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# **Ethics<sup>4</sup> Everyone**

**The Handbook for  
Integrity-Based Business Practices**

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You read about it in the papers; you hear about it on the evening news; it's plastered on industry publications and legal journals. Almost everyone is talking about it – almost everywhere you turn, it's front page news.

## The “it” is **ETHICS** ... and it has quickly become today's most critical business concern.

Look around. It seems as though for every organization or individual receiving an ethics award, there's another being charged with some type of impropriety. And this has led more than a few to conclude that we're right in the middle of an ethics and integrity crisis – as businesses ... and as a society. “Why else,” they contend, “would we create ethics departments, ethics officers, codes of conduct, and the like?” And to a degree, they're right. But whether you share their assessment, or consider it an over-dramatization, two facts are undeniable: 1) there are some serious problems out there, and 2) it's absolutely imperative that you and your organization **DON'T** get caught up in them!

So what's all the hubbub about? What exactly is *ethics*, anyway? Well, if you turn to a dictionary for help, you find definitions such as: “a system of moral principles or values; the rules or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession; accepted principles of right and wrong.” Translated into simple, behavioral terms, it means doing what's right, fair, honest, and of course – legal.

Our grandparents, and generations before them, would probably be amused (and disturbed) by the fact that we now create departments, appoint officers, and even write books – all to make sure we do what they knew as **the only way to do business ... the natural way to behave**. But then, they didn't face the same intense workplace and career pressures that lead to temptations of stretching the truth, trading quality for expediency, managing by exploiting “loopholes,” and chasing short-term, end-justifies-the-means, quick profit.

The good news is that most businesses, and most people that work in them, *are* doing right, fair, honest, and legal things every day. And that's how it needs to be – that's where YOU need to be – because the risks are great for doing otherwise. The reality is ...

■ **Your reputation** (yours and your organization's) **is at stake.** In the business world, reputation is everything. Fact is, your success hinges on it. Customers have choices. They research and compare vendors. And they do business with reputable organizations. Commit one ethical faux pas – which *will* overshadow scores of previous good actions – and you'll watch your customers go elsewhere. Not good!

■ **Your job is at stake.** If your business *loses* business, there's less of a need to keep you around. Whatever job protection you may have had becomes non-existent. And, with today's increased sensitivity and focus on business practices – combined with the need for organizations to protect themselves – ethics violations can result in job loss. *Definitely* not good!

That's precisely why you should care about ethics; that's precisely why you need to pay attention to the pages that follow.

And here's the big code-breaker you need to remember: Whether or not you have an ethics department, or compliance officers, or a "code of conduct," the ethical make-up of your business begins and ends with YOU ... and all the other "you's" with whom you work. The actions *you* take, the decisions *you* make, and the daily behaviors *you* exhibit – whether big or seemingly insignificant – are ultimately how you and your organization will be judged.

When it comes to ethics, everyone is responsible ...

everything counts ...

everyone must "walk the talk"!

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