

Ethics is Power

‘Now – is always the right time to do the right thing’

Generation Y is the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. Known for their optimism, education, collaborative ability, open-mindedness, and drive, they are the hottest commodity on the job market. To align, engage and involve them with a vision to profess ‘Ethics’, one has to tell them why, in a way that lets them know its importance and benefits both personally and professionally.

Many a times there is perplexity in understanding the difference between values, virtues, morals and ethics. More often than not we use these words synonymously. A virtue is a quality that shows how human beings ought to be; whereas a value may vary among cultures and may change over time. An example of a value not important to all cultures is "being on time - punctuality." Virtues are values that have become intrinsic to the personal identity and way of life of a person. If a value is practiced enough, it becomes part of the personality – the character – of a person. E.g: Valuing ‘truth’ leads to honesty, integrity, and courage; valuing justice leads to fair-mindedness. Morality is the system through which we determine right and wrong conduct. Morals have a greater social element to values and tend to have a very broad acceptance. We judge others more strongly on morals than values. Ethics is the philosophical study of Morality. Imagine a person who has a strong value of achievement and success. One would expect him to display virtues like determination, discipline, purposefulness, being goal oriented while gaining the skills necessary to accomplish goals. However, one would not know or predict whether he will cheat to get what he wants or "do an honest day's work each day". This dimension relates to a matter of ethics and morality.

Ethics is Power. There are certain advantages accrued by professing ‘Ethics’ universally. Ethical conduct commands respect and influence because;

- People, who function ethically, have a high score on moral intelligence which provides protection against ‘toxic’ influences in society. Moral intelligence is the summation of seven traits; consistency, inhibitory control, responsibility, logic, cooperation, fairness and empathy. These traits are valued universally.

- Ethical people are conscious that a 'lie' is not just in the words, or the lack of words, it's the intention. They are conscious, aware and therefore try to minimize all variations of lies including; lie to derail, lie to confuse, lie to misinform and also lie by omission. They are not a party to treat people as means to the end you wish to accomplish and not as ends in themselves.
- People who operate ethically believe their 'word' is their bond. They are conscientious in the performance of their duties. They avoid any actions or creating the appearance that they are violating the law or engage in any activity that conflicts with their duty. They have no hidden agendas and motives therefore confidentiality, data security, and conflict of interest is seldom a problem with these individuals. Organizations place immense trust in such individuals and groom them for leadership positions to bridge the ever growing 'trust deficit' in the minds of the stakeholders.
- Ethical people are highly resistant to influence attempts from 'political swindlers' who use unethical means. The power of those acting unethically is dampened and thus ethical authority is enhanced by comparison.
- Ethical employees are less likely to spend valuable energy in internal turf battles, both personally and departmentally. This frees enormous amount of time and energy for task accomplishments enabling them to be productive and efficient. This empowers teams and organizations to better serve customers and operate more efficiently. The result can be greater power and influence in the market place.
- Consistent ethical conduct results in 'influence'. Those higher in the organization are more likely to pay attention to an individual they know to be ethical versus someone who they believe is trying to advance personal versus organizational agenda.
- Employees known to operate ethically are preferred team members revered as even equal to and sometimes greater than technical competence. Team leaders who believe their members are ethical worry less about being negatively surprised by something wrong in their team. Often this results in more delegation of responsibility to an ethical person, other factors being equal. This can give the ethical person more responsibility and influence within the team.

- People known to operate ethically foster positive working environment. They are honest, thoughtful and constructive critiques. They acknowledge, listen and respond to feedback objectively. They are honest about their experiences, abilities and availability.
- People who are ethical in their conduct give due credit to their team members during success and also take responsibility of the failures.
- People who believe in ethical living make ethical choices in financial investments, consumer purchases, charity and even in choosing the food they eat. They evaluate their choices based on health, environmental and social consequences. They live responsibly.

Ethical behavior is 'value' driven. Values are integral to attitude formation and to how one responds to people and situations. One's character does not stay at home when one goes to work or play. Since it calls on perceptive thought, analytical and intuitive reasoning, and prudential judgment, ethics is perhaps more art than science - the art of choosing well and wisely for the good of self and others to succeed in one's personal and professional life.