

10 MYTHS about Business Ethics

MYTH 1 BUSINESS ETHICS IS MORE A MATTER OF RELIGION THAN MANAGEMENT.

“altering people’s values or souls isn’t the aim of an organizational ethics program — managing values and conflict among them is ...”

MYTH 2 OUR STAFF MEMBERS ARE ETHICAL SO WE DON’T NEED ATTENTION TO BUSINESS ETHICS.

When the topic of business ethics comes up, people are quick to speak of the Golden Rule, honesty and courtesy. But when presented with complex ethical dilemmas, most people realize there’s a wide “gray area” when trying to apply ethical principles.

MYTH 3 BUSINESS ETHICS IS A DISCIPLINE BEST LED BY PHILOSOPHERS, ACADEMICS AND THEOLOGAINS.

Business ethics is a management discipline with a programmatic approach that includes several practical tools.

MYTH 4 BUSINESS ETHICS IS SUPERFLUOUS — IT ONLY ASSERTS THE OBVIOUS: “DO GOOD!”

The value of a code of ethics to an organization is its priority and focus regarding certain ethical values in that workplace. For example, it’s obvious that all people should be honest. However, if an organization is struggling around continuing occasions of deceit in the workplace, a priority on honesty is very timely.

MYTH 5 BUSINESS ETHICS IS A MATTER OF THE GOOD GUYS PREACHING TO THE BAD GUYS.

Good people can make bad actions, particularly when stressed or confused. Managing ethics in the workplace includes all of us working together to help each other remain ethical and to work through confusing and stressful ethical dilemmas.

Ethics HelpLine

1.800.261.7497

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MYTH 6 BUSINESS ETHICS IS THE NEW POLICEPERSON ON THE BLOCK. Business ethics was written about as early as even 2,000 years ago in Cicero's *On Duties*.

MYTH 7 ETHICS CAN'T BE MANAGED. Actually, ethics is always "managed". For example, laws, regulations and rules, strategic priorities, the behavior of the organization's founder or current leader, even such "codes of ethics," such as the "10 Commandments" in Christian religions or the U.S. Constitution are all forms of management.

MYTH 8 BUSINESS ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ARE THE SAME THING. The social responsibility movement is one aspect of the overall discipline of business ethics. Writings about social responsibility often do not address practical matters of managing ethics in the workplace, e.g., developing codes, updating policies and procedures, approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas, etc.

MYTH 9 OUR ORGANIZATION IS NOT IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW, SO WE'RE ETHICAL. One can often be unethical, yet operate within the limits of the law, e.g., withhold information from superiors, fudge on budgets, constantly complain about others, etc. However, breaking the law often starts with unethical behavior that has gone unnoticed.

MYTH 10 MANAGING ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE HAS LITTLE PRACTICAL RELEVANCE. Managing ethics in the workplace involves identifying and prioritizing values to guide behaviors in the organization, and establishing associated policies and procedures to ensure those behaviors are practiced. This "values management" is also highly important in other management practices.

(excerpt from Carter McNamara's Complete Guide to Ethics Management: An Ethics Toolkit for Managers)

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