethical guide has always been hovering in the background of society. In recent years, we brought it to the forefront and gave it a name.

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