



Ethics
for a Modern
Workforce

Competency 1

**Foundations for an
Ethical Workplace**



Your Ethical Responsibilities at Work

Ethics Competency 1 • Module 1

Time	25 minutes
Background Information	<p>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.</p> <p>Employees need to understand what their responsibilities are as they relate to themselves, the company, co-workers, customers, and the community. Everyone who has a stake in the success of the company needs to understand where they fit in and why good ethics (at every level) makes good sense.</p>
Module Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know the definition of ethics• 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.
Slides	<p>What is Ethics? Your Role in Supporting Good Ethics Your Ethical Responsibilities Personal Responsibility Following the Rule of Law Responsibility for Company Assets Responsibility to Seek Guidance</p>
Case Studies/ Scenarios	<p>1.1 - Stepping Forward 1.2 - Looking Good 1.3 - Recall</p>
Evaluation	<p>Quiz – 5 Points Manual Blanks – 20 Points Participation – As Assigned</p>

Getting Started...

Discuss and Share

Case 1.1 – 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.

Provide participants with two minutes to discuss this case study with their partner or group. Take several responses and allow discussion. Focus the discussion by asking:

- Would you come forward? Why or why not?
- What is the employee's responsibility in this situation?
- What moral and ethical implications are there?
- Has this kind of thing ever happened to you in the past?

Instructional Note: Any one of the three provided case studies can be used.

Discuss and Share

Have participants complete the Questions for Starters in their manuals. Allow time for brief comments and sharing.

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.

Presentation...

What is Ethics?

🗨️ Explain...

"For starters, we need define the term 'ethics.' In particular, we need to understand what ethics is in the context of the workplace."

📄 Display...

The instructor may also incorporate his or her own various definitions into this list.

- Ethics is the basic, moral ground rules¹ by which we live our lives.
- Good ethics is learning what is right and wrong and then doing² the right thing.
- Business ethics is understanding what is right or wrong in the workplace and then doing what's right.

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💬 Ask...

- How else have you heard the term "ethics" defined?
- Have you ever heard someone completely twist the definition to meet their own needs?

Your Employee Responsibilities

🗨️ Say...

"As an employee you have certain ethical responsibilities. First and foremost, you need to understand that good ethical behavior at work is a basic, fundamental expectation."

📄 Display...

- 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 knowingly³ help another person act unethically in the conduct of business.
- You are ethically responsible to yourself, your company, co-workers, supervisor, customers, and your community.

Your Ethical Responsibility

Ethical behavior at work is a basic expectation!

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💬 Ask...

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

💡 Discuss...

Take a minute to discuss the issue of ignoring the unethical actions of others. Is the consequence for overlooking unethical behaviors of others treated the same or differently than being the sole participant?

Your Role in Supporting Good Ethics

💡 Explain...

"Everyone has a role in supporting good ethics in the workplace no matter what your position. Becoming aware of your ethical roles and responsibilities will help you become a better judge of ethical dilemmas."

🖨️ Display...

- Play by the rules.
- You need to make ethics a part of your everyday⁴ job.
- Do your homework – know the rules.
- Help others make good choices.
- Be a **role model**⁵ of good ethics.
- **Ask**⁶, if you don't know the answer!

Your Role in Supporting Good Ethics

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Following the Rule of Law

💡 Explain...

"Our orderly society is based on the rule of law. No one is above the law. Although most people obey this in principle, it is tempting to skirt around the law if it is inconvenient or we know we won't get caught. As employees, the choice is not ours to make. In whatever your capacity, you are an agent of the company and are required to uphold the letter of the law. Here are some principles to help."

🖨️ Display...

- You are responsible to obey the laws and the **spirit**⁷ in which they were made.
- Satisfying the letter of the law is not enough. Your standards should be higher.
- You should recognize and follow **industry standards and practices both written**⁸ and **nonwritten**⁹.
- You are responsible to do your homework. **Ignorance**¹⁰ of the laws is not an excuse.

Obeying the Rule of Law

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💬 Ask...

- What is an example of breaking the "spirit" of the law?
- Do you know any dumb laws? Why were they made?
- How does the rule of law protect you and others around you?

🧠 Ethical Advice

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

Personal Responsibility

🧠 Introduce Slide

“When we mess up, it seems only natural to shift the blame to someone else. But when it comes to ethics, no one else is responsible for our moral choices but us.”

📄 Display...

- Don't play the blame game!
- Personal ethics is really about personal responsibility¹¹.
- Taking responsibility for your actions is a part of building character¹².
- Taking responsibility for your mistakes shows courage that will foster respect from those around you.
- You are legally liable¹³ for bad ethical choices.

A Word About Personal Responsibility...

- Don't play the blame-game!
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💬 Ask...

- Think about what you heard growing up from your parents and role models about responsibility? What has stuck with you all these years?
- What would you (or do you) tell children about being responsible?

Q & A: Whose Responsibility?

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

A: 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.

Responsibility for Company Assets

🧠 Explain...

“Every employee has control over company assets. Whether it's a piece of office equipment or a trade secret, it is expected that each employee will do everything in his or her power to protect the company from loss.”

📄 Do it!

During the presentation, have participants circle in their manual the kinds of assets that they control. Next to their circles, have them write two examples of each.

Display...

- You are expected to respect and protect your company's assets. They include:
- Facilities¹⁴
- Computers
- Inventory
- Proprietary¹⁵ information and trade secrets
- Patents, trademarks, and copyrights
- Office supplies
- Equipment
- Products
- Confidential¹⁶ information

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Q & A: It's Not My Problem

Q: 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?

A: 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.

💡 Ethical Advice

To get an ethical 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?

Ten Personal Values for Ethics Success

Say...

“When at work, there are certain personal values that will help you become ethically successful. If you incorporate these values into your work and show them in your attitude, then you will be more ethical and more successful in what you do.”

Display...

1. **Respect**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. **Citizenship** – Build a workplace that protects health and welfare of employees, your community, and your environment.
5. **Value** – Build a profitable company that will have stability and prosperity.
6. **Honesty**¹⁸ – Believe that honesty IS the best policy.
7. **Integrity**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. **Trust**²⁰ – Work to build the trust of employees, supervisors, customers, and the community.

Ten Personal Values for Business Ethics Success

- **Respect** – Respect laws, people, and property.
- **Teamwork** – Work openly and supportively with others, aiming toward common goals.
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- **Honesty** – Believe that honesty IS the best policy and to live it.
- **Integrity** – Always take the high road.
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- **Quality** – Strive for quality in every aspect of your work.
- **Trust** – Build the trust of employees, supervisors, customers, and the community.

Responsibility to Seek Guidance

Explain...

“You are not alone in building an ethical workplace. There are others who are here to help. Should you experience an ethical dilemma, ask for help. Know who to contact in case you have a problem. Don’t be afraid to ask for advice and report unethical situations if you see them.”

The following list of individuals is included in the Participant Manual.

- Supervisor
- Human Resources Manager
- Legal Department (if a law has been violated)
- 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)
- Any company executive, vice president, or officer of company
- Company President

 **Do it!**

Next to each one of these departments or positions, have participants write the name and phone number of whom they would contact if they had a concern. If available, provide a company phone list or directory with the names and contacts for each. Give time to write if necessary.

Extension/Evaluation

Think...Discuss...Decide

Propose the following two case studies. Allow participants time to think about them, discuss them with a partner or group, and come to a decision.

Case 1.2 Looking Good

Jamie and Amy are friends who work for the same company. About six months ago, Amy took disability leave for clinical depression. The company's long-term disability insurance pays her 55% of her monthly salary. Last Saturday Jamie ran into Amy at their kids' soccer game. Amy looked great. She acted perfectly normal. Jamie asked Amy how she was doing and she said, "Great!" Jamie is suspicious that Amy is taking advantage of company disability benefits. It is upsetting to her because the insurance premiums went up 12% this year.

Case 1.3 Recall

As a Quality Assurance supervisor Jerry discovers a flaw in a part used in automobile engines. The flaw may not necessarily be dangerous but it could require several months of testing and re-engineering to fix. The factory has already produced and shipped 5,000 parts. The company is in financial trouble and would be devastated if required to recall the parts. A recall now could cost the jobs of hundreds of workers.

Practical Practice

Allow participants time to complete these questions in their manuals. Additional time may be required for partner or group discussion.

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 resolve the dilemma?
3. Discuss the whole concept of 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 1 - Quiz

The questions and answers from the Participant Manual are as follows:

T	F	You are responsible to your co-workers.
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.

✓ Evaluation 2 – Manual Completion

There are 20 blanks in the participant manual. All correct blanks receive one point. There are twenty-five points possible for each module. Evaluation options and standards are at the discretion of the training provider.

