



Ethics
for a Modern
Workforce

Competency 1

**Foundations for an Ethical
Workplace**

Employee Manual

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Competency 1
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Ethical Responsibilities in the Workplace

Ethics Competency 1 • Module 1

Background Ethics and responsibility go hand-in-hand. Without personal responsibility, ethical codes and rules are mere abstract concepts. An ethical workplace is one where everyone is on the same page regarding which moral principles guide behavior and how they are applied. Rules are set, but it is up to the individual to show responsibility and to adhere to the rules. Following the rules and behaving ethically at work is not a choice but a responsibility. As an employee, you need to understand what your responsibilities are as they relate to yourself, your company, your co-workers, your customers, and your community.

- Objectives**
- Understand employee responsibilities in the workplace.
 - Know how to support good ethics at work.
 - Understand moral responsibilities
 - Understand responsibility for company assets.
 - Know how to seek guidance on ethics issues at work.

Case Study – Stepping Forward

Amber misread the control on a mixing machine and the subsequent product ruined some sensitive equipment down the line. It cost the company almost \$65,000 to replace the equipment. The company is not sure what happened and is investigating. She's pretty sure they will fire whoever was responsible. She has not come forward. The next Monday morning the V.P. will be calling all the workers from her department to a meeting to discuss the issue.

Questions for Starters...

1. What are the limits of personal responsibility? When can you throw up your hands and walk away from your responsibility for a workplace situation?

2. Describe a situation where you did something wrong and decided to take responsibility rather than shift the blame to someone or something else.

What is Ethics?

- Ethics is the basic, moral _____¹ by which we live our lives.
- Good ethics is learning what is right and wrong and then _____² the right thing.
- Business ethics is understanding what is right or wrong in the workplace and then doing what's right.

Your Ethical Responsibility

- Ethical behavior at work is a basic expectation!
- You are responsible for behaving in an ethical manner as you work and conduct business.
- You should read and understand company guidelines, rules, codes, and procedures.
- You should not _____³ help another person act unethically in the conduct of business.
- You are ethically responsible to yourself, your company, your co-workers, your supervisor, your customers, and your community.

Your Role in Supporting Good Ethics

- Play by the rules.
- Make ethics a part of your _____⁴ job.
- Do your homework – know the rules.
- Help others make good choices.
- Be a _____⁵ of good ethics.
- _____⁶, if you don't know the answer!

Question?

Whose Responsibility?

When do I stop looking out for the company and start looking out for myself? There are some things going on in my organization that aren't ethical.



Thinkin' About It

How else have you heard the term "ethics" defined?

Ethical Advice

Although the weight of the world is not totally on your shoulders, you need to make sure that you do as much as you possibly can to support good ethics. You might be surprised at the impact your pursuit of good ethics has on the entire workplace.



Thinkin' About It

- Do you have an employee handbook that discusses your responsibilities?
- If so, how are the responsibilities in this list different or the same?

Answer...**Whose Responsibility?**

Understand that you can be held personally liable for illegal and/or unethical activities at work. Your first order of business is to protect yourself. Second, you need to protect the company from people who are intent on destroying it and your livelihood. Everything else comes after that. You should never feel obligated to protect someone who is behaving unethically. You are responsible for your own actions and not the reckless actions of others.

**Thinkin' About It**

What is an example of breaking the "spirit" of the law? What does this mean?

Ethical Advice

Your ethical standards should go beyond the moral minimum to stay out of trouble. Your standards should reach for the highest possible mark.

Ethical Advice

To get a perspective on caring for company assets, turn the situation around. Imagine you were the one who purchased the item with your own money. How would you feel if it were mistreated?

Following the Rule of Law

- You are responsible for obeying the laws and the _____⁷ in which they were intended.
- Satisfying the letter of the law is not enough. Your standards should be higher.
- You should recognize and follow industry standards and practices, both _____⁸ and _____⁹.
- You are responsible for doing your homework. _____¹⁰ of the laws is not an excuse.

Personal Responsibility

- Don't play the blame game!
- Personal ethics is really about personal _____¹¹.
- Taking responsibility for your actions is a part of building _____¹².
- Taking responsibility for your mistakes shows courage that will foster respect from those around you.
- You are legally _____¹³ for bad ethical choices.

Responsibility for Company Assets

You are expected to respect and protect your company's assets. They include:

- F _____¹⁴
- Computers
- Inventory
- P _____¹⁵ information and trade secrets
- Patents, trademarks, and copyrights

- Office supplies
- Equipment
- Products
- C_____ ¹⁶ information

Ten Personal Values for Business Ethics Success

1. R_____ ¹⁷ – Respect laws, people, and property.
2. Teamwork – Work openly and supportively with others, aiming toward common goals.
3. Leadership – Show leadership in areas where you are strong.
4. Corporate Citizenship – Build a workplace that protects health and welfare of employees, your community, and your environment.
5. Shareholder Value – Aim to build a profitable company that will have stability and prosperity.
6. H_____ ¹⁸ – Believe that honesty IS the best policy and to live it.
7. I_____ ¹⁹ – Always take the high road.
8. Responsibility – Take responsibility for your actions.
9. Quality – Strive for quality in every aspect of your work.
10. T_____ ²⁰ – Work to build the trust of employees, supervisors, customers, and the community.

Responsibility for Seeking Guidance

Know the appropriate chain of command. If you find yourself in an ethical dilemma, it is your responsibility to seek guidance from:

- Your supervisor: _____
- Human Resources Manager: _____

Question?

It's not my problem!

My company wastes money right and left. If a piece of equipment breaks, the company buys a new one. People don't seem to care about company property. I often hear co-workers saying, "At least I don't have to pay for it" after they break something. Is there any ethical issue at play even if nobody seems to care about company property?



Thinkin' About It

Can you add any more personal values that contribute to an ethical workplace?



Thinkin' About It

Next to each one of these departments or positions, write the name and phone number of the person whom you would contact if you had a concern.

Answer...
It's not my problem!

Everything belongs to someone. Everything is paid for by someone. If you simply stole the property, do you think the company would care? They certainly would. Respecting property is an ethical issue irrespective of who owns it. It is wrong to destroy or neglect someone else's property even if the owner can afford to lose it. As with most other ethical issues, just because someone else does something wrong, it doesn't make it right.

- Legal Department:_____
- EEOC or Title IV Administrator (for discrimination issues):

- Loss Prevention or Company Security (for theft, shrink, waste, or abuse):_____
- Business Ethics Committee or Ethics Office (if available):

- A company executive, vice president, or officer of the company:_____

Practical Practice

1. Honestly look at your own workplace. Do you consider it to be an ethical place to work? Why or why not? If not, describe a way that would make it better.

2. Is there a company rule or policy that most people ignore? How can you ethically deal with this dilemma?

3. Discuss the rule of law. Why is it so important for a company, state, or country? Can you think of an example where people ignore the rule of law?

Evaluation

Circle the correct answer according to the information presented in this course.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| T | F | You are responsible to your company and coworkers. |
| T | F | You are not legally liable for your bad ethical choices at work. |
| T | F | Ethics is the basic moral ground rules by which we live our lives. |
| T | F | You are required to follow industry standards that are not written. |
| T | F | Taking responsibility for your actions is a part of building character. |