



# Business Ethics is Not an Oxymoron

By Patricia Clason

Recently I overheard a conversation about a person who attended a large seminar. This person passed around a clipboard asking people to sign up if they would like to be informed of future events. The purpose was to create a mailing list to market a similar, competitive business. Prior approval was not obtained from the event promoter. Smart marketing? Or a breach of ethics?

We are faced with increasingly gray areas as our world grows at a pace more rapid than our ability to process the changes. Ethics is a buzz word in business, seen on the cover of national magazines, debated in Internet news groups.

What is ethics? A working definition is: a set of values that consistently guides our behaviors. These values are usually...

1. In alignment with the majority of society's definitions of correct and positive behavior;
2. Within legal parameters;
3. Balancing the good of the individual with the good of the whole.

One of the problems is that we have different values guiding society. We have been through several major shifts in societal standards of right and wrong and no longer have a "majority of society's definitions of correct and positive behavior."

Diversity comes up as well regarding ethics. By the year 2001, the racial and ethnic groups we call minorities will be

the majority of the US population. The diversity in religious and cultural backgrounds brings diversity in ethics.

With the speed of technology development and the Internet, we find ourselves in virtual realities that don't have clear rules or laws governing them. Privacy, boundary, ownership and copyright issues are challenged by our instant ability to obtain information.

## Self-preservation is not enough

Remembering that survival implies not enough for all and life itself at stake, we sometimes forget that true survival requires long-term, successful relationships with customers and suppliers, as well as co-workers and others within the company. When people or businesses do not understand their inter-connectedness to the whole and are completely self and survival oriented, it throws the ethical system out of whack.

Know your core life values and the values that your company stands for. Live and work congruently with those values. People will know you as a person of integrity and will trust you. You will be called "ethical" and you'll be able to live with yourself honorably. Balancing the good of the one with the good of the whole is vital to long-term business success, and is easy to do when your ethics are purposefully chosen.



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