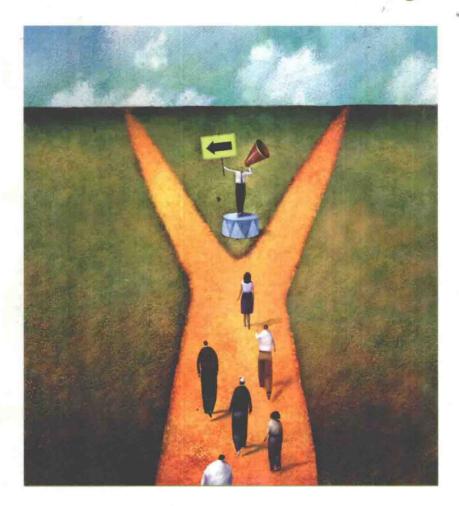
Marianne M. Jennings



Business Ethics

{ Case Studies and Selected Readings }

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FOURTH A EDITION

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Preface

"What is right is right even if no one is doing it. What is wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it."

Source Unknown

"Goodness is the only investment that never fails."

Henry D. Thoreau

Walden; Higher Laws

"Three people can keep a secret if two are dead."

Hell's Angels

In 2000, KPMG, the international accounting firm, surveyed 3,075 working adults. Nearly half reported seeing unethical or illegal conduct of a serious nature at their jobs during the past year, and 76 percent said they had observed a "high level" of illegal or unethical conduct. The most common legal and ethical breaches reported by the survey respondents were deceptive sales practices, unsafe working conditions, and mishandling of confidential or proprietary information. These are not small misdeeds. Nearly half of those employees surveyed also indicated that if members of the public were aware of these misdeeds, it would result in a loss of public trust.

Longitudinally, data on both attitudes about ethics and ethical breaches show that there is a steady increase in both ethical breaches as well as the tolerance for them occurring. In 1997, a Rutgers University survey revealed that 26 percent of undergraduate students engaged in plagiarism in writing papers for their courses. In May 2001,

¹ KPMG, LLP, 2000 Organizational Integrity Survey: A Summary, published by the KPMG Integrity Management Services unit. For more information, go to http://www.us.kpmg.com or http://www.kpmgconsulting.com.

that figure had increased to 54 percent, a doubling in four years.² Certainly the Internet has made the task of plagiarism easier, but the rate of increase in that form of dishonesty as well as others is indicative of a troubling trend.

The following events from the past few years offer some insight into the current issues in business ethics:

- The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filed fraud charges against Sunbeam, its former CEO Albert J. Dunlap (often called "Chainsaw Al" for his career pattern of downsizing companies and making deep and swift cuts in the size of their work forces in order to quickly restore profitability), and its auditors for allegedly overstating earnings by, among other things, recording sales that did not really occur.³ Mr. Dunlap has settled his case by agreeing to pay shareholders \$15 million. Arthur Andersen settled with the shareholders for \$110 million.⁴
- Jonathan G. Lebed began trading stock when he was 12 and through the Internet was able
 to pump and dump his way from an initial investment of \$8,000 all the way to \$800,000
 until the SEC moved in and filed its first fraud charges against a minor, collecting almost
 \$600,000 in gains and leaving his parents only with the funds to pay the income taxes on
 young Jonathan's 3-year run.⁵
- FINOVA, Inc., a financial corporation, and Enron, an energy trading firm, both consistently named one of the top ten companies to work for in the United States, had to issue corrected financial statements. The final fall-out from information about debts and writedowns not revealed to shareholders was that both companies now sit in Chapter 11 bankruptcy with their shares valued at under one dollar each, down from highs of \$70–\$80 per share. These are the largest and seventh largest bankruptcies in the history of the United States and their root causes for failure rest in ethical lapses.
- Both the stock exchanges and the SEC are exploring new codes of ethics for conflicts of interest among analysts and the companies they evaluate in light of the NASDAQ crash.
- General Motors lost a case on its Malibu car that exploded on impact and the jury awarded
 the family injured in the fiery crash over \$4.9 billion (later reduced to \$1.2 billion on appeal) because the evidence included internal memos with GM's knowledge of the defect in
 design centering around the gas tank and its placement that GM would not correct.⁶
- Nearly all dot-com firms are revamping, retooling, and recovering from an era in which financial statements have now been shown to be false, overstated, and creative in their approaches.⁷

Profits. High returns on investments. Earnings management. Product defects. Fraud. Each day brings news of another business with an ethical flaw. Businesses do exist to make a profit, but business ethics exists to set parameters for earning

² The Rutgers study is conducted by Professor Donald McCabe on a regular basis. The survey had 4,500 student respondents. ESchool News Online, May 11, 2001, Edupage. See also http://www.rutgers.edu for more information on Professor McCabe and his work on academic integrity.

³ Floyd Norris, "They Noticed the Fraud but Figured It Was Not Important," The New York Times, May 18, 2001, p. C1.

⁴ Michael Lewis, "Jonathan Lebed: Stock Manipulator, S.E.C. Nemesis—and 15," The New York Times, February 25, 2001, at http://www.nytimes.com and also p. 24 of The New York Times Sunday Magazine.

⁵ Kelly Greene, "Dunlap Agrees To Settle Suit Over Sunbeam," The Wall Street Journal, January 15, 2002, p. A3.

⁶ Milo Geyelin, "How an Internal Memo Written 26 Years Ago Is Costing GM Dearly," The Wall Street Journal, September 29, 1999, pp. A1, A6.

⁷ For example, Microstrategy's stock premiered in its IPO (initial primary offering) at \$6 per share and climbed to \$333 per share. When the SEC announced its investigation of the company for "accounting improprieties," the stock price fell 62 percent. Its share price was \$3.59 in June 2000. Michael Schroeder, "SEC's Probe of Microstrategy Focuses on Auditor Independence Standards," The Wall Street Journal, July 18, 2000, p. A3.

that profit. This book of readings and cases explores those parameters and their importance.

In 1986, before Ivan Boesky was a household name and Michael Douglas was Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*, I began teaching a business ethics course in the MBA program in the College of Business at Arizona State University. The course was an elective. I had trouble making the minimum enrollments. However, two things changed my enrollments and my fate. First, the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) changed the curriculum for graduate and undergraduate business degree programs and required the coverage of ethics. The other event was actually a series of happenings. Indictments, convictions, and guilty pleas by major companies and their officers—from E.F. Hutton to Union Carbide to Beech-Nut to Exxon—brought national attention to the need to incorporate values in American businesses and business leaders.

Whether out of fear, curiosity, or the need for reaccreditation, business schools and students embraced the concept of studying business ethics. My course went from a little-known elective to the final required course in the MBA program. In the years since, the interest in business ethics has only increased. Today nearly 100 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have a code of ethics. Over half provide their employees with regular training in ethics.

Application of ethical principles in a business setting is a critical skill. Real-life examples are necessary. Over the past sixteen years, I have collected examples of ethical dilemmas, poor ethical choices, and wise ethical decisions from newspapers, business journals, and my experiences as a consultant and board member. Knowing that other instructors and students were in need of examples, I have turned my experiences into cases and coupled them with the most memorable readings in the field to provide a training and thought-provoking experience on business ethics.

The cases come not only from a quarter of a century of teaching and business experience, but also from my conviction that a strong sense of values is an essential management skill that can be taught. The cases apply theory to reality; hopefully, they will nurture or reinforce a needed sense of values in future business leaders.

The fourth edition continues the features students and instructors embraced in the first, second, and third editions, including both short and long cases, discussion questions, hypothetical situations, and up-to-the-moment current, ongoing, and real ethical dilemmas. Some of the longstanding favorites are back by popular demand—such as the Nestlé infant formula experience with its longstanding lessons in doing the right thing.

The fourth edition continues the classic readings in business ethics that provide insight into the importance of ethics in business and how to resolve ethical dilemmas. For this edition, the readings are integrated throughout the book to provide substantive thoughts on the particular areas covered in each section. The organizational structure and indexes, somewhat modified from the third edition, make material easy to locate. A case can be located using the table of contents, the topical index, or the product index, which lists both products and companies by name. An index for business disciplines groups the cases by accounting, management, and the other disciplines in colleges of business.

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The instructor's manual is updated with more sample test objective- and essayanswer questions of varying lengths and structures. The questions have been coded for topic and even some for case-specific questions so that exams can be created by subject area. The transparency/ PowerPoint package, which includes illustrative charts to assist instructors in walking classes through the more complex cases, has been updated and expanded.

This book is not mine. It is the result of the efforts and sacrifices of many. I am grateful to the reviewers for their comments and insights. Their patience, expertise, and service are remarkable.

I am fortunate to have Bob Sandman as the editor for this edition. His calm and steady guidance make him an author's choice for editor-of-the-year. I am grateful to Rob Dewey for his continuing support of all my work. I continue to love editors. Where I see only deadlines, they see both the big picture of the book and its details: They have vision.

I am grateful to my parents for the values they inculcated in me. Their ethical perspective has been an inspiration, a comfort, and, in many cases, the final say in my decision-making processes. I am especially grateful to my father for his continual quest for examples of ethical and not-so-ethical behavior in action in the world of business. I am grateful for my family's understanding and support. I am most grateful for the reminder their very presence gives me of what is truly important.

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Introduction

"The reputation of a thousand years is determined by the conduct of one hour."

Japanese Proverb

"A quiet conscience makes one so serene."

Byron

"There is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience."

Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale The Power of Ethical Management

"What once seemed black and white
Turns to so many shades of gray
We lose ourselves in work to do and bills to pay"
Bruce Springsteen, Blood Brothers¹

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Why Business Ethics?

A cover story in *Fortune* magazine, entitled "The Payoff from a Good Reputation" (*Fortune*, February 10, 1992), quotes a vice chairman of an advertising agency as saying, "The only sustainable competitive advantage any business has is its reputation." The same could be said about individual business persons. Reputation cannot be found in the annual 10K filing the Securities and Exchange Commission requires of a firm and won't be reflected in the net worth recorded on the firm's balance sheet. But its loss can be so devastating that if it were quantifiable, the failure of a firm to disclose that its ethical values were waning would constitute fraud under the federal securities laws. A business lacking an ethical commitment will, eventually, bring about its own demise.

A May 14, 2001, cover for *Fortune* magazine asks this question: "Can we ever trust again?" As we discover some of the creative accounting of the dot-com companies and the all-too-close relationships and conflicts among analysts, underwriters, and their clients, those who have invested are wondering how there could have been so many breaches of trust with so few people willing to express concerns. The burst of the dot-com bubble offers its share of ethical missteps that may have contributed to or exacerbated the scope of the economic downturn.

But the dot-coms with creative accounting and conflicts of interest are not unique. Examining the fates of companies such as Union Carbide, Beech-Nut, E.F. Hutton, Salomon Brothers, Johns-Manville, Exxon, Phar-Mor, Kidder Peabody, Bausch & Lomb, Sunbeam, FINOVA, Nike, Ford, Firestone, and others whose very public ethical mishaps resulted in tremendous losses supports the notion that a lack of commitment to ethical behavior is a lack of commitment to a firm's success.

Many people consider the term "business ethics" an oxymoron. Nonetheless, in keeping with the observations in *Fortune*, compelling reasons support choosing ethical behavior in a business setting. Courses in finance and accounting teach us that the primary purpose and obligation of a business is to earn a profit. The immediate pursuit of the bottom line occasionally can distort even the most conscientious perspective. The fear of losing business and consequently losing profits can lead individuals and companies to make decisions that, while not illegal, raise concerns about fairness, equity, justice, and honesty.

In their 1994 book *Built to Last*, James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras noted that the common thread among companies with long-term growth and profits was a strong commitment to values. These successful companies had high standards for product quality, concern for employees and employee safety, and reputations for fairness and good service. In short, the ethical components of business were a common thread in their success.

A firm must pursue the positive figure for its bottom line with a long-term perspective in mind. Running a successful and ethical business is like running a marathon, not a sprint. Studies show that firms that perform better financially over time are those with a commitment to ethical behavior. A study by the Lincoln Center for Ethics and Professors Louis Grossman and Marianne Jennings at Arizona State University demonstrated that the fifteen U.S. corporations that have paid dividends

for at least one hundred years without interruption also had a strong commitment to values. These companies knew what they had to do to be successful, but they also knew what they would *not* do to achieve that success.² What they would not do is compromise their values.

A 1997 study in the *Academy of Management Journal* concludes that firms involved in ethical difficulties (including criminal violations, regulatory citations, and product liability suits) experience earnings declines for at least five years following the public announcement of their problems.³

There is something to the correlation between business ethics and business success. While not every ethical person is guaranteed business success, every business that engages in unethical behavior is guaranteed a setback and the costs of trying to restore that invaluable reputation.

² The results of this study will appear in the forthcoming book, Building and Growing a Business: The Remarkable Stories of Fifteen Companies Each with 100 Years of Consistent Dividends, *Greenwood Press, 2002.*

³ Melissa S. Baucus and David A. Baucus, 40 Academy of Management Journal, 1997, p. 129.

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