

The Ethics of Teaching Business – A Wake Up Call for Business Educators

Since eternal times we have heard , ‘Teaching ‘ is a noble profession . Dissecting the two words, to be noble is to have or show qualities of high moral character. Teaching requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it calls also for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge, and therefore, educators are seen as professionals.

Ethics are the principles, beliefs, assumptions and values that illustrate a moral life. Ethical practice is the foundation of teaching be it of primary, secondary or tertiary/ professional levels. The desire for the respect and confidence of one's colleagues, of students, the administrators, educational leaders, and of the members of the community should provide the incentive to attain and maintain the highest possible degree of ethical conduct.

Hostile takeovers, corporate espionage, environmental damage, corruption, scams, scandals in the business world are headlines of every news paper today. Business schools have recognized the need to address these ethical issues and the curriculum therefore include subjects like Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility. They have become hot topics of debates, discussions, seminars and research. The contention however is not the importance placed on these topics or subjects, but the ‘Ethics of Teaching Business’. The professional and ethical dedication of educators and staff, transparent systems for collecting and disseminating information, effective systems of accountability and monitoring, reliable judiciary, etc. These ‘intangible inputs’ are crucial to the delivery of quality business education. However, the impact of the educators (teachers / faculty / professors) on student behaviour is immense. They are role models to their students who are the business leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, the business educator must recognize the magnitude of the responsibility inherent in the teaching at business schools. *Do we walk the talk???*

We teach them about product expiry, persistent process up gradation, etc. Many a times, we forget to upgrade our teaching content and processes. Keeping abreast of latest theories, research findings, current trends, and tools and techniques of teaching are to be our essential repertoire as professionals. We teach them about environmental implications, health hazards of products and processes in our classes but it is also imperative to help students integrate their knowledge by giving those assignments, simulations, live projects, internship that integrates their learning. This would help them understand the implications of their business decisions from the overall perspective like ecological, behavioral etc and not just with an eye on the bottom line. We teach our students that the success of any product or services depends upon its 'quality'. Each and every business leader is coached and preached to pursue that elusive and challenging goal of 'Quality'. As business educators sometimes we do not practice what we preach. Many a times we forget important teaching material, prepare sloppy handouts with typo errors, produce slides visuals which are blurred or not relevant to the syllabus. Does this behavior demonstrate a value for 'quality'? Would we want to instill these work ethics in our students?

The HRM classes are abuzz with terms like, 'employee participation, participative management, employee involvement and how it enhances creativity and innovations in organizations. We also give lectures relating equal opportunity, fair treatment, respecting diversity and pluralism. Do we demonstrate the same by giving scope for discussions on controversial topics, by engaging in stimulating debates where students get different perspectives even though sometimes they don't agree to our perspectives and belief systems? The business syllabus includes topics like pay for performance, incentives and rewards. Do we as business educators help them internalize those concepts? Do we set standards of acceptance and excellence for the assignments, projects and presentations in the class, and also communicate the same to the students? Do we spell clearly the assessment rules in terms of team and individual performances in class? It is essential that the primary rewards - their grades and marks be clearly tied to their class performance. Tests and other assignments should be designed, administered and graded fairly. They should be able to give a perspective of the overall continuous student development and also give the facilitator a viewpoint to how well he/she managed the content and if the pedagogy was effective. Can we as business educators vouch that we don't show any favoritism in classrooms, practice deception or

discriminatory practices, grade fairly, and not disgrace students in any way? The best way to instill participative management, fair treatment, respect for diversity and equal opportunity is to demonstrate these values in our behavior in the class and be role models.

Finally, value for money is the basic bottom line in any product or service industry. Students and their parents (more so in the Indian context) invest their valuable time, efforts and money to pursue their degrees. Paradoxically the Indian business management schools are accused of churning unemployable graduates. Management degrees more than often are considered as a gate away to better social status and better prospects in marriage markets. As business educators and leaders we should ensure that our students get the value for their money and we create employable global citizens and business leaders of tomorrow.

The instances, where we as educators could be able to demonstrate and prepare our students towards ethical conduct are endless. In relation to the enormity and the gravity of this topic, the mushrooming management colleges and the ingress of many entrants into the profession of teaching business schools this is a very short discussion. Concluding, with the adage, 'Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember then teach me and I will understand '. The business educators have opportunities at every step to practice what they preach. They have ample avenues to show that they too care about business ethics.

Dr. Farida Virani

HR Consultant and Faculty

Dr. Farida Virani