



From the Desk of the Editors

“Is it too Late to Teach Business Ethics in College?”

We are faced with decisions every day, most of them fairly routine. But what happens when people are faced with ethical dilemmas? Those decisions that force them to choose between right and right are the ones that ultimately define us. And who determines what is right or wrong? Even things that are considered legal may not always pass the ethical test. Having to make an ethical decision, especially a difficult one, can lead good people to do the wrong things. So should we even bother to teach business ethics to college students? Yes, we should. We have an ethical obligation to do so.

Ethics goes beyond pointing out all the unethical business practices and the legal consequences that those who have been caught have suffered. Students won't just become ethical because you point out that Bernie Madoff went to jail for his Ponzi scheme. They probably already know about him. Or maybe you can go back to Enron, and point out that situation. No, that won't work either. So what can college and university professors do to ensure that their students behave ethically? They have to understand that they cannot ensure future ethical behavior. However, they can provide students with opportunities to hone their critical thinking skills so that they understand how ethical behavior, while not always easy, is the right thing to do.

Business majors are often labeled as some of the most unethical college students. Many people believe that business people are only out to make

money, and they don't care about their employees, the environment, etc. In essence, business people are often thought to just be greedy. We have a responsibility to give college students an opportunity to learn how to become ethical leaders. It can be done, but it takes some work, and it difficult to judge effectiveness because it is not immediate and cannot really be evaluated through a test. But that doesn't mean we don't keep trying. The goal is to get them to think critically and make the right decision in the future as they transfer the skills and attitudes they were taught in the classroom.

To say that we shouldn't bother to teach business ethics in college is just giving up on our future business leaders. Do we really want to say that by the time someone gets to college, it is too late for them to learn different behaviors and attitudes? That is actually a very big part of the experience, opening your mind once you're exposed to different ideas and viewpoints. So instead of just naming unethical leaders and talking about how much money they amassed, start a conversation about ethical leadership and ethical leaders. We all seem to be able to name unethical companies and people, but can we name ethical companies and leaders as well? If not, that's a problem. Business ethics can be taught and college students must learn that good ethics is good business.

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