

CORPORATE ETHICS

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PER THE COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR:

ETHICS

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We live in a highly global, highly competitive world. With the rapid growth of the Internet and the continued globalization of the world's economies it is becoming easier for companies who just ten years ago would never had considered branching into new areas of business or new geographical locations to do just that. We are living in the age of Microsoft, that in just thirty years can go from a baby business in a garage to the largest corporation in the world. With the multiplication of corporate complexity and the exponential rise in competition between various sized businesses, one issue that has risen to the top of the corporate concern chart is Ethics.

At first glance it seems a bit strange for corporate ethics to be getting so much attention and press. First of all, a generation ago corporate ethics was hardly a concern. People did business by the shake of a hand and the ideas of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness were taken for granted. Secondly, with the degradation in the morals of our society and the world at large it seems odd that people, let alone corporations would be at all concerned about ethics however, they are. A simple search on the Internet for the heading "corporate ethics" brings back some 5,000 web sites. There are non-profit organizations complete dedicated to the issue, companies have developed whole departments with vice-president level direction, and publications are almost too numerous to mention. Why all the fuss, why all the attention?

Some of the following statistics may begin to shed some light:

A survey conducted by KPMG, 2000

Background: Questionnaires were fielded between October 15 and November 15, 1999. A total of 2,390 completed questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 78%.

76% of employees observed illegal and/or unethical conduct on the job.

49% of employees observed misconduct.

A survey conducted by the Ethics Resource Center, 2000
Background: A nationally representative telephone survey of 1,500 U.S. employees.

8% of senior and middle managers say they felt pressure to commit misconduct, compared to 15% of all other employees.¹

Companies are being faced with realities like this across every industry. With an increase in sexual harassment suits, employees use of the Internet during work, reporting of time, etc. the list goes on and on.

Every employee and every employer that walks into one of our churches (therefore, nearly everyone) today or in the future will face ethical dilemmas in the workplace if they are not currently. The issue at stake is how are they as Christians to respond to these situations? What is going to be their “handbook of corporate ethics”? The answer is clear, it must be the Word of God. However, this is easier said than done. How are they to live out the Word of God in a workplace that is “waxing worse and worse”?

Some of the people in our churches will work for corporations that have very elaborate ethics programs, ethics news letters, ethics training, etc. many will not. However, this difference really is no difference at all. Even those people who work for a company that is trying to implement ethical standards will face difficulty. The primary reason for this is that the ethical standards that these companies are implementing are not based on scripture. They are based on people (sinful people at that).

¹ A Compilation of Surveys, Studies and Data on Business Ethics by Center for Business Ethics at Bentley College. <http://ecampus.bentley.edu/dept/cbe/survey.html>

As our people face the varying ethical issues in their employment it is important that they keep the following things in the forefront of their mind:

1. Know their company's ethics standards. Some things that are not biblical issues may be appropriate in some companies and not others. For example, one company might allow their employees to use company computers to send personal emails and another may not. A person needs to be aware of their company's policies as a beginning point in their desire to please God at their work place.
2. Know their company's policy for reporting violations of ethical standards/policies. If a company has policies in place for ethical practice, they will also have policies in place for how to report violations of those policies. It is very important for the Christian to set an example of following the companies set policies and standards as much as possible. One's testimony will be ineffective if he/she does not follow these standards.
3. Knowing the company's standards is only a starting place for the Christian. He/she is expected to follow the standard of Scripture above and beyond any company policies.

They out to be very familiar with the teaching of Scriptures like:

Ephesians 6:

⁵Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; ⁶Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; ⁷With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: ⁸Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free. ⁹And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Colossian 3:

²²Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: ²³And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; ²⁴Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. ²⁵But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

These passages give believers clear teaching on the responsibility of every Christian to his boss and every Christian boss to those that work under him. They are to serve out employers as they serve Christ. The standard is very high.

The corporate world has gotten more complicated over the years and is bound to become more complicated in the years to come. However, the Word of God does not change and is as sufficient for today's big corporate environments as it was for the first century believers. Our people need to meet and exceed their companies' ethical standards by keeping to the high standard of Scripture.

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