

Incorporating Ethics and Ethical Decisions in the Classroom and Extension Outreach

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Discussion on ethics – why?

- Headlines of 09/11/01 all too familiar, even 2_ years later.
- 11/08/01 – Enron admitted to using accounting practices by Arthur Andersen that inflated its income figures; filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy a month later; Justice Department launched criminal investigation as to why over \$1 billion shares of Enron stock were sold by executives while telling employees and stockholders to hold, resulting in over \$60 billion lost by investors. *How could something like this happen? Why did it happen? Who let it happen?*
- 03/27/02 – Adelphia Communications announced financial problems stemming from founder John Rigas (and family) used corporate assets as collateral for loans of \$3.1 billion to make personal purchases and finance family projects; filed bankruptcy. *What kind of people would do such things? How could this happen? Could it happen again?*

- **03/27/02 (same day) – CEO of Tyco, Dennis Kozlowski, charged with evading \$1 million in sales tax on artwork and other finery purchased for himself with company funds; found to have looted \$600 million from the firm.**
- **WorldCom announced internal audit found improper accounting procedures, resulting in overstatement of profits by \$7.1 billion while understating expenses by \$3.8 billion – an \$11 billion error resulting in 17,000 employees losing their jobs.**
- ***Why is this happening? How many companies are unethical? Whatever happened to business and personal ethics?***

- **Questionable ethics not limited to business:**
- **Alleged abuses in Catholic Church and attempted cover-ups.**
- **Stephen Ambrose, history professor, plagiarized passages from fellow historian Thomas Childers for his Pulitzer prize-winning book.**
- **Figure skating judge in Salt Lake City's Winter Olympics claimed her decision had been coerced, altering the pairs competition results.**
- **Wide-spread "cut & paste" from Internet by high school and college students to complete assigned papers and get grades.**
- **Published research journal articles copied from www by college professors and integrated into manuscripts – publish or perish.**
- **Dehumanization of Iraqi and Afghan detainees/prisoners.**

Ethics – why a topic of discussion in the classroom and extension education?

- Undergraduate agribusiness students in agribusiness marketing, finance, accounting, and management classes ask **Who? How?** in response to the headlines.
- Extension agribusiness clientele ask **What? Why?** in response to the headlines.
- Ethical dilemma may lead to unethical choices, but why?
 - We do what's most convenient.
 - We do what we must to win.
 - We rationalize our choices with relativism, by deciding what's right in the moment according to the circumstances.
- **“Where once our decisions were based on ethics, now ethics are based on our decisions.”** John Maxwell, *There's No Such Thing As “Business” Ethics*

Some current marketplace solutions:

- Teach remedial ethics (Joan Ryan)
- Perform an “ethical flea dip” (F.J. Navran)
- Rely on the law and legality
- **Ethics + Competence = Winning Solution**
- **Responsibilities to Customers**
 - Serve customers’ best interest
 - Never misrepresent or mislead the customer
 - Protect confidences; avoid unauthorized incentives
- **Responsibilities to Company**
 - Remain loyal
 - Support the total marketing effort
- **Responsibilities to Public**
 - Do not downgrade the competition
 - Be informed and uphold regulations
- **Responsibilities to Self**
 - Constantly upgrade self; separate personal and professional life

“Men of Character Between the Hedges”

Mark Richt, UGA football coach

- **Character is more than talk.**
- **Talent is a gift; character is a choice.**
- **Character brings lasting success with people.**
- **People cannot rise above the limitations of their character.**

- **Responsibilities to students:**
 - **To encourage the free pursuit of learning, to demonstrate respect for students, and to respect confidentiality.**
 - **To model the best scholarly and ethical standards.**
 - **To foster honest academic conduct and to ensure fair evaluation.**
 - **To avoid exploitation, harassment, or discrimination.**

- **Responsibilities to colleagues, the institution, the discipline:**
 - **AAUP guidelines on ethical behavior.**
 - **Autonomy? Non-maleficence? Beneficence? Justice? Fidelity? Act consciously?**

Adopt the “Golden Rule” – how would I like to be treated in this situation?

- Decisions, not conditions, determine your ethics.
- Wrong decisions leave scars.
- The more people involved, the greater the pressure for conformity.
- Inaction is also a decision (“to decide not to decide is to decide”).
- J.C. Penney and the Golden Rule stores
- Thomas Addington and Stephen Graves (editors of *Life@Work* magazine) observe “We cannot grow character through a crash course weekend seminar when one day we suddenly realize we need some; it’s impossible. We can’t become an astronaut or a world class fly fisherman or an expert brick mason in a microwave weekend of learning.”

Undermining the Golden Rule

- **Pressure**
 - Enron booked future revenue immediately, rather than when earned.
 - Avoid compromising your values: Am I going to make rash emotional decisions? Am I going to compromise the truth? Am I going to take shortcuts? Am I going to bow to others' opinions? Am I going to make promises I can't keep?
- **Pleasure**
 - “If it feels good, do it.” lead to moral and fiscal irresponsibility.
 - Run from temptation and develop discipline.
- **Power**
 - Dr. Seuss's *Yertle the Turtle*.
 - Power cycle: reception of power; abuse of power; loss of power.
- **Pride**
 - “Pride is the bottom of all great mistakes.” John Ruskin
- **Priorities**
 - “Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Seizing the “golden opportunity.”

- Take responsibility for your actions.
 - Develop personal discipline.
 - Know your weaknesses.
 - Align your priorities with your values.
 - Admit wrongdoing quickly and ask forgiveness.
 - Take extra care with finances.
 - Put your family ahead of your work.
 - Place high value on people.
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- Treat people better than they treat you.
 - Walk the second mile.
 - Help people who can't help you.
 - Do right when it's natural to do wrong.
 - Keep your promises even when it hurts.

Thank you for your attention!