

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS and SUSTAINABILITY

A Casebook for Environmental Professionals



Hal Taback • Ram Ramanan

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To

Joyce

Hal Taback

To

Charu, Bala, Raj, and Jana

Ram Ramanan

Preface

Ethics—The Fourth Bottom Line

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed.” Extreme greed, whether for money or nature’s resources, has disastrous consequences. Today, given the unprecedented size and speed of global transactions, the world is poised for potential tsunamis in many areas because “the avenues to express greed have grown so enormously”[†] and “man has acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world.”[‡] In this book we focus on sustainability, an area we can influence, and expand the triple bottom-line context of people, planet, and profit with a fourth component—purpose. People are inherently self-serving. Absent purpose as a moderator, one could easily skew the objective through the inherent bias of self-interest—caring only for people who mimic us, protecting only parts of the ecosystem that overtly serve us, profiting only a subsection of the stakeholders, misleading investors through underreporting material environmental risks from climate change, misleading consumers through “green washing,” or overclaiming the environmental friendliness of products and services.

Path Taken Matters

Organizations are run by people, and it is the individuals who are responsible for the actions of, and the consequent outcomes and impact on, the corporations and society. For instance, U.S. corporate law does not mandate maximizing share price or shareholder wealth, yet myopic focus on

* Govind Singh, “Mahatma Gandhi: A Sustainable Development Pioneer,” *Eco Localizer*, <http://ecowordly.com/2008/10/14/mahatma-gandhi-who-first-envisioned-the%20concept-of-sustainable-development> (last modified October 14, 2008); <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/environment1.htm>.

† “Testimony of Alan Greenspan,” presented during the Federal Reserve’s Monetary Policy Report: Federal Reserve Board, July 16, 2002, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Greenspan (accessed December 2012).

‡ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002), <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/880193-silent-spring> (accessed December 2012).

short-term return is driven by the skewed executive compensation system. The BP Gulf oil spill in 2010 is a clear example of this culture of cutting corners that led to the all-around loss of regional ecosystems, oil, fishing, and tourism industries, as well as the shareholders and bond holders of BP. “End does not justify the means”—the path taken matters. The extent to which people will go to achieve their personal objectives often depends on their character, which is formed at an early age. Since the potential for cheating exists in childhood and is carried into adulthood, ethical values should be learned much earlier in life. Therefore, companies are faced with the challenge of making significant additional efforts to ensure that their employees unlearn some of this ingrained unethical behavior. What makes a person behave ethically (or unethically)? Our inherent self-preservation instinct is something we must recognize and deal with rationally whenever we encounter situations that tempt us to stray from the right course of action. Ethics training is needed to combat this natural instinct. Just as athletes must train their bodies to perform at their peak, environmental (and other) professionals require ethics training to ensure that they continue to behave ethically in difficult situations.

Making Ethical Decisions

A fundamental definition in this book is as follows: *Ethics is the difference between what a person has the right to do and the right thing to do!* A person’s “right to do” is often defined by the law of the land. The “right thing to do” is the action taken in response to a situation that will result in the greatest benefit and the least harm to all the stakeholders. Ethical decision making is affected by three qualities: competence in identifying issues and evaluating consequences, self-confidence in seeking different opinions and deciding what is right, and willingness to make decisions when the issue has no clear solution. The first aspect involves the ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, and propriety from impropriety. The second is self-confidence built through real-world experience and training. The third is a commitment to do what is right and proper. Ethics is an action concept, not simply something to think about and rationalize. It involves conduct and behavior. Ethics requires character and courage to meet the challenge when doing the right thing costs more than the stakeholder wants to pay.

* Anthony J. Perel, *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), p. 75.

Environmental Ethics Training

Building a culture of ethics is critical, and effective ethics training is crucial to overcome our inherent selfishness. Universities teach ethics with hypothetical dilemmas, companies use a “code of ethics” that their employees sign, and books are written on humanity’s greed and its inhumanities to animals and plants. But this book is different in that it concentrates on providing hands-on practical training. This book serves as our first, but very important, step in providing society with training tools to stem the rot and rebuild an ethics culture, one piece at a time. Frequent in-house ethics training and organizational ethical culture-building supplemented with an appropriate incentive/deterrent system will help develop ethical values and minimize the temptations to cheat. The objective of this book is to serve as a resource for training environmental practitioners and students aspiring to become environmental leaders and professionals. The suggested approach is to educate and train professionals and practitioners through participative workshops that discuss relevant, real-world dilemmas and help people learn how to do the right thing, rather than to leave it to their instincts.

Construct of This Book

Ideally, this material will be used by university professors and organizational environmental managers and leaders for educating students and training employees who are performing environmental duties for developing and building an ethical culture. Additionally, groups of environmental professionals or individuals may use it on a scheduled periodic basis to maintain individual awareness of the ethical dilemmas that they may encounter in their practice and in maintaining their professional board certifications. These participatory training workshops are designed to help our professionals hone their skills and prepare our students to develop their skills to make ethical decisions. These could serve as one significant step to counter the myriad temptations and opportunities to stray that entice all of us in today’s business world. This book is not intended to outline theories of ethics and the terms used in ethical debate, but rather to examine the conflicts experienced by environmental professionals using actual dilemmas and solutions thereof. Some ethical choices are clear-cut, while others are more problematic; it is by looking into the problematic ones that we can start to appreciate the issues involved in resolving those dilemmas.

Section I of this book takes an incisive look at the genesis and challenges of environmental ethics. Chapter 1 starts with natural human instincts, the unethical culture all round, and learned behavior through religious and

philosophical thought processes. Chapter 2 covers the human attitude and treatment of other species and the natural world, as well as some fundamental concepts in environmental decision making in the public policy arena, especially on select mega-environmental issues. Corporate governance and the significance of building ethical cultures in organizations in the context of the new business ambience and social contract are presented in Chapter 3. The final chapter in Section I provides insight and specifics on how to develop and conduct an environmental ethics program to educate and train leaders, professionals, and students.

Furthermore, a rich tapestry of diverse real-world dilemmas that are relevant to environmental professionals has been devised and included in Section II. It identifies and deals with numerous dilemmas in a case study format, offering various options, testing ethical values, and giving trainees practice in the challenge of doing the right thing. Additional material is available from the CRC Press website: <http://www.crcpress.com/product/isbn/9781466584204>.

This casebook on ethics offers to help the environmental professional appreciate the choices that others make and evaluate the justification they give for those decisions. It also sharpens one's ethical awareness; that is, it invites the reader to undergo a conscious examination of values and choices and how these may have shaped his or her life so far and how they can be used to shape it in the future.

Hal Taback

Carlsbad, California

Ram Ramanan

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Acknowledgments

I thank my clients, colleagues, family, and staff who have supported me over the past 35 years while I have done the right thing in protecting the environment and public health while still meeting my other priorities. I thank my associates of over three decades at the Air and Waste Management Association where I have chaired its ethics committee; Bob Hall, a long-term associate and past president and executive director of A&WMA; and Lisa Bucher, the editor of *EM* magazine, where my ethics columns were published for five years. They have allowed me to identify real-world ethical issues and encouraged me to formalize ethics training in columns, papers, workshops, and now, this book.

Hal Taback

I thank my academic, corporate, and consulting peers of over four decades who have inspired me to pursue an ethical path throughout my career and who have offered me the support and provided me the courage to never stray from my dedication to strive for excellence and to do so with a clear conscience. I thank my parents and parents-in-law for instilling those values in me through exemplary living. My father's graduation gift, a plaque etched with Einstein's quotation, "The concern for man and his destiny must always be the chief interest of all technical effort. Never forget it among your diagrams and equations," drove me to pursue the environmental field. Several decades later, my children's retirement gift, another plaque, this one with Gandhi's quotation, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed," opened my eyes to the fourth dimension—ethics. Today I am consumed by the desire to build our future leaders with a better comprehension of purpose and achieve a higher form of capitalism.

Finally, I want to thank my daughter's childhood friend, Alice Bootman, for her unstinting help in editing the drafts of this book.

Ram Ramanan

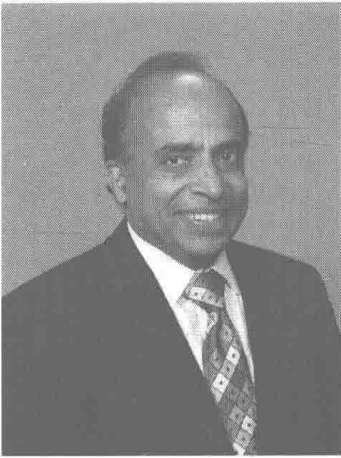
About the Authors



Hal Taback, PE, BCEE, QEP, REA, is president of Hal Taback Company of Carlsbad, California, a Southern California environmental consulting firm. He has over 40 years of professional engineering practice in regulatory and engineering issues related to reducing the risk from toxic air pollutants and hazardous waste and air compliance issues. For eight years he served as the principal consultant to the American Petroleum Institute, coordinating with the United States Environmental Protection Agency on developing Maximum Achievable Control Technology rules for all processes in the petroleum industry.

Taback holds a master of science in engineering from Princeton University and a bachelor of mechanical engineering from the University of Rochester. He is a licensed professional engineer (PE) in California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Arizona; an American Association of Environmental Engineers board-certified environmental engineer; a qualified environmental professional; an ANSI/RAB-certified ISO 14001 EMS auditor; a California-registered environmental assessor (REA); and a member of Sigma Xi and Tau Beta Pi.

A fellow and honorary member of the Air and Waste Management Association (A&WMA), Taback chairs its national ethics committee. He has chaired ethics workshops at eight national meetings of the Air and Waste Management Association and has lectured on the ethics of the environmental professional to technical and bar associations across North America. He has over 140 publications in the environmental field. For five years Taback wrote a bimonthly column in *EM* magazine entitled "Ethics Corner," in which he discussed solutions to common ethical dilemmas experienced by environmental professionals. His papers on ethics have been published in *Environmental Auditor*, *Engineering Times*, and *Southern California Environmental Digest*. Taback's presentations on ethical obligations of the environmental professional are conducted as an interactive discourse using ethical dilemmas as the basis for discussion.



Dr. Ram Ramanan is a Fulbright fellow and Air and Waste Management Association (A&WMA) fellow with over 40 years of corporate, consulting, and academic experience in the management of sustainability, environmental, health, and safety issues. He is the interim director of the Center for Sustainable Enterprise and an industry associate professor at the IIT Stuart School of Business. In addition, he currently chairs the Education Council and serves as director on the International Board of Air and Waste Management Association.

Dr. Ramanan, an ExxonMobil retiree, has developed and implemented corporate risk management and sustainability strategies and programs, managed corporate liability at dozens of Superfund sites, and advised several mega (>\$1 billion) new ventures on environmental and social impact assessments in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. He has also led industry group advocacy efforts in environmental standards development at the state and federal levels in the United States, India, and at the World Bank. Dr. Ramanan has also served as fellow and director at ICF International, as president of a subsidiary of Trinity Consultants, and as department manager at AECOM (formerly ERT). Prior to that, he held various positions, from design engineer to general manager, providing air pollution control systems for the power and petroleum sectors in India.

Dr. Ramanan has published or presented over 40 technical and management papers throughout the world. He holds a PhD from the University of Texas at Dallas, an MBA from the University of Texas at Austin, an MS in marketing and engineering from the University of Bombay, and a BS in chemical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology. He is an American Academy of Environmental Engineers board-certified environmental engineer, a professional engineer in Texas and India, a chartered engineer and chartered environmentalist and scientist in the UK, a qualified environmental professional, and an elected fellow of the Indian Institute of Engineers and the Indian Institute of Chemical Engineers.

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