

Ethics

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Do the right things right

● PURPOSE

Workplace ethics has to be more than moralizing from the main office. In order to build trust, workplace ethics must be demonstrated in consistent action throughout the workplace and in all business relationships. The purpose of this session is to define ethical behaviors in this workplace.

● SUMMARY

Workplace ethics include employee relationships, customer relationships, supplier relationships, shareholder relationships, community relationships, and others. Ethical conduct involves both heart and head, responsibility, commitment, and standards. In this activity, participants will analyze the definition of “ethical behavior” contained in the *Baldrige National Quality Program Criteria for Performance Excellence* (2004) and relate their work to it. In this analysis, they will be guided by the Native American “Circle of Life” and its foundations of ethical behavior from this culture.

● AGENDA

<i>Step</i>	<i>Time</i>
Discuss the graphic in the Discussion Starter (A) Handout	10 minutes
Discuss the reference in Discussion Starter (B) Handout	10 minutes
Provide examples from the workplace	15 minutes
Describe current and desired practices in the workplace	10 minutes
Wrap up	10 minutes

● INTRODUCTION

1. As participants enter the room, distribute copies of the Discussion Starter (A) Handout (The Circle of Life) and the Discussion Starter (B) Handout (Baldrige Explanation of Ethical Behavior). (If you prefer, you can make a two-sided copy for each participant, A on one side and B on the other, so that each person has only one piece of paper to deal with.)
2. Begin the session by introducing the topic and why it's important from a personal perspective and from a business perspective.
3. Refer participants first to the Circle of Life Handout and ask them to notice the features of the Circle of Life, including the feathers in the center. Use this graphic to help participants focus on the personal characteristics of ethical behavior. Ask them what they see in the Circle of Life. Then continue with the following observations:

“When people behave ethically, their actions are described by words such as truthful, accountable, consistent, focused, disciplined, humble, patient, compassionate, discerning, inclusive. The Circle of Life is found in many countries and cultures, including Native American culture. The image of persons reaching out to and connected with each other in a circle is a representation of an ancient and contemporary belief that we are all related in common pursuit. The Africans’ circle of life, the great stone circles of Europe, the mandalas of India, and the medicine wheels of America’s Chippewa Indians serve as a unifying and empowering symbol of humanity’s quest to avoid suffering, live in harmony, and be happy. The addition of the eagle feathers in the center

of the circle reminds us to relentlessly search—to be eagle-eyed—for justice and right relationships. With carefully placed stones in meaningful patterns within a circle in the grass, Chippewa Native Americans focused on qualities such as purity, clarity, wisdom, illumination, strength, trust, and love, and on processes such as introspection, cleansing, and renewal, certainly some of the foundations of what we today consider ethical behavior today.

“But the definition of ethical behavior often eludes us. We confuse what seems right at the moment in a certain context with what is surely wrong in the long run; we develop our intellectual selves to the exclusion of or with imbalance of our spiritual selves. We let anger, fear, and greed block our positive impact on others. We are not sure that corporate values are played out in ethical behavior in the corporation. We remain silent when we should speak. We forget the notion of personal responsibility and lose touch with opportunities for service for the good of all. We abandon the circle.

“Now turn to the Discussion Starter (b) Handout and read the explanation of the U.S. government’s National Institute of Standards and Technology’s concept and practice of ethical behavior.”

● AWARENESS

4. Allow several minutes for participants to read the excerpt from the *Baldrige Criteria*. Guide participants’ thinking to the organizational issues raised in the excerpt. As they are reading, go to a flip chart and write on it the following words from the Baldrige excerpt:

- Behavior
- Moral and professional principles
- Right from wrong
- Role models
- Communicated
- Reinforced
- Mission and vision aligned
- Empower

5. Lead participants through the list of words, one by one, and ask whether they agree with the statements on the handout. Ask them to modify any of those words according to their own understanding or experience. Keep the focus on organizations as participants elaborate on the excerpt.
6. Now bring the two sides of the Discussion Starter Handout together by suggesting that A deals mainly with personal characteristics and B deals mainly with organizational concepts. Both are necessary for ethical workplace behavior.

● EXAMPLES

7. Facilitate a discussion of examples of unethical behavior. Start participants off by suggesting several common problems: stealing supplies, back-dating paperwork, calling in sick when you're not sick, breaking confidence, changing the rules mid-stream, withholding information, and so on. Help participants understand what ethical behavior is by stating what it is not.
8. Conclude this exercise by asking participants to reverse their thinking and turn these unethical behaviors they've just heard into positive statements of what ethical behavior is. Remind them that they should think in terms of behaviors—actions—and help them start each statement with an action word. Record their statements on a flip chart. Aim for at least five statements.

● DEFINITION

9. Using the examples of ethical behavior just recorded on the flip chart, ask the group to connect the underlying ideas and make a narrative definition of ethical behavior in this workplace. Ask for a volunteer scribe to work at the flip chart to write the definition of ethical behavior at this workplace. Continue facilitating discussion until all ideas have surfaced and the statement is clearly presented.
10. Here are some examples of how a company can demonstrate ethical behavior. Use these to encourage a deeper examination of the ways in which ethical behavior improves work. Compare these with the definition above. Modify the definition above to include any of these ideas.
 - Supervisors care about employee well-being.
 - Employees here are encouraged to make changes to improve the work that they do.

- The company encourages and enables employees to develop job skills so they can advance their careers.
- We have a safe work environment.
- Employees are thanked and recognized for their contributions.

● WRAP UP

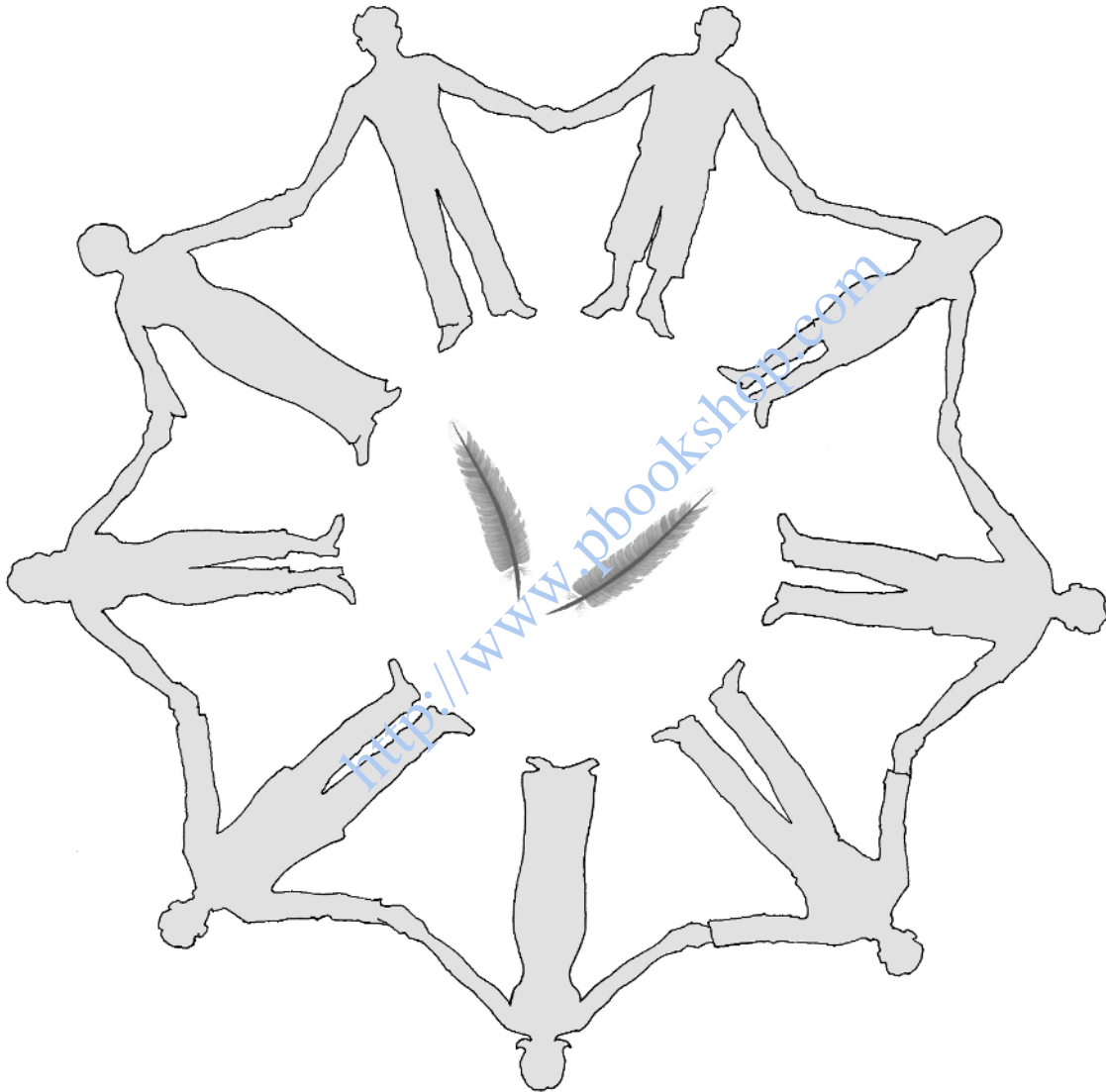
11. Close the session by reiterating the positive examples and behaviors in this company. Refer back to the two Discussion Starter Handouts, which suggest personal as well as organizational responsibilities regarding ethical behavior.
12. Distribute a copy of the Self-Examination, Reflection, and Action Planning Handout to each participant and explain that participants can use this worksheet to help organize their thoughts as they fine-tune their definitions and demonstrations of ethical workplace behavior.

REFERENCE

Baldrige National Quality Program 2004 Criteria for Performance Excellence. (2004). Gaithersburg, MD: National Institute of Standards and Technology.

HANDOUT 11.1
DISCUSSION STARTER (A) HANDOUT FOR
Ethics

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Circle of Life

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HANDOUT 11.2
DISCUSSION STARTER (B) HANDOUT FOR
Ethics*

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Baldrige Explanation of Ethical Behavior

The term “ethical behavior” refers to how an organization ensures that all its decisions, actions, and stakeholder interactions conform to the organization’s moral and professional principles. These principles are the foundation for the organization’s culture and values, and they differentiate “right” from “wrong.”

Senior leaders should act as role models for these principles of behavior. The principles apply to all individuals involved in the organization, from employees to members of the board of directors, and need to be communicated and reinforced on a regular basis. Although there is no universal model for ethical behavior, senior leaders should ensure that the organization’s mission and vision are aligned with its ethical principles. Ethical behavior should be practiced with all stakeholders, including employees, shareholders, customers, partners, suppliers, and the organization’s local community.

While some organizations may view their ethical principles as boundary conditions restricting behavior, well-designed and clearly articulated ethical principles should empower people to make effective decisions with great confidence.

*Source: Glossary of Key Terms, *Baldrige National Quality Program 2004 Criteria for Performance Excellence*, 2004, Gaithersburg, MD: National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), p. 30.

HANDOUT 11.3

SELF-EXAMINATION, REFLECTION, AND
ACTION PLANNING HANDOUT FOR

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Self-Examination

We know intuitively that the state of our mind and heart together allows ethical content of our behavior to develop and drives our ethical behavior to keep growing and improving. Keep this list of personal descriptors of ethical behavior, introduced earlier in the *Lunch and Learn* session, as a daily reminder of desirable characteristics:

- Truthful
- Accountable
- Consistent
- Focused
- Disciplined
- Humble
- Patient
- Compassionate
- Discerning
- Inclusive

Reflection

The business press during the first half of the first decade of the new millennium has been full of corporate scandals and ethical shortcomings: the names Fastow, Skilling, Ebbers, Grasso, and Stewart have raised our collective consciousness about ethics and what drives our values. Reflect on these examples and try to identify the ethical problems they represented.

Action Planning

Resolve to act in ethical ways to correct the wrongs and move forward with the rights as you see them in your organization. Keep a checklist or journal to record your actions.

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