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Ethics

i Overview

A public library director has been instructed to provide information to government officials about the material borrowed by a patron. The director knows that providing library patron records violates the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association and is confused about what she should do.

A recent MLIS graduate has been offered a job in an information center in a bank that has been accused of discrimination in approving mortgages and other financial services to residents living in low-income neighborhoods. This practice conflicts with her personal values, and she wonders if she could be happy working in that organization.

The director of a small academic library has been invited for an all-expenses-paid visit to a vendor's corporate headquarters. He knows he would gain valuable information about the vendor's products but fears that the trip might influence his future purchasing decisions.

An employee in a special library is concerned that the software on his computer is illegal. His supervisor did not purchase enough site licenses for the department in an attempt to keep costs under control.

All of these examples are descriptions of incidences in which individuals in a workplace setting have to determine the right or ethical way to handle a problematic situation. In the past, many organizations just assumed that managers and employees would behave ethically. Since the early 2000s and the scandals that occurred in organizations such as Enron, World-Com, and Arthur Andersen, however, much more emphasis has been put

on ethics in the workplace. Managers now realize that encouraging ethical behavior is an important part of managing in every organization.

This chapter will present an introduction to the topic of ethics and provide information about how to foster ethical working environments in libraries.

ETHICS IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

Every day individuals must make decisions and then act according to their beliefs about what they consider to be right or wrong. Ethics helps answer the question, "What should I do?" Ethics is usually defined as a set of principles and values that govern the behaviors of an individual or a group with respect to what is right and what is wrong. Whenever decisions need to be made, it is important to reflect on the ethical aspects of the choice as part of the process. Individuals face ethical issues both in and outside of the workplace. In this book, the discussion of ethics will be focused primarily on managerial and professional ethics, that is, the ethics that are found in the workplace.

Ethical problems are inevitable in any type of organization; library managers need to know about ethics and how to apply ethical principles to the decisions that confront them in the organizations they are managing. A chapter on ethics logically follows the preceding chapter on leadership because research has shown that the leaders in any type of organization set the ethical tone of that organization.[1] One study of more than a hundred corporate managers found that 90 percent of them agreed that employee attitudes toward ethical issues directly mirrored executive beliefs.[2] Other researchers have found that the best single predictor of how employees handle ethical dilemmas is the perceived values of top management.[3] A recent British study found that when employees were asked to rate 20 qualities they would want a manager to have, honesty was the top-rated attribute.[4] If the top managers in an organization routinely engage in questionable ethical principles, such as inflating expense accounts, taking supplies home for personal use, or revealing material that should be kept confidential, then others in the organization will consider those acceptable ways of behaving. It is important for any organization to be clear about its ethical expectations, and the individuals who most commonly act as role models in establishing those expectations are the organization's leaders. They provide guidance for the rest of the organization's employees in what is expected ethically.

ETHICS—A DEFINITION

The whole idea of ethics can be a bit confusing, and many people find if difficult to precisely define what they mean when the use the term *ethics.* Ethics is often confused with morals or even law, but these three terms refer to different concepts. Although the terms *ethics* and *morals* are often used interchangeably, they are not identical. Morals typically refer to the practices of individuals, whereas ethics refers to the overarching rationales behind such practices. Some people feel that it is immoral to drink alcoholic beverages, but

that is an individual moral belief or value that does not mean that drinking itself is unethical.

There is also often confusion in many people's minds about the differences between ethical standards and the law. Usually what is considered ethical is also legal, but that is not always so. Ethics is a branch of philosophy, and its principles are derived from theories of what is right and wrong. Law is more concerned with rules that stabilize societies than promoting social ideals. It is incorrect to assume that if something is legal, it is also ethical. Ethics often requires a higher standard than laws, and although what is ethical is usually legal, in some cases, ethics conflicts with law. Capital punishment is legal in many states in the United States, but many citizens think that the death penalty is unethical even where it is legal. Some physicians have broken the law by prescribing marijuana to dying patients to ease pain. For them, the ethical requirement of lessening suffering is a more important concern than laws regarding use of illegal drugs.

Another factor that leads to confusion about ethics is that ideas about ethical behavior can change over time. At one time, slaveholding was considered ethical by most people in society, and now it is been abolished as an abhorrent practice in almost all societies. In addition, ethics are affected by societal and cultural norms. Practices that are considered ethical in some countries would not be consider ethical in others. For instance, polygamy is recognized as ethical in a few places but not in most. Child labor is still common in many developing countries, but it would be considered unethical (as well as illegal) to employ children in factories in most of the world.

Some Definitions

Ethics: The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession.

Morals: Rules or habits of conduct, especially of sexual conduct, with reference to standards of right and wrong.

Laws: The body of rules and principles governing the affairs of a community and enforced by a political authority; a legal system.

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The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

Because ethical standards are not codified like laws and are not uniform across time and place, it is often difficult to decide what action should be taken when an ethical decision needs to be made. Often individuals must make decisions based on their judgments rather than on indisputable facts. Many times there seems to be no one right ethical solution, instead there are alternative choices, none of which is perfect. These situations are referred to as ethical dilemmas. One common example often used to illustrate an ethical dilemma concerns stealing. Stealing is usually considered to be unethical, but

would stealing would be justified if stealing food were the only way to feed a family? Which is of higher value, personal property or feeding one's family?

In organizations, employees are faced with similar ethical dilemmas. For example, you supervise a single mother who is often absent from work. You have given her warnings, but she continues to be absent about one day a week—often because one or more of her children are ill. You know she is the only source of support for her family. Are you justified in dismissing her for excessive absenteeism? Managers often experience situations in which their professional responsibilities come into conflict with their personal values. Many times there is no clear-cut right or wrong decision. Knowing about ethics helps in solving these situations.

✷? What Do You Think?

Albert Einstein once said, "Relativity applies to physics, not ethics."
Do you agree with this statement? Are ethical principles always the same, or do they change with the situation?
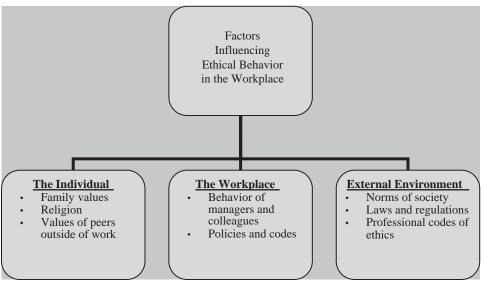
THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS

Although some individuals consider ethics in the workplace to be a frill or an add-on, ethics is an integral part of good business. Organizations that exploit the labor force, take advantage of customers, or deny product defects incur huge costs that ultimately hurt the organization. Consider the difference in ethical approach between the large tobacco companies, which attempted to deny the ill effects of nicotine, and Johnson & Johnson, which voluntarily recalled all of its Tylenol products in an early product-tampering case. The tobacco companies were severely punished by penalty costs imposed by the courts, whereas Johnson & Johnson won widespread praise and customer loyalty by its ethical stand. Organizations that are well respected and profitable are almost always marked by good ethical practices.

Of course, individual employees sometimes act in opposition to the organizational norms. Each employee brings his or her individual ethical values to an organization. These values have been shaped in an individual's early years by parents, relatives, teachers, and culture, and they represent an individual's basic convictions about what is right and what is wrong. Because these individual values usually differ from person to person, any one organization can have individuals working in it with widely varying ethical values. Each employee, with his or her own values, is then exposed to the norms of the organization. Ideally, these norms would conform to the individual's values, but sometimes they do not. Finally, the behavior of individuals in the workplace is affected by external factors such as the norms of society or laws and regulations. These three sets of factors influencing ethical behavior can be seen in figure 15.1.

Even though the ethical behavior of individuals is influenced by many factors, research has shown that an organization's ethical norms have a strong

Figure 15.1—Factors Influencing Ethical Behavior

influence on how employees act and their ideas of right and wrong within that organization. James Weber and Janet Gillespie found that corporate culture is recognized as a key contextual influence in establishing and maintaining ethical norms.[5] Linda Trevino and Michael Brown state that much unethical conduct is the result of "neglectful leadership and organizational cultures that send mixed messages about what if important and what is expected."[6] So employees' organizational values are influenced by the organization's ethical climate. Unethical actions within an organization "involve the tacit, if not explicit, cooperation of others and reflect the values, attitudes, beliefs, language, and behavioral patterns that define an organization's operating culture. Ethics, then, is as much an organizational as a personal issue."[7] Thus it is the responsibility of mangers to provide leadership in ethics because those "who fail to provide proper leadership and to institute systems that facilitate ethical conduct share responsibility with those who conceive, execute, and knowingly benefit from corporate misdeeds."[8]

Some companies such as Johnson & Johnson have been known for decades as institutions that pride themselves on integrity and ethical behavior. Robert Wood Johnson, one of the early presidents of Johnson & Johnson, developed a credo for the organization in the 1940s, and this simple one-page document has guided the actions of the employees of Johnson & Johnson from that date. The credo clearly states the organization's responsibilities to four separate sets of stakeholders in the company—customers, employees, communities, and stockholders—and emphasizes that the organization puts its responsibility to customers before profits.[9]

In the past few years, ethics has become an increasingly important concern to all organizations. The corporate scandals that occurred in organizations such as Enron and WorldCom not only brought adverse publicity to the

organizations but they also caused great damage to the people who worked in these organizations or who had relied upon them for service. These cases have resulted in a new wave of corporate reform efforts, primarily the Sarbanes-Oxley Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002, which was designed to make accounting practices more transparent and to protect investors. Some of the most egregious corporate misdeeds took place at the Enron Corporation. It has been suggested that one could teach an entire ethics course by using Enron as an example of what not to do. Although Enron was considered to be a "company of the future," it "sought to circumvent or avoid systems that were designed to protect the company and its shareholders and to bolster the credibility of its dealings."[10] Although no library has had an ethical scandal as immense as that at Enron, given the frequent occurrence of unethical and illegal behavior in highly respected organizations, it is critical to understand and to promote ethical conduct in all types of organizations, including libraries.

THE ETHICAL INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL

Ethics are especially important to practicing professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and librarians because there are specific ethical issues that need to be confronted in all these professions. Subfields of ethics such as biomedical and legal ethics have developed that are particularly relevant to certain professions. One subfield of ethics that relates directly to librarians and information specialists is the field of information ethics. Information ethics is the "branch of ethics that focuses on the relationship between the creation, organization, dissemination, and use of information and the ethical and moral codes governing human conduct in society."[11] Information ethics has become more important since the burgeoning of technologies, such as the Internet, which have posed new problems relating to our ethical understanding of such issues as privacy, censorship, and intellectual property. This subfield of ethics is concerned about issues such as relationship between information and the good of society and the relationship between information providers and the consumers of information. Information ethics also covers other areas such as access to information, intellectual freedom, plagiarism, copyright, and digital divide issues.

Although many of the problems relating to ethics that are confronted in libraries are similar to those in other organizational settings, each type of organization encounters some problems that are unique to that type of setting, and the context must be considered. Martha Smith has provided a model of the conflicting loyalties that are often experienced by information professionals.[12] This model can be seen in figure 15.2. The multiple loyalties of information professionals include loyalties to:

Self; includes personal integrity, job security, and personal responsibilities.

Clients or patrons; includes privacy of information, freedom of access, serving patron needs.
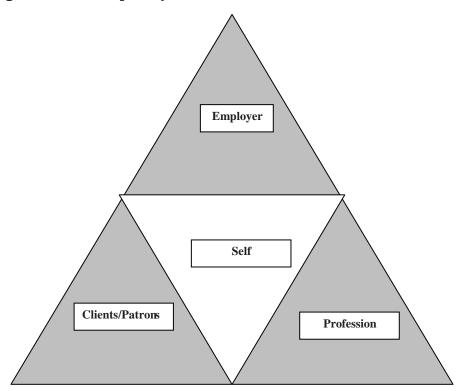
Figure 15.2—Multiple Loyalties of Information Professionals

Profession; includes professional standards of service and the responsibility to raise the public knowledge of issues identified by the profession.

Employing institution; includes loyalty to employer, upholding the goals and priorities of the institution, and working for its good.[13]

Ideally, these four loyalties would function together, but sometimes there is conflict among the loyalties, and then a professional has to negotiate among conflicting claims. Smith provides the following example. Imagine a situation in which a library director is asked by city officials to monitor circulation records to aid in the investigation of the illegal manufacturing of drugs. Which loyalty will have priority? Loyalty to the patron and to the profession would likely cause her to refuse. However, loyalty to the employing institution or to self might cause her to comply.[14]

This model demonstrates the complexity that is involved in making ethical professional decisions and can be a useful tool when managers in libraries need to reason through a multifaceted situation that causes conflict between personal, professional, and institutional loyalties. When managers confront difficult decisions, they should first think of the alternative solutions or actions that might be taken and then review them in light of the four loyalties discussed previously to see if their decision is being unduly influenced in any way.

PROBLEMATIC ETHICAL SITUATIONS

Managers confront many different types of ethical problems on the job. Problematic ethical situations or ethical dilemmas often consist of a conflict between the needs of a part and the needs of the whole. These may be the conflicts between the needs of an individual employee and the organization as a whole or between the needs of an organization and society as a whole. Pharmaceutical companies have come under increasing criticism because of their decision to make profits for the stockholder and charge high prices for AIDS drugs instead of making them available at low costs, especially to impoverished individuals or nations.

In the for-profit world, a great deal of the unethical behavior that has occurred has been a result of trying to maximize profits at any cost, including engaging in unethical or illegal activities. Because most libraries are not-for-profit organizations, they do not usually face the problem of trying to balance ethical behavior with increasing profits to stockholders or owners.

Libraries, like other organizations, often face ethical issues in the area of human resource management. Need for confidentiality and conflict between the rights of the individual and the rights of the institution were the top two ethical issues identified in one survey of library administrators. The other top ethical issues mentioned were fair treatment of employees, affirmative action/equal opportunity, discipline and firing, and performance appraisals.[15] Some of the ethical issues relating to human resources and staffing were discussed in previous chapters in this book.

Another type of ethical dilemma often found in a professional situation is that of individual conflict of interest. A conflict of interest exists when an individual who has to make a job-related decision has an outside interest in the outcome that may influence the objectivity of the decision making. Usually these interests are financial, but sometimes they may be personal, for instance, when an individual hires as a summer intern the daughter of a friend instead of doing an objective job search to fill that position.

Kenneth Kernaghan and John Langford list seven types of conflicts of interest. All of them might be confronted by librarians in the course of their official duties.

1. **Self-dealing.** This means using a management position for personal advantage. For example, self-dealing would be a librarian who uses his or her position to secure a contract for a private consulting firm partially owned by that librarian's spouse.

2. **Accepting benefits.** These are any benefits that might be thought to affect independent judgment. For instance, some libraries have policies against allowing collection development librarians to be entertained by vendors to avoid having any suggestion that a vendor selection decision might be influenced by accepting a certain vendor's hospitality.

3. **Influence peddling.** This consists of an individual soliciting benefits in exchange for unfairly advancing the interests of another party. For example, a librarian who is instrumental in the selection of a new

automated system might be accused of influence peddling if that
individual agreed to advocate for a particular system in return for
the vendor offering him or her a part-time position.

4. **Using an employer's property for private advantage.** This could
involve taking office supplies for home use or using software licensed
to an employer for personal use.

5. **Using confidential information** involves using information that
you become privy to as part of your position to your own advan-
tage. For example, a reference librarian who becomes aware of
confidential information about a person by means of a reference
interview and reveals that information in a way that advantages
the librarian.

6. **Outside employment or moonlighting.** For example, a conflict of
interest would arise if an employee spent so much time on an out-
side consulting job that the regular job was neglected.

7. **Postemployment** conflict of interest occurs when an employee
uses knowledge or information gained in a position to benefit
after leaving that position. Perhaps an employee in the library
of a private corporation resigns and uses knowledge from the
previous employment to compete directly with his or her former
employer.[16]

? What Would You Do?

You are the reference librarian on duty at a large public library. Two teen-
agers come in and ask for instructions on how to build a car bomb. Would
you:

• Help them all you could?
• Call the police?
• Ask your supervisor for advice?
• Ask them why they want the information?

   You are the director of a small academic library. An automation vendor
offers to take you to dinner at a national meeting. Would you:

• Accept with thanks?
• Go ahead but pay your own way?
• Decline the invitation?
• Ask if another director friend could come too?

   Patrons in your small inner-city public library have complained about
homeless people taking baths in the library rest room and sleeping on the
furniture. Would you:

• Lock the restrooms and have people get a key from the staff so that
  restroom use could be monitored?
• Put signs up discouraging inappropriate use of the library?

> • Have the police remove persons who are sleeping or using the library to
>   bathe?
> • Suggest that patrons start a shelter for the homeless?
>
> _____
>
>   Adapted from Martha M. Smith, "The Ethics Quiz," *North Carolina
> Libraries* (Spring 1993), 28–30, and used by permission. (To continue to
> test your knowledge of ethics, see more questions on this quiz at http://
> www.lu.com/management.)

The Ethics Quiz allows you to try to decide what you would do in response to
a few examples of ethical dilemmas that might arise in a library setting. As you
can see, deciding what is the ethical thing do is not always clear-cut or easy.

TOOLS FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

When managers or employees are confronted with an ethical dilemma, what
should they do? How should they think through the issue, and what factors
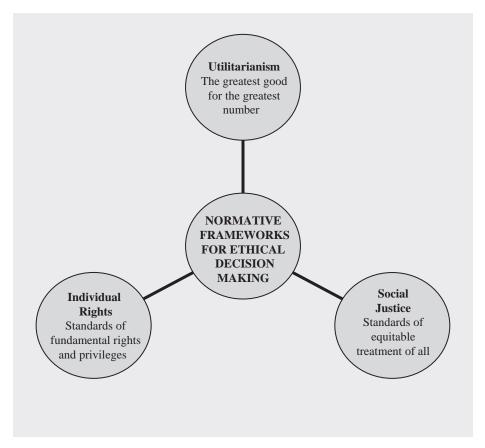should they consider?

Obviously, an important first step in analyzing any ethical issue is to gather
all the information that is available. Sometimes individuals make wrong deci-
sions because they are not aware of all of the facts concerning the case. But
getting the facts is not enough. Facts give us information about a decision,
but they do not tell us what should be done. There are a number of different
approaches that people can use to deal with ethical issues.

Normative Ethical Frameworks

Philosophers have developed a number of different approaches to dealing
with ethical issues, including the development of a variety of normative ethical
frameworks that can be used for evaluating behavior. The frameworks can be
seen in figure 15.3. In brief, the most common frameworks are:

- **Utilitarianism.** Using this framework, an individual would behave
  in a way that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of
  people. For instance, a manager might decide to ban all smoking in
  the workplace because more employees will benefit from this policy
  than will be hurt by it.

- **Individual rights.** This is the framework that states that all indi-
  viduals have inalienable rights, such as rights to privacy, freedom of
  speech, and due process, and that these rights should not be abridged.
  An employer might make the decision not to look at e-mail logs because
  he or she considers that a violation of employees' privacy rights.

- **Social justice.** This approach holds that decisions must be based
  on standards that involve the fair treatment of all, fair application of
  rules, and fair compensation. This framework would ensure that there
  would be no discrimination among employees on such factors and
  race, religion, or gender. An employer would compensate all workers
  doing the same job equally.

Figure 15.3—Normative Frameworks

These ethical frameworks give a manager a context to use in considering ethical problems and a means of identifying the most important ethical considerations, but they often do not provide clear-cut solutions. Instead, sometimes they provide different, often contradictory, answers to the problem. For instance, in 2000 the North Carolina Museum of Art had to make a difficult choice about a painting that the museum had bought to be part of its permanent collection. After its purchase, this painting was found to have been stolen by the Nazis during World War II. The descendents of its original owner asked the museum for restitution of the painting.[17] It could be argued using the utilitarian framework that the greatest good would be produced by leaving it in the museum where many visitors could see it on display. However, other arguments could be mounted using the other two frameworks, which would support the rights of the descendents of the owner from whom the painting was stolen. In this particular instance, a compromise was reached. The museum paid compensation to the owner's descendents for the painting, and it remained in the museum. Unfortunately, there are often no real right and wrong answers in ethical situations, and compromises have to be made. The frameworks give managers a way of viewing ethical dilemmas and putting them in a broader perspective.

Codes of Ethics

Many organizations have codes of ethics designed to guide individuals within the organization in acting ethically. In addition to individual codes in specific organizations, many professional organizations have developed codes of ethics designed to guide individual conduct within a profession. Most large corporations in the United States and many in other countries around the world have developed their own codes of ethics.[18] Many of these companies' codes of ethics are available on their Web sites. For instance, BellSouth[19] and Lockheed Martin[20] have their codes of ethics posted on their Web sites. Fewer libraries have developed their own individual codes of ethics. Although there have been suggestions that libraries develop codes of ethics for library administrators, such codes have never been developed.[21] Instead, most libraries have subscribed to a professional code of ethics. For example, the American Library Association has a code of ethics that can be seen in figure 15.4. The Medical Library Association also has developed its own code of ethics for health sciences librarians.[22] National libraries or librarians' associations around the world have developed professional codes of ethics. A large number of such professional codes can be seen at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (http://www.ifla.org/faife/ethics/codes.htm). It is interesting to compare and contrast the elements found in each of these professional codes and to see how each group's code varies in some aspects from the others.

The value of both institutional and professional codes of ethics depends on how they are used. If the importance of a particular code is taught to all employees, if top managers affirm such codes, and if individuals who go against the code are punished, codes can be important in shaping behavior. If such a code is used only as window dressing, it will be ineffective in providing a guide to ethical behavior. Enron had a 64-page code of ethics that was distributed to all employees, but obviously the code was ignored by many of the managers in the company.[23]

✷ What Do You Think?

It often has been said that reputation is how others perceive you and character is how you act when no one is watching. Is it inevitable for people to behave differently when they are being observed by others, or does the truly ethical person always behave the same?

Other Frameworks for Ethical Decision Making

Experts provide other frameworks, including a list of questions that individuals can use to assess whether they are confronting any problematic situation in an ethical way. For instance, questions such as the ones in table 15.1 provide guidance to an individual trying to reach an ethical decision. Other managers use such guidelines by asking such questions as: "Would you be proud to tell

Figure 15.4—The Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

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Code of Ethics of the American Library Association

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees, and library staffs.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

1. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.

2. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

3. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted.

4. We recognize and respect intellectual property rights.

5. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairnesss, and good faith and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.

6. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.

7. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.

8. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Adopted June 28, 1995, by the ALA Council

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Source: Reprinted with permission.

your parents or grandparents about the decision you have made?" "Are you able to sleep well at night?" "How would you feel if interviewers from your local television station showed up with cameras to ask about your actions?" Questions like these may help focus an individual's response to a perplexing problem. But

TABLE 15.1 Questions for Examining the Ethics of a Business Decision

1. Has the problem been defined accurately?
2. Would you define the problem differently if you stood on the other side of the issue?
3. How did the situation occur in the first place?
4. To whom and to what do you give your loyalty as a person and as a member of the organization?
5. What is your intention in making this decision?
6. How does this intention compare with the likely results?
7. Whom might your decision or action injure?
8. Can you discuss the problem with the person or persons likely to be affected before you make the decision?
9. Are you confident that your decision will be just as valid over time as it seems now?
10. Could you disclose without qualm this decision to your boss, your board of directors, your family, or to society as a whole?
11. What is the symbolic potential of your action if understood? If misunderstood?
12. Under what conditions would you allow exceptions to this decision?

Source: L. L. Nash, "Ethics without the Sermon," *Harvard Business Review* 58, no. 6 (November–December 1981): 81.

ethical dilemmas are not easy; sometimes there are no readily apparent correct answers, or there is more than one approach that might be taken.

ETHICS TRAINING

Managers must realize that all of the ethical frameworks, codes, and question-asking approaches described previously are useless unless they are communicated to employees and employees are taught to use them. As was mentioned earlier, individuals have their own set of ethical guidelines, and these guidelines can differ a great deal even among employees who are largely homogeneous. As organizations employ a greater diversity of employees, it is important to remember that different cultures often have different beliefs about what is acceptable ethical behavior, and it can never be assumed that an employee understands the ethical expectations of an organization without training. A number of institutions in the private sector have instituted ethics training programs to train employees about the ethical standards expected within the organization on topics varying from sexual harassment to insider stock trading. In addition, some have set up hotlines to allow employees to seek guidance or to report wrongdoings.[24] Although trying to teach people to behave ethically is not an easy thing to do, ethics training can be useful because it reinforces the organization's standards and reminds the employee that these standards are important to the organization.

? What Would You Do?

Drew Pope put down his pencil, pushed back in his chair, stretched his arms over his head, and looked out the window. It was a warm Indian-summer day. The maple trees that lined the Allenby Public Library parking lot reached toward the sun like a hedge of orange fire. The smell of their dry, aromatic leaves spiced the gentle breeze. "What a day to be inside!" he said, meditatively addressing the emptiness of the room. With considerable reluctance, he spun his chair around and was about to return to his papers when Preston Huish put his head into the room.

"Have a minute, Drew?" the selectman asked, perkily.

"Sure," smiled the library director, "Glad to see you. Won't you sit down, Preston?" He didn't know the selectman well, but they were on a first-name basis.

Pope studied him with questioning eyes, his hand reaching for the remainder of his coffee.

Huish spoke, "My daughter, Lisa, applied for a page's job at the beginning of September, and yesterday she stopped by to see the circulation head to find out when she would be starting. Ms. Wren told her that she was number 18 on the waiting list and that it would be quite some time before she would be called."

The dim thought at the back of the director's mind, "You're about to ask a favor of me. I can tell." But he kept his own counsel.

The selectman continued, "Would you personally look into this and see if she can't be moved up on the list? She's in her final year of high school, and she's saving to go away to college next year. She's bright and a really reliable kid. I'd appreciate it if you'd move her to the top of the list."

For the rest of this case study, see http://www.lu.com/management.

GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS TO PROMOTE ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Ethics are crucial to every organization, but as a recent article by Trevino and Brown stated, "Ethics isn't easy." Unethical conduct has been with us throughout history, but today there are more gray areas and more opportunities for people to engage in unethical behavior. These authors provide a set of guidelines for improving ethics management in any type of organization. These guidelines are:

1. Understand the existing ethical culture. To manage effectively, a manager must understand the ethical culture. Tools such as anonymous surveys and focus groups can help a manager find out what employees really think the ethical climate of the organization to be. Do employees feel that people who act ethically are rewarded and those who do not are punished? What do employees think you need to do to succeed in the organization?

2. Communicate the importance of ethics. Managers need to be sure that they send clear and consistent messages that ethics is essential. It is not enough to tell people to do the right thing. Employees need to be educated about the types of ethical issues that may arise in the organization and discuss ethics and values when decisions are being made.

3. Focus on the reward system. Managers should be certain that ethical behavior is rewarded, not punished. Be sure that employees realize that getting ahead, no matter how you do it, is not tolerated.

4. Promote ethical leadership. The top managers in a firm must demonstrate ethical behavior themselves if they want to encourage it in those who are below them in the organization. Managers must send out explicit messages about ethics because ethical cultures go hand in hand with ethical leaders. Ethical leadership also must be stressed by middle managers and supervisors. In for-profit organizations, it is important to stress that ethical behavior is more important than short-term, bottom-line profits.[25]

CONCLUSION

Ethics is an important topic, and it is often complex because there are so many gray areas. Obviously, there are some elements, such as restrictions on physically harming another person, that would be agreed upon by almost everyone. But there are many other areas in which ambiguity exists, and even people with the best of intentions often will disagree about the right thing to do. All managers should demonstrate the importance of ethics by their own behavior, should be certain that appropriate codes of behavior are in place and that employees are informed of them, and should monitor the behavior of employees to be sure that they are complying. Managing ethically is not easy, but it is a responsibility of all managers to uphold high ethical standards within their organizations.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Robert Jackyll, "Moral Mazes: Bureaucracy and Managerial Work," *Harvard Business Review* 61 (September–October 1983): 118–30.

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