

# Workplace Ethics and Values



**Introduction: Ethics** is defined as the specific moral choices made by an individual in his relationship with others. They are standards or principles that help govern the way we conduct our life. They are often called morals. **Work ethics** are those standards which affect our approach to working and the way we get work done.

**Values** are something we establish and believe in; they are established over a long period of time. They are the qualities or traits that are most important in our lives. We develop our values through the influences of family, friends, teachers, media, culture, tradition, religion and community. Our actions and decisions are based on our values. **Work values** are things upon which we base decisions at work and they are built on the foundation of the personal values we hold. When we work within an organization, be it at school, on the job, or in other pursuits, we need to blend our values with those of the other workers and the company for the betterment of the organization.

## Work Ethics

It is often difficult to make ethical decisions. According to the Ancient Greeks the ethical thing to do was not always the “correct” thing to do, but it was the “right” thing to do. Ethics are the concern for the well-being of and respect for others; being fair; doing good and preventing harm.

For instance, a customer returns an electrical appliance to you and says, “This doesn’t work right. I want my money back.” It appears to you that the appliance has been damaged by misuse. The correct thing to do would be to protect your employer’s interests and not accept goods that may have been damaged by misuse. The “right” thing to do, however, may be to accept the return in order to maintain good customer relations and apologize for any inconvenience the return may have caused. In the long run the customer will be happy and will likely continue to patronize the business.

Some guidelines may be applied to help you make ethical decisions. Is it legal, i.e., does it violate local, state or federal law? Is it within the policy of your company? Is the situation fair to all of those involved? **Would you be comfortable if others knew of your decision?** Will you be comfortable with your decision? Using these questions to make ethical decisions will help you make the best decisions. Workers are often evaluated on ethical behaviors.

Words often associated with ethics include compassion, respect, fairness, honesty, caring, truth, and trustworthiness.

### A Question of Ethics!

You just bought a super new game for your computer; it was really quite expensive, but it is truly awesome and fun to play. Your best friend really likes it, too, but doesn’t have the money to buy his own and has asked you to make a copy for his computer. Will you make a copy for him? Why? Why not?

## **Work Values**

**Work values** are important in two ways. One way is how your values in life affect how you do your job and the satisfaction you derive from your job. The second way, is how your values affect those you work with.

Your career and life choices should be compatible with your values if they are to bring you true satisfaction. For instance, if you highly value “animal rights” it may be difficult to work for a pet store that sells puppies raised in a puppy mill. If you value independence and freedom your best careers might be in the area of entrepreneurship, or owning your own business.

Teams, when they are successful, likely involve people who have different values. Teams can balance the values of all of its members and ensure that differing values are respected when decisions are made. Individual diversity and values strengthen the team. For instance, one person may value loyalty to the organization over loyalty to self. Another person may value quality of their personal life over total commitment to an organization. Sometimes men and women approach problems differently. It doesn't mean that one person is right and the other person is wrong. Valuing diversity means that team members can learn from one another and build on the positive qualities in the group. The balance created by such variety makes a team stronger.

### **Whose Values Are They?**

You and your co-workers have scheduled a team meeting at 8:00 every other Monday morning. For some reason, your co-workers seem upset when you often arrive at the meeting at 8:20. Why are they upset? After all, you often work until 5:30, so you really put in your full eight hours a day. What's going on?